

## Contraception and Abortion: The Underlying Link

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### Does Contraception Prevent Abortion?

In the 1950s a revolutionary development occurred, affecting the most intimate relations between men and women: the pill. Its repercussions were felt by couples, families, society, and the Catholic Church itself.

In the face of moral objections, proponents of the pill hailed its many potential benefits. Chief among them was the expectation that it would reduce the number of nonmarital births, then and still today a significant predictor for poverty. Who could doubt that widespread use of contraception would eliminate unwanted pregnancies? And aren't abortions mainly the result of unwanted pregnancies? Many concluded that by increasing the use of contraception, one could drastically reduce the number of nonmarital births. Even after abortion became legal in the United States and the number of abortions quickly soared, more contraception was touted as the key to reducing abortion rates.

A tremendous fallacy lurks behind this argument. Now that contraceptive use has been widespread for more than forty years, the facts clearly belie the claim that such use leads to a decrease in abortions. Since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, abortions continue unabated at nearly 1.3 million per year. In fact, new research suggests that heightened access to contraception makes the problem worse. A study published in the August 18, 2000 *British Medical Journal* shows that teens who consult with medical professionals about contraception actually have a higher rate of pregnancy than those who don't.<sup>i</sup> As to contraception reducing the number of abortions, other studies show that "over 80 percent of young women who have had abortions are contraceptively experienced."<sup>ii</sup> In fact, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, over half of women having abortions say they were using a contraceptive in the month they became pregnant.

Dr. Janet Smith, professor of moral theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary (Detroit), reverses the pro-contraception syllogism with unassailable logic:

Most abortions are the result of unwanted pregnancies, most unwanted pregnancies are the result of sexual relationships outside of marriage, and most sexual relationships outside of marriage are facilitated by the availability of contraception. To turn this 'progression' around: contraception leads to more extra-marital sexual intercourse, more extra-marital sexual intercourse leads to more unwanted pregnancies; more unwanted pregnancies lead to more abortions.<sup>iii</sup>

There is another reason why contraception actually leads to more abortions. There is an underlying link, or mentality, between the two. This mentality views human life as something that is not always welcome and, when unwelcome, can be disposed of. As a result, "People often use abortion as a backup after trying but failing to prevent conception."<sup>iv</sup> Catholic theologian Germain Grisez provides a concise account of the two ways contraception may encourage abortion:

In the first place, promoting contraception, especially among the young, condones and even encourages immoral sexual activity. Even if contraceptives are provided and used, this activity will lead to many pregnancies, since all methods of contraception have a failure rate. Moreover, the children who come to

be as unwanted are likely to be aborted, or neglected and abused, because, unlike children who are unplanned by people open to new life, they were rejected in advance.v

### The Anthropological Link

At the root of this mentality lies a fundamental anthropological error, one that strikes at the heart of who we are as human persons. This can be combated only by turning to the alternative to contraception — natural family planning.vi As John Paul II resoundingly affirmed, contraception and recourse to the naturally recurring periods of fertility and infertility in the woman's cycle rest on "two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality."vii Behind the contraceptive mentality looms a materialistic concept of the human body as an object that can be manipulated. When we live out such a view of the person and human sexuality, it is no surprise that where contraception fails abortion often follows. Sexual intercourse tends to be reduced from an act of personal self-giving to one of mutual sensual gratification freed from any tie to responsibility to new life.

### The Physiological Link

The link between contraception and abortion is sometimes subtle and even insidious. This is true on the physiological level, where some contraceptives may prevent the implantation of a newly conceived embryo in the womb. This is especially a concern in the case of the "morning-after pill."viii But it is thought that other contraceptives, such as intrauterine devices and hormonal forms of contraception, may also act as abortifacients some of the time, not only as contraceptives.ix A woman using birth control pills does not even know if such an early abortion is occurring within her own body.

### The Sociological Link

In the field of sociology, recent studies from unexpected sources confirm the link between "the contraceptive revolution" and an increase in abortions. One study was conducted by George Akerlof, a Nobel prize-winning economist, professor at Berkeley, and a former fellow at the Brookings Institution. He is not a social conservative. In two articles in leading economic journals, Akerlof details findings and advances arguments that vindicate Pope Paul VI's prophetic warnings about the social consequences of contraception.x According to Akerlof, the sexual revolution left traditional and moderate women (who did not accept premarital sex and contraception) unable to compete with women who had no serious objection to premarital sex. If a woman did get pregnant, she could no longer elicit a promise of marriage. Boyfriends simply could say that pregnancy was their girlfriends' choice. Men were less likely to agree to a "shotgun wedding" in the event of a pregnancy than they had been before the arrival of the pill and abortion.

Akerlof's findings point out the direct sociological link between contraception and abortion:

Thus, many traditional women ended up having sex and having children out of wedlock, while many of the permissive women ended up having sex and contracepting or aborting so as to avoid childbearing. This explains in large part why the contraceptive revolution was associated with an increase in both

## The Immorality of Contraception

Contraception is morally wrong not simply because of its direct link to abortion; it is wrong in itself. In his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI gives an authoritative definition of contraception as "every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible."xii Paul VI goes on to reaffirm the Church's constant teaching that such actions are intrinsically evil (*intrinsece inhonestum*),xiii explaining that contraception violates "the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act."xiv

The culture of death wages a silent war against the culture of life. In the balance hang not only the lives of millions of unborn children, but the future of the family. John Paul II affirmed that "the family is placed at the center of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love."xv Which side holds the advantage at present? One figure is very sobering. Today less than one percent of all married couples of child-bearing age in the U.S. use natural family planning.xvi

## A Compelling Response: John Paul II's Theology of the Body

We can bring about a change in the contraceptive mentality and help build a culture of life through what John Paul II has left as a legacy: a compelling defense of the truth of natural family planning. In his theology of the body, John Paul has situated the Church's teaching in the context of a total vision of the human person.

In three broad strokes the late Holy Father presented a total vision of the human person. Everything begins with original man before sin. Alone in the midst of God's creation, Adam experiences original solitude. Though master of all creatures, Adam feels utterly alone because only he is a person, a conscious subject called to make a gift of himself in love and receive another's self-gift. When God creates Eve, Adam exclaims: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:18). Through Eve's body, Adam recognizes her as a person, with whom he is called to form a communion of persons (*communio personarum*) in the image of the self-giving love of the Blessed Trinity.xvii

There follows one of the most beautiful lines in the Book of Genesis. "And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed" (Gn 2:25). Why were they not ashamed? Before sin, Adam and Eve recognize fully the nuptial meaning of the body. God created them male and female in order to make a gift of themselves in love. They see in the other's body a person to be loved. "They see and know each other with all the peace of the interior gaze, which creates precisely the fullness of the intimacy of persons."xviii

The freedom of the gift which Adam and Eve experience is soon destroyed by one mysterious act: they sin. With sin historical man emerges upon the scene. Sin brings with it the capacity to use the other person as an object rather than loving him or her as a person. The nuptial meaning of the body is now

in great peril. Fallen man is no longer capable of making the free gift of himself envisioned by his Creator.

In his unfathomable love and mercy, Christ rescues mankind through the suffering of the cross and the glory of his resurrection. By redeeming man, Christ also brings about the redemption of the body. He makes it possible for men and women to recapture the freedom of the gift by walking the narrow yet joyful path of life in the Holy Spirit.

The total vision of the human person is completed by pondering mankind's future destiny. Eschatological man represents the fulfillment of our destiny with God, after the resurrection of our bodies. Paradoxically, the nuptial meaning of the body is fulfilled in heaven, where "they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Mt 22:30). How can this be?

In heaven the only adequate response to God's outpouring of love will be to give ourselves entirely to him in all that we are as personal subjects. That is why the exclusive self-giving between husband and wife in marriage, even though it is done for love of God, no longer exists in heaven. As we give ourselves to Christ, the bridegroom, we will also be giving ourselves to all others in him — the communion of saints. The perspective of eternal life reveals the beauty of the call to celibacy, to consecrated life, as another way to fulfill the nuptial meaning of the body. Those consecrated to Christ through poverty, chastity, and obedience make present on earth, in anticipation, that virginal, yet spousal, union with God that each person will live for all eternity in heaven.

The vast panorama of a total vision of the human person opened by John Paul II makes it possible to understand in all their depth and beauty the Church's teachings on marital love and procreation. Every act of conjugal union is an expression of the spouses' complete self-giving to one another and acceptance of each other in their fullness as persons. This self-giving love is fruitful, both in the union of the couple in "one flesh" and in its openness to new life. It images the fruitful love of the Trinity.

Here is also revealed the evil of the contraceptive act. Contraception violates the truth of the language of the body. It means telling a lie with the body. On the one hand, the husband says to the wife, in the innate language of the conjugal act, "I give myself completely to you with everything that I am, and I accept you completely as a person." Yet on the other hand, he fails to give himself in his capacity to be a father, and he fails to accept her capacity to be a mother. Contraception therefore keeps the conjugal union from being an act of true, self-giving, personal love as it was designed to be.

### A Culture of Life at Its Most Intimate

Where will the battle for the culture of life be lost or won? Not in any courtroom, but in the quiet conviction of innumerable homilies and articles and talks on the Church's teaching on marriage and Pope John Paul II's theology of the body.

Then, a day will come when the culture of life is fostered, not merely in our legal system, but in the very heart of the most intimate relations between man and woman.

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## PROGRAM MODELS

The good news is that there are now many excellent chastity programs and resources available for diocesan and parish use. "True Love Waits for Marriage," used successfully by Mary Pat Van Epps of the Diocese of Memphis, is a basic, easy-to-organize program that any parish can offer. Designed to promote chastity among junior and senior high youth, three 2-hour classes meet on consecutive Sunday evenings from 6:00-8:00 PM. A closing Mass can be celebrated by the pastor (or bishop) on the Saturday morning following the final session.

Week 1: Pizza party and "ice breakers" are followed by an overview of basic Catholic teachings on sexuality. (See Catechism of the Catholic Church sections on virtues, conscience, matrimony and the sacraments.) Allow lots of time for questions from the youth and your answers. Have handouts available on chastity. Invite parents to the closing, where they can voice their support and commit themselves to being an example to their children. (See suggested prayer on page 47 of the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry's True Love Waits Resource Manual.)

Week 2: Offer snacks. Show a chastity video such as "Sex Has a Price Tag" (One More Soul, 800-307-7685) or "Sex, Lies and the Truth" (Focus on the Family, 800-232-6459) or a similar video. Invite Catholics who understand and live the teachings of the Church on sexuality for the Q&A portion. Close with prayer. (See, for example, the prayer on page 53 of the NFCYM Manual mentioned above.)

Homework assignment: Ask teens to bring songs, magazine articles and advertisements that have a sexual connotation to the next session.

Week 3: Snacks. Discussion of contemporary lyrics and messages from the media and how we can be countercultural. Divide youths into groups of 6-10 people. Distribute banner paper, markers and stickers. Ask them to make chastity banners to "market" chastity to their peers. Write prayer petitions and assign ministers for the closing Mass.

Week 4: Closing Mass with parents followed by a pot-luck lunch. Use the group's prayer petitions and repeat the "Prayer for the Faith Community" from the first week's session. Distribute True Love Waits for Marriage commitment cards to be signed and kept by each participant. Invite each to sign the Commitment Book to be kept by the parish/ diocese for future programs. Use the Prayer for Youth and Community (page 49 of the NFCYM Manual).

For additional information, contact Mary Pat Van Epps at 901-373-1285 or [marypat.vaneps@cc.cdom.org](mailto:marypat.vaneps@cc.cdom.org).

Some highly recommended chastity programs:

Chastity speaker Jason Evert's program materials are found at [www.catholic.com/chastity.asp](http://www.catholic.com/chastity.asp). Family

Honor, Inc. offers a variety of chastity programs, training, resources, etc.: [www.familyhonor.org](http://www.familyhonor.org).

Free to Be offers Life Choice One peer training and curricula; a religiously-neutral program of Central California Catholic Charities: [www.free-to-be.net](http://www.free-to-be.net).

Keys to Chastity (4-class series for parents and teens from Northwest Family Services (NWFS): [www.nwfs.org/keystochastity.htm](http://www.nwfs.org/keystochastity.htm)).

LifeSaver Retreats (1-day workshop retreats for teens from NWFS: <http://www.nwfs.org/lifesaver.htm>).

Peers Educating and Encouraging Responsible Sexuality (PEERS) offers program, training materials. See on-line video for more information at: [www.peersproject.org/index.html](http://www.peersproject.org/index.html). Real Love, Inc. Program and materials by chastity educator/motivator Mary Beth Bonacci: [www.reallove.net/index2.asp?CID=1](http://www.reallove.net/index2.asp?CID=1).

Reapteam is a Catholic youth retreat ministry of the Archdiocese of St. Louis: [www.reapteam.org](http://www.reapteam.org).

YAM, Young Adult Ministry of the Archdiocese of Atlanta; check the website for great, cleverly marketed, programs: <http://www.yam.org/yam.cgi/>.

Also visit the following sites for ideas, programs and resources: [www.nfcym.org](http://www.nfcym.org) (National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry), [www.nacym.org](http://www.nacym.org) (National Association of Catholic Youth Ministry Leaders), [www.nccys.org](http://www.nccys.org) (National Center for Catholic Youth Sports), and [www.milarch.org/youth/index.html](http://www.milarch.org/youth/index.html) (Youth and Young Adult Ministry of the Archdiocese of the Military).

## RESOURCES

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- i. "The study found that 71 percent of 223 teen-age girls who became pregnant had discussed contraception with a health expert in the year before they became pregnant." Brian McGuire, "Sex Education Can Backfire, Says British Study," in the National Catholic Register, Vol. 76, No. 36, September 3-9, 2000, 1.
- ii. See Stanley K. Henshaw and Kathryn Kost, "Abortion Patients in 1994-1995: Characteristics and Contraceptive Use," 28 *Family Planning Perspectives* 140, 145 (table 2) (1996).
- iii. Janet E. Smith, "Paul VI as Prophet," in *Why Humanae Vitae Was Right: A Reader*, 523.
- iv. Germain Grisez, *Living a Christian Life (The Way of the Lord Jesus, Volume 2)*, (Quincy, Ill: Franciscan Press: 1993), 505.
- v. Germain Grisez, *Living a Christian Life*, 515-516.
- vi. John Paul II affirms that the difference between contraception and natural family planning is "both anthropological and moral," *Familiaris Consortio*, 32. Emphasis in original.
- vii. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 32.
- viii. See Horacio B. Croxatto, et al., "Mechanism of action of hormonal preparations used for emergency contraception: a review of the literature," 63 *Contraception* 111-121 (2001); Chris Kahlenborn et al., "Postfertilization Effect of Hormonal Emergency Contraception," 36 *The Annals of Pharmacology* 465 ( March 2002); John Wilks, "The Impact of the Pill on Implantation Factors – New Research Findings," 16 *Ethics & Medicine* 15-22 (2000); Keith L. Moore and T.V.N. Persaud, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 7th ed. (2003), 56; Walter L. Larimore and Joseph B. Stanford, "Postfertilization Effects of Oral Contraceptives and Their Relationship to Informed Consent," 9 *Archives of Family Medicine* 126-133 (2000).
- ix. Susan Harlap, Kathryn Kost, and Jacqueline Darroch Forrest, *Preventing Pregnancy, Protecting Health: A New Look at Birth Control Choices in the United States* (New York: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1991), state that when not effective in some other way, intrauterine devices work "by initiating a local inflammatory response to a foreign body, which inhibits implantation should fertilization occur" (27), combined oral contraceptives "change the uterine lining to inhibit implantation should fertilization occur" (27), the progestin-only pill works by "inhibiting implantation" (28), contraceptive implants work by "inhibiting implantation of a fertilized ovum" (28), and progestin-only injectables work in ways "similar to those of the minipill and implants" (29). See Ashley and O'Rourke, *Healthcare Ethics*, 3rd ed., 278-79; Kristine M. Severyn, "Abortifacient Drugs and Devices: Medical and Moral Dilemmas," *Linacre Quarterly* 57 (Aug. 1990): 50-67; Rudolf Ehmman, "Problems in Family Planning," *Anthropotes* 7 (1991): 100-101. Quoted in Germain Grisez, *Living a Christian Moral Life*, 505.
- x. See Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 17.
- xi. W. Bradford Wilcox, "The Facts of Life and Marriage: Social Science & the Vindication of Christian Moral Teaching," *Touchstone*, January-February 2005. As reprinted in *Zenit Rassegna*.
- xii. *Humanae Vitae*, 14.
- xiii. *Ibid.* The Catechism of the Catholic Church reiterates Paul VI's condemnation of all forms of contraception as intrinsically evil in number 2370.
- xiv. *Humanae Vitae*, 12. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2336.
- xv. John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 1994, 23.
- xvi. Joseph B. Stanford, M.D., "Sex Naturally," *First Things* 97 (November 1999), 28-33.
- xvii. John Paul II, General Audience of November 14, 1979, in *Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 46-47.
- xviii. John Paul II, General Audience of January 2, 1980 in *Ibid.*, 57.