



Pop culture, schools, and the media all tell you that artificial birth control is a wonderful development of modernity. Explaining why they're wrong and the official Church teaching is correct can be a painful matter. The teaching itself is a difficult one, but if you support contraception, I invite you to rethink your position.

Some find Church arguments against contraception confusing. Simply put, artificial birth control separates two aspects of sex that God wished never to be separated: the unitive, which brings two people together; and the procreative, which brings new life into the world (see Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*).

Of course, that won't satisfy those of a less philosophical and more pragmatic bent. Happily, there are plenty of practical reasons why the Church's teaching is preferable.

First, some studies suggest that couples who choose natural methods of spacing births (natural family planning, or NFP) instead of artificial means experience a divorce rate as low as 2 percent, compared to 50 percent for the general population. NFP, in which husband and wife cooperate, actually has the effect of strengthening the marital bond.

Additionally, sexual intimacy within the sacrament of marriage is improved with NFP. Devices such as condoms block that perfect union between a husband and wife, while the pill actually changes the wife's body chemistry and can reduce her desire for sexual intimacy. Neither of these outcomes falls within God's plan for husband and wife.

Pontiffs throughout the 20th century have endorsed NFP as a moral method of spacing births. The Couple to Couple League is a wonderful place to start for those preparing for marriage, or for those who may want to "start over" and need guidance on the method.

Of course, the real problems with artificial birth control are hidden and emerge from a single fact: Contraceptives eliminate from sex the "risk" of pregnancy. This is a dramatic technological shift, and it has had terrible consequences for our

society.

Perhaps the most obvious effect has been an increase in promiscuity. Adults and teenagers, freed from the "consequences" of sex, began having casual sexual encounters in numbers unseen before. Once sex was detached from pregnancy, it moved into the realm of a leisure activity, a cultural pastime to enjoy whether married or not.

Not only that, but contraceptives put pregnancy in the same category as a disease to be prevented (as recently noted by Sen. Barack Obama). Within a few years, this view became so prevalent that when women were "stricken" with pregnancy, they needed a cure. Welcome to 1973 and abortion on demand, thanks to Roe v. Wade.

The social connection between public acceptance of birth control and public acceptance of abortion is inescapable; it's virtually impossible to find a group that supports abortion that doesn't also support artificial birth control. If birth control is an issue of privacy, so is abortion; if birth control is a way for the poor to have fewer children, so is abortion. Abortion advocates use the same arguments to favor abortion as they do for contraceptives. That alone should give pause.

But there's another grave side-effect of the contraception revolution: Since pregnancy was considered a "disease," and children were the result of pregnancy, they came to be seen considered undesirable and inconvenient -- an impediment to life's goals. After all, if children were so wonderful, why were so many people going out of their way to avoid having them? While life goals used to center around raising a family, the introduction of artificial birth control shifted the focus to the career as the summit of satisfaction. Money, material goods, and comfort became more important than the family. (On a purely pragmatic level, one can see this mentality's economic fruit -- or, rather, lack of fruit -- in Japan and other industrialized nations.)

And so, the divorce rate rose. The argument that one can have actions without consequences -- that careers and personal satisfaction came before families -- led to such legislation as "no-fault" divorce, first signed into law in the mid-1970s.

The Church has herself paid the price for contraception, as a final and often neglected result of the decline of families has been the parallel collapse in religious vocations. Once people started having fewer children, it became more important for each child to marry and produce grandchildren. As this went on, of course, fewer families encouraged religious vocations, and fewer children felt called to them. Thus, America encounters a tragic shortage of priests, sisters, and brothers at a time when we need them most.

Promiscuity, abortion, the destruction of the family, the decline in religious vocations -- these are the rotten fruits of artificial contraception. If one supports

contraception, these are the effects he or she is promoting, whether intentionally or not.

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