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Contraception – Pro-life Option?

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Pope Paul VI asked that different sound arguments in favour of his teaching on contraception be sought. In light of this papal plea, the following article is submitted to test whether there are convincing reasons to overcome the arguments presented in the article and so provide sound reasons in favour of the papal encyclical. The same could be done with the Wijngaards Statement (2016), which attempts to overcome *Humanae Vitae*, this Statement itself being quite flawed. Someone asked, “If no-one answers, either because they can’t or simply aren’t taking the time to do so, are you going to answer your own article?” A good question.

Preamble – Two Versions of the Slippery Slope Argument



Version 1: If you hold position A for reasons xyz, then logically you have to hold positions B and C for the same

reasons. B and C may or may not follow in practice. The point is, you can’t forbid them if you hold A.

Example of version 1:

Once you hold that a person may be killed at the end of life for his or her supposed good, you have crossed the line, denying that God is the author of life, and so other examples of killing cannot be declared wrong.

Version 2: If you hold position A for reasons xyz, it does not follow logically that you have to hold positions B and C. But you know that B and C will follow. We know human beings well enough to know that this will be the case.

Example of version 2:

Allowing contraception does not imply that you have to support abortion. But abortion does follow failed contraception for many women. If you don’t want babies, you don’t want babies, and will use any means to avoid giving birth.



The Contraception Problem

We are speaking here about “simple” contraception, not about procedures which may be contraceptive, but are also abortifacient when contraception fails. It would seem that we face a dilemma from Catholic teaching on contraception. We presume here that the people we’re talking about actually **think**. Many don’t, for one reason or another.



If the Church is correct, that contraception is intrinsically evil and seriously so, then millions of Catholic couples are doing something very immoral. If something is seriously orally wrong, it harms individuals and society. We are not speaking here about sin, which implies knowledge and consent.

If the Church is wrong in its teaching, then the couples are saying that the Church is wrong in clear, long-held teaching on a serious moral matter. If this is the case, why should we heed Church teaching on any moral matter? We may agree with the Church, but not because of the Church’s teaching.

A Solution

This “solution” to the above problem is based on the proposal of the majority of the advisory committee prior to *Humanae Vitae* that the procreative dimension of marital sex should apply to marriage as a whole and not to each act. This view was rejected by Pope Paul VI. What I am suggesting is that

accommodation to this view of the majority is not a total overturning of the papal teaching about the nature of marriage but rather a further consideration of the prolife stance as it affects the whole of marriage.

The marriage act is something sacred. This does not mean, of course, that married people think of this explicitly as they make love. It does mean that it is acknowledged by them as a background to their relationship. It is the act that generates a new human being, a person loved as individual by the infinite God of love. It is also the act that gives another person access to one’s body in deep intimacy. It is the act which unites the partners as potential parents. This sacred act, from its nature as procreative and unitive, defines itself as restricted to married persons.

Every aspect of marriage is prolife. It procreates new life, it cares for children, it builds up the partners and it extends beyond



the walls of home to reach out to others, especially the neighbour in need.

Contraception is obviously non-prolife when people use it in one-night-stand circumstances. Nor is it prolife when it is used by two unmarried persons intent on pleasure without the danger of conception and who are, in any case, usurping the use of an act reserved for the good of partners in an exclusive and faithful relationship

dedicated to new life. It is equally non-prolife when married partners are selfish enough to desire a “childless marriage”. Married couples who make use of natural family planning to avoid children when motivated by selfish reasons alone, are also non-prolife. One would imagine that such couples are rare indeed.

If one were to consider an isolated marriage act, in isolation from any context, then this act is prolife only if it is both unitive and procreative (in the sense that the act as such tends towards procreation of new life). The same act, again considered apart from any context, would not be prolife if contraception were used to prevent the coming to be a new life.

But no act of marriage is ever without context. The act of contraception may be between spouses who consider one or two children quite sufficient to satisfy their wants, but no more than this number who could interfere with their ambitions. The act may be between spouses who have been as generous as possible in the matter of childbearing, but who now have serious reasons at the moment not to have more children, for example, when the wife’s health is under threat. In many cases, contraception will denote selfishness, in others not. In the latter case, contraception is employed out of love and consideration of the other, for the sake of children already born, even for the sake of future children. The total marriage is still determinedly prolife.

There are advantages to natural family planning that are not present in contraception. There is no intrusion of

chemicals into the woman’s body (in chemical contraception). There would seem to be more care of the other spouse when there is restriction of availability of the marriage act. There is more immediate consciousness of the sacred quality of the act. In natural family planning the individual act retains its unitive and procreative dimensions (the teleology of the act is procreative). At the same time, though the contraceptive act is lacking in some respects, it is equal to the natural family planning act when marriage as a whole is considered.



Pope Paul VI as Prophet

Pope Paul VI predicted that declaring contraception

morally acceptable would result in all kinds of immorality – mostly concerning the degradation of women. History has proven him correct.



The point here is, does this result from slippery slope 1 or 2, does it result from an intrinsic connection between contraception and other immoralities, or from the moral weakness of people? My contention here is that contraception chosen for prolife reasons can be distinguished from these other

immoralities mentioned by the Pope. Indeed, it is also distinguished from the misuse of contraception.

Postscript

Think of the statement, “It is raining.” Think of a soft summer light drizzle. Think of a hurricane and driving rain that will result in severe flooding. Does the simple, “It is raining” capture the reality of both situations? So with, “They’re using contraceptives”, which can refer to a selfish distortion of the act of love or a prolife act of love.

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In the spirit of collaboration, we are committed to providing services to our Diocese, our community institutions, and to all who seek a deeper understanding of healthcare and bioethics.

We are interested in what you have to say. If you have a particular topic of interest or would like to provide us feedback on the articles in this publication, please contact:

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We look forward to hearing from you!

