

A Commentary on John Paul II's Assertion: "Contraception and Abortion are Fruits of the Same Tree, and are Hallmarks of a Culture of Death"

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Introduction

In these modern days, more and more methods and techniques are developed by science and medicine about birth control. Among these methods are contraceptive methods and abortion that have become normative in many parts of the world. Many people argue that contraception reduces the rate of abortion. However, John Paul II mentioned that "contraception and abortion are fruits of the same tree, and are hallmarks of a culture of death". This article will be a commentary on John Paul II's assertion. It will be divided into three main parts. The first part will be about definitions of some key terms of John Paul II's assertion. That is to say what is meant by the "culture of death", abortion and contraception. The second part will try to elaborate on contraception and abortion as "fruits of the same tree". And the last part will point out how to understand contraception and abortion as "hallmarks of a culture of death".

The Culture of Death

The expression "culture of death" is found in the encyclical of John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*. This encyclical might be seen as the source of this phrase. It says:

"...we are confronted by an even larger reality, which can be described as a veritable structure of sin. This reality is characterized by the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and, in many cases, takes the form of a veritable "culture of death". This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. Looking at the situation from this point of view, it is possible to speak in a certain sense of a war of the powerful against the weak: a life which would require greater acceptance, love and care is considered useless, or held to be an intolerable burden, and is

therefore rejected in one way or another”¹

The context in which this phrase “culture of death” was mentioned, points out that it refers to abortion, euthanasia, contraception and other similar practices in this modern culture of ours that understand human life as ‘a means to some other end and not solely an end itself’²

Abortion

Karl Peschke defines abortion as ‘the removal of the non-viable human being from the mother’s womb by human intervention, whether by killing him before removal from the womb, or whether by exposing him to a certain death outside the womb’.³ There is what is called direct abortion and indirect abortion. On the one hand, abortion is direct ‘when the ejection of the non-viable fruit or the destruction of the offspring in the womb is intended as the aim of an action or as a means to achieve this aim’⁴ On the other hand, it is indirect ‘if the death of the foetus is merely permitted as a concomitant effect of a directly willed end’.⁵

Concerning abortion, the Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights that ‘direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law’⁶ because ‘human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception’

Contraception

The word Contraception literally means ‘against (contra)-(con)ception’ (cf. Respect of life). More precisely, ‘this refers to all the various ways in which male-female sexual intercourse can be prevented from resulting in the conception of a new life. Specifically, contraception means all the ways in which the male seed can be stopped from fertilizing a female egg’.⁷ Some of the means to prevent conception are ‘physical (condoms), chemical (pills) and surgical (vasectomy, hysterectomy, tubal ligation)’.

By its definition, one can see that contraception and abortion are practically different. Actually, ‘contraceptive acts and the means employed in them seek to prevent a life from being conceived’. On the contrary

‘abortive acts and the means employed in them seek to terminate the life that has already been conceived’.

Contraception and Abortion: Fruits of The Same Tree

This part will try to show that contraception and abortion are both fruits of the same tree because there are both unlawful birth control methods; there are both evil and both unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality.

Contraception and Abortion: Unlawful Birth Control Methods

John Paul II concerning contraception and abortion shared the same idea with his predecessor Paul VI. As a matter of fact, Paul VI basing himself on the Christian doctrine of marriage affirmed in *Humanae Vitae* that ‘the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children’.⁸ More than that, he reaffirmed that contraception especially ‘direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary’ or ‘any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means’ are all considered as unlawful methods concerning birth control.

Contraception and Abortion: Both Evil

People usually argue that a lesser evil is to be preferred to a greater one. Hence, they justify contraceptive used in sexual intercourse, compared to abortion. However, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it—in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general.⁹

Consequently, it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong’.

It is true that contraception and abortion are morally different but they are both evils. While contraception ‘contradicts the full truth of the sexual act as the proper expression of conjugal love’ and ‘is opposed to the virtue of chastity in marriage’, abortion ‘destroys the life of a human being... and is opposed to the virtue of justice and directly violates the divine commandment «You shall not kill»’.

Contraception and Abortion: Both Unwilling to Accept Responsibility in Matters of Sexuality

John Paul II explained in *Evangelium Vitae* that both contraception and Abortion come from a ‘hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality’.¹⁰ These two unlawful methods of birth control ‘imply a self-centred concept of freedom, which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfilment’. As a result, it is clear that ‘the life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception’

Contraception and Abortion: Hallmarks of A Culture of Death”.

In this part, it will be pointed out on the one hand contraception and abortion are not in favour of life. On the other hand, some figures will show how they rapidly lead to death.

Contraception and Abortion: Both Against Life

One of the reasons why Contraception and abortion are ‘hallmarks of a culture of death’ is that they are both against life. ‘In fact, God, master of life, has entrusted to men the noble ministry of life, and man must discharge it in a manner worthy of him.’¹¹ Yet ‘the contraceptives and sterilization and abortion ‘deny the God-given fertility of men and women’ (cf. Respect life). Moreover, they ‘are certainly part of the reason why in some cases there is a sharp decline in the birth-rate’.

Another reason is that instead of preventing abortion as many could think, contraception rather leads easily to abortion. This is explained when one considers that ‘Contraceptives can be abortifacient, preventing the implantation of the fertilized egg and the removal or expulsion of the

foetus or embryo from the uterus’ (cf. Respect life). In fact, ‘when this «prevention» fails, many contraceptives act as abortifacients and destroy the newly created person. And when contraceptives fail completely and the contraceptive mindset is already in place – abortion is often the resultant remedy’ (cf. Respect life).

Therefore, John Paul II would say ‘the various techniques of artificial reproduction, which would seem to be at the service of life and which are frequently used with this intention, actually open the door to new threats against life.

Facts & Figures

As a form of contraception, it has been shown that:

The “pill” increases the risk of breast cancer by over 40% if taken before a woman delivers her first baby. If taken 4 or more years before the woman’s first child is born, the increase for breast cancer is 70% more. The pill can also increase the risk of liver and cervical cancer (cf. Respect life).

Furthermore, ‘Forty-eight percent of women with unintended pregnancies and 54% of women seeking abortions were using contraception in the month they became pregnant’ (Respect life).

These figures actually point out that the use of contraception in many cases induces the users in a state of disease leading easily to death. Hence contraception, like abortion is a hallmark of the “culture of death”.

Conclusion

This article has tried to comment on the assertion of John Paul II that says “contraception and abortion are fruits of the same tree, and are hallmarks of a culture of death”. It is worth to mention that ‘the transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator’ (HV #1). Therefore, contraception and abortion ‘are a supreme dishonour to the Creator’ (EV#3). On the one hand, they are all unlawful birth control methods, both evil, and unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality. On the other hand, they both ‘deny the God-given fertility of men and

women' and lead directly or indirectly to death, whether by not allowing the birth of a baby or leading the mother to death.

¹ John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae*.

²Your dictionary, *The Culture of Death*: <https://www.yourdictionary.com/culture-of-death>. Accessed 28 January 2021.

³ Peschke, Karl. *Christian Ethics. Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II. Vol. II*. Warwickshire: Goodlife Neale, 1993.

⁴ Peschke, Karl. *Christian Ethics. Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II. Vol. II*. Warwickshire: Goodlife Neale, 1993.

⁵ Peschke, Karl. *Christian Ethics. Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II. Vol. II*. Warwickshire: Goodlife Neale, 1993.

⁶*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Geoffrey Chapman-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999.

⁷ Hanigan, James. "Contraception". *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*. Glazier, Michael and Monika Hellwig, eds. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994.

⁸ Pope Paul VI. *Humanae Vitae*

⁹ Pope Paul VI. *Humanae Vitae*

¹⁰ John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae*.

¹¹ Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*