

Cooperating With the Way God Created Reproductivity
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The article I wrote last week, "[Pro-Choice or Not?](#)" brought forth a comment about contraception. Carol wrote, "I will say that if you want to reduce abortion as you often state, then you should be for women to continue to have the legal and moral right to use contraception if they choose to do so. If there is no conception there is no life."

Her point is valid. However, this is not as simple as it seems. We must ask ourselves if contraception is moral. Before I discuss the morality of contraception according to our Catholic faith, I would like to present another argument that might be used to support contraception. It was mentioned by St. Pope Paul VI in his encyclical, [Humanae Vitae \(HV\)](#). He writes

In the first place there is the rapid increase in population which has made many fear that world population is going to grow faster than available resources, with the consequence that many families and developing countries would be faced with greater hardships. This can easily induce public authorities to be tempted to take even harsher measures to avert this danger. There is also the fact that not only working and housing conditions but the greater demands made both in the economic and educational field pose a living situation in which it is frequently difficult these days to provide properly for a large family ([HV](#), 2).

This concern might support the need for contraception if one centers on limiting population growth. However, again, we must consider the morality of contraception.

The argument against abortion centers on the fact that ***the child in the womb is alive***. Therefore, since abortion ends the life of these children, it violates the Fifth Commandment, *thou shall not kill*.

Carol is correct in saying "if there is no conception there is no life." The Vatican document [Donum Vitae](#) states.

The Congregation recalls the teachings found in the *Declaration on Procured Abortion*: "***From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a new life is begun*** which is neither that of the father nor of the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. ***It would never be made human if it were not human already***. To this perpetual evidence ... modern genetic science brings valuable confirmation. ***It has demonstrated that, from the first instant, the programme is fixed as to what this living being will be: a man, this individual-man with his characteristic aspects already well determined***. Right from fertilization is begun the adventure of a human life, and each of its great capacities requires time ... to find its place and to be in a position to act" ([Donum Vitae \(DV\)](#), Section 5.I.1, my emphasis).

Thus, contraception does not directly violate the fifth commandment. But that does not mean it is without moral question.

Why would our Catholic faith object to contraception?

One might suppose that the Catholic Church continues to think that families should have as many children as possible. Contraception would stand in opposition to this. However, the church says parents can regulate the size of their family. St. Pope Paul VI wrote

If therefore there are *well-grounded reasons* for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances, the Church teaches that married people *may then take advantage* of the *natural cycles* immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth in a way which does not in the least offend the moral principles which we have just explained ([HV](#), 16, my emphasis).

Our Catholic faith acknowledges that it is not always prudent for families to have a large number of children. Parents should ask themselves how many children they can properly care for (with a reasonable standard of living in mind).

The moral question about contraception then becomes *how* a family limits the number of children.

In the above quote from St. Pope Paul VI, I emphasized that “married people *may then take advantage* of the *natural cycles*” in the woman’s fertility. What is natural and created by God is good. St. Pope Paul VI writes

The fact is, as experience shows, that new life is not the result of each and every act of sexual intercourse. *God has wisely ordered laws of nature and the incidence of fertility in such a way that successive births are already naturally spaced through the inherent operation of these laws.* The Church, nevertheless, in urging men to the observance of the precepts of the natural law, which it interprets by its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life ([HV](#), 11, my emphasis).

Clearly, God did not intend for women to be fertile all the time. Families may take advantage of this and, for proper reason, *choose not* to engage in sexual intimacy during the woman’s fertile period to limit the number of children they have. It is a choice they make. Understanding this, Natural Family Planning (NFP) is an acceptable and moral practice in the Catholic Church.

While it is *natural* and *moral*, NFP is not popular. Why? I see two principal reasons for this. The first is that it does not permit the couple to have sex whenever they want. It requires them to control their desires. Secondly, it takes effort. The woman needs to monitor her fertility cycle and the couple has to communicate about when the woman is fertile so they can restrain from sexual intimacy.

Isn’t contraception easier and more certain than NFP? Before continuing, please allow me to note when I say “contraception” I am referring to methods like the birth control pill, IUD, the shot, implant, and the patch. All of these involve hormonal methods. I do not know if all of the hormones used exist in nature or not. Regardless of that, in using them for birth control, they are

introduced in ways and levels that are not natural. There are other methods of contraception such as condoms that do not require the use of hormones. However, they remain as an action not in accord with God's plan for fertility.

What is the difference between NFP and contraception? Is the goal not the same, to limit the number of children? If the only moral consideration is the end result, then contraception ***might seem*** morally equivalent to NFP.

Here I would like to take a moment to offer some words to anyone reading this who has used any form of contraception in the past and is now wondering if they were sinning. Do not worry! God is merciful. When we engage in grave matter without knowing or understanding its evil and later come to understand, God is ***always merciful***. Just ask God for forgiveness with a repentant and contrite heart and He will eagerly forgive as the father welcomed back his prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

It seems appropriate to also comment on the removal of reproductive organs. One may choose to do this as permanent contraception. The same moral questions I offer here apply. However, if the organs are diseased or cancerous, their removal, providing no child is present in a woman, is medical treatment when necessary to save the life of the person and not morally objectionable in our Catholic faith.

Returning to the moral difference between NFP and contraception, the phrase "the ends do not justify the means" is appropriate here. In considering the morality of ***any*** action, we must evaluate not just the goal but the method(s) used in achieving the goal.

NFP cooperates with the way God created nature. There is a natural period of infertility in the woman's fertility cycle. In fact, there is more time of infertility than fertility. It is morally acceptable to use these times of infertility for sexual intimacy. Why is it morally acceptable? Because this is the way God created it. God only creates what is good.

I am centering my argument on God as the creator. Therefore, an atheist might wish to completely throw out my argument. Before they do, I would encourage them to still reflect on the idea that in nature, there are natural periods of infertility and fertility. This is not by random chance. It is the reality of our world.

Turning to contraception, it does not cooperate with the natural fertility cycles of women. It does not see the cycle as something good. It says what is present in nature is not good enough. Contraception says a woman should be infertile all the time except if she chooses to have a child. It rejects what is natural as bad.

In my article "[Pro-Choice or Not?](#)" last week I mentioned a book I am presently reading, *Citizens Yet Strangers: Living Authentically Catholic in a Divided America* by Kenneth Craycraft (Huntington: IN: Our Sunday Visitor. 2024). Craycraft uses the term "radical individualism." I am concerned that the mentality that often goes with contraception focuses on the parents in a very individualistic way. God calls us to look beyond ourselves in solidarity with him and the world.

Here, I might imagine that someone might wish to say that, from the perspective of population control, limiting the number of children a family has is in solidarity with the world. If you think this might be true, I invite you, actually I ask you, to reflect on why you think population control is good. If it is to not exceed our natural resources, then we need to ask ourselves about our standard of living. Are we over-using our natural resources because we have too many children or is it because we want too much (materially) for each person? We might also ask ourselves if the concern over population growth has led to people not having enough children.

In saying yes to contraception and rejecting a woman's natural fertility, one is, while perhaps not intentionally, rejecting God by rejecting what He has created.

I also see a significant medical concern that questions the use of the birth control pill. I take some prescriptions on a regular basis. *Every* one of the pills I take is designed to help the body do what it is designed to do. Artificial contraception is different. Used as contraception, the pill is specifically designed to make a woman's body work differently than it is supposed to. Is this medically sound? Is it medically safe? The same question applies to other hormonal methods including the shot and implants. The IUD can also be a safety issue in that it may cause physical damage like puncturing the surrounding area.

One should ask these questions in the immediate sense but also over a lifetime. How many years does a woman take artificial conception for? At what age does she begin to engage in sexual activity? How many years will it be before she reaches menopause and is no longer fertile such that she could stop taking artificial conception? It could be more than 30 years (less any time when she wants to conceive a child). What effects does the long-term use of artificial contraception have on her body?

Here a brief word to acknowledge another use of the birth control pill. It can be used for women who have irregular or difficult periods. In this use, it is actually trying to help a woman's body work as it is designed. However, if a woman takes the pill for this reason, she should be careful not to develop an attitude of "free sex" based on her infertility caused by the pill.

To these women, I would still encourage them to think about the long-term effects of taking the pill. There are more natural methods to help some women treat issues regarding their periods. A good resource for both NFP as well as irregular/difficult periods is the St. Paul VI Institute (experts in Fertility Care and NaPro Technology - <https://popepaulvi.com/>). They can also help couples who are struggling to conceive a child - <https://popepaulvi.com/fertilitycare-center-of-omaha/>.

Before I shift to another moral concern regarding the use of contraception, I would like to invite everyone to take a moment to think about how you see children. Are they a gift or are they something to be avoided? Here, St. Pope Paul VI writes,

The transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator. It has always been a source of great joy to them, even though it sometimes entails many difficulties and hardships ([HV](#), 1).

We might also think of what God said to Jeremiah, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you*” ([Jeremiah 1:5](#)).

The other moral concern regarding the use of contraception is how it shapes attitudes about sexual activity. Sex is designed by God to be an act of intimacy between a married male and female. It is designed to bring forth children. Contraception clearly stops the latter (children). Does it lead to sex for pleasure rather than intimacy? Does this lead us down a slippery slope to where other people are nothing more than objects to bring us pleasure? Do they think the same about us? Here St. Pope Paul VI writes

Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection ([HV](#), 17).

Contraception is seen by some as freeing women to pursue a career instead of being stuck at home caring for children. We do well to ask God to help find a proper balance between career and raising children. What St. Pope Paul VI wrote should lead us to ask if contraception has actually diminished what makes being a woman special.

God created sex to be much more than a few minutes of pleasure. Again, I turn to St. Pope Paul VI

Men rightly observe that a conjugal act imposed on one's partner without regard to his or her condition or personal and reasonable wishes in the matter, is no true act of love, and therefore offends the moral order in its particular application to the intimate relationship of husband and wife. If they further reflect, they must also recognize that an act of mutual love which impairs the capacity to transmit life which God the Creator, through specific laws, has built into it, frustrates His design which constitutes the norm of marriage, and contradicts the will of the Author of life. Hence to use this divine gift while depriving it, even if only partially, of its meaning and purpose, is equally repugnant to the nature of man and of woman, and is consequently in opposition to the plan of God and His holy will ([HV](#), 11).

Before concluding, for those who might yet think contraception as acceptable, I would like to offer two areas of concern. First is the use of the “morning after” pill. It should be understood this pill does not simply prevent conception. It is used to prevent implantation in an abortifacient way. Here, one should also note that the birth control pill and other artificial conception medicines have an abortifacient element to them. So, if the woman is already pregnant when she starts taking the artificial conception or becomes pregnant while taking the medicine, it can cause an abortion. This leads to my second area of concern, the failure rates of artificial conception. Marketers of artificial contraception boast of rates of 90-99% effectiveness. These rates assume you take the medicine exactly according to instructions. It also assumes a woman’s body responds exactly as they expect to the medicine. If a woman chooses to take artificial contraception, she should ask yourself what she will do if she becomes pregnant. Will she have the baby?

Medical science has made great strides in the last 100 years. Just because medical science allows us to do something, does not mean we should do it. St. Pope Paul VI writes

But the most remarkable development of all is to be seen in man's stupendous progress in the domination and rational organization of the forces of nature to the point that he is endeavoring to extend this control over every aspect of his own life—over his body, over his mind and emotions, over his social life, and even over the laws that regulate the transmission of life ([HV](#), 2).

I hope this article has helped you understand the moral issues regarding contraception. St. Pope John Paul II wrote in *Evangelium Vitae* about how the Catholic Church is incorrectly perceived as promoting abortion by rejecting artificial contraception (13). Our Catholic faith says parents can restrict the number of children they have but calls us to do it by using what God has created in a woman's fertility cycle rather than artificial contraception pill that goes against the way a woman's body is designed to work.

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