

THE USE AND ABUSE OF CONTRACEPTIVES

How should we view population control in the light of the command “to be fruitful and multiply”?

Is the mandate to multiply a universal injunction that should be obeyed at all times everywhere humankind is found?

The answer is ‘Yes’ if what we mean is to be fruitful, both in our productive and reproductive functions. It is ‘No’ if what we mean is merely multiplying people without summoning the resources needed to properly care for them.

Genesis 1:28 is what is known as the ‘Cultural Mandate.’ The command **to multiply**, to **fill the earth**, is only one part; the other part is **stewardship**, the command to **rule over creation**. This means that alongside the push for **growth** should be an accompanying capacity for **governance**. We have a responsibility to **maximize** as well as to **sustain** the resources—including people—that God has given to us.

At the beginning of the world, Adam and Eve stood alone, beholding the vast natural resources waiting to be tamed. Today, after millennia of sin, our planet is now teeming with people, but our natural resources have dwindled to scarcity.

We have obeyed the first command to multiply with eagerness, but have not been more faithful in obeying the second command to wisely steward the earth. The concern to manage our population growth rate in proportion to our capacity to sustain the welfare of our people is consistent with the mandate to govern the earth.

For Filipino Christian couples, family planning is not only grounded on this ethic of human responsibility but is also a contribution to a society reeling in poverty.

To use or not to use the pill or condom or any other contraceptive within marriage is rightly a decision to be made by husband and wife, and not the state. The state can make the resources available for people to make informed choices, but it is the place of parents to determine the size of their family, given their available resources.

In the same way they can be used for God-honoring purposes, family planning and contraceptives, as any tool, can be turned to sinful and selfish ends.

Even in a marital context, if contraceptives are used merely to indulge a sex life without risk, it is used sinfully. The French sociologist Jacques Ellul said of this situation, that the pill was an expression of egotism and simple self-centeredness. If a couple’s reason for not having children is nothing more than to live a life of unhampered freedom, that motive too, should come under critique.

We must multiply, certainly; but that growth must be governed in such a way that it ensures the welfare of all and our actions do not lead to self-seeking autonomy and irresponsible indulgence.

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