

BEYOND THE 'NATURAL' AND 'ARTIFICIAL' DIVIDE

Statistics show that the Philippines has one of the fastest birth rates at 2.48 per cent in the world. We may increase to 130 million in the next twenty five years unless a population management program succeeds. Scientists, economists and scholars believe that a developing country like the Philippines can only move “one step forward, two steps backward,” if it is unable to manage its high population growth rate.

However, population control and the promotion of artificial non-abortive methods of contraception such as the pill or condom have been denounced by various religious groups, including the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church, to which most Filipinos claim affiliation, is steadfast that every conjugal act of a married couple is meant for union *and* procreation, and that these two are inseparable. To prevent pregnancy, only abstinence and the natural rhythm are condoned. All other contraception methods are seen by Rome as interrupting a God-ordained “natural” chain from copulation to conception, and are thus, immoral.

This is where it helps us to return to look closely at what Scripture teaches... and does not teach.

The Creation account helps us to understand that companionship and mutual help were the primary reason God created the first woman and instituted marriage. In the New Testament, St. Paul reminded the married couples of the Corinthian church of their sexual obligations to one another, emphasizing that each married person had authority over the body of his or her spouse, and that sexual abstinence should be solely for temporary periods of devotion to prayer. Paul emphasized that couples should not delay in resuming their sex life “lest Satan should tempt through lack of self-control”.

Clearly, Scripture underscores the importance of the conjugal union so much so that abstinence in a marriage is discouraged.

Does this mean that couples must open themselves to the possibility of producing offspring each time? Do contraceptives interfere with God’s natural working in this process? We must remember that the God of Scriptures is sovereign, and regulates the sizes of all families, whether or not contraceptives are used. The idea that God’s will is done only where people are uninvolved and passive betrays an un-Scriptural view of God and His ways. Human beings, since the Creation, have been given a mandate to steward and subdue the earth; this includes wisely planning the number of children according to what a family unit has the resources to support.

We cannot emphasize too often that responsible family planning *excludes* the option of abortive contraception: Contraceptives which prevent the meeting of male sperm and female egg does not violate God’s prohibition against our taking of human life; it is a different thing to interfere in the process after conception has produced a new individual with its own genetic code.

Fundamentally, Scripture does not mandate that sexual union and procreation must be considered one unbroken chain. And let no man presume to give laws that God has not Himself instituted in His Word.

We should also not forget the fundamental Scriptural precept that in all other areas of Christian living, motives and practice together should glorify God. When couples practice family planning, whether through the rhythm method or artificial contraception, the intent should be in harmony with Scripture, for whatever is not done in faith, is sin.

Adapted from the article of the late Mrs. Evelyn Miranda Feliciano entitled "Impaling the Pill." Mrs. Feliciano was a Fellow and writer of ISACC.