

‘Contraception – None of the Church’s businesses

by

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Introduction: Name, who I am, member of St Francis Parish, married 36 years with 2 children, 2 grandsons, what I do – a Creighton Model FertilityCare teacher and trainer of new practitioner/teachers.

Introduction to talk: Fr Walsh gave me the title a couple of weeks ago, changed from ‘Contraception, Why Not’, a talk based on Professor J. Smith’s talk. Thought that would be easier. At 1 point I was going to sit and play you her talk. I’m not a natural speaker, very privileged to be here talking to you. Going to give some background on the rise of contraception use and where we are today, what the Church prophesied about contraception use and finish with how we can find the way back to a healthier way of life. By the end I hope they will agree that this issue is very much the Church’s business, despite the critics who say ‘How can old men in the Vatican know anything about sex?’ My references for preparing this talk are Humanae Vitae, Dr J Smith’s work on Humanae Vitae, the work of Chris West in explaining the Theology of the Body and the Theology of the Body, and my resources from the Fertility Care Practitioner Education Course which I now run.

Where are we today? Number of marriages is on the decline, a fall of 4% between 1996-2004, cohabitation is increasing and the number of cohabitees having children is also increasing, number of children is on the decline, The abortion rate has shown a slight fall of 1.6% in 2008 from 2007. abortion numbers have fallen slightly in the years 2007-2008 : 198,499 – 195, 296 but are still frighteningly high, the number of lone parents is increasing, married couples tend to have more children that cohabiting couples, who have a higher separation rate leading to the lone parent family. Teenage pregnancy rates are too high – 41,325 under 18’s in 2008, showing a 13% drop in numbers though the

government target was 50%. Why is that? Aren't we teaching our children more sex education than ever before?

This is what Pope Paul VI stated in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, published on July 25th 1968 in section 17: **'They (responsible individuals) should first consider how easy it will be for many to justify behaviour leading to marital infidelity or to a gradual weakening in the discipline of morals. Not much experience is needed to understand human weakness and to comprehend that human beings, especially the young, are so susceptible to temptation that they need to be encouraged to keep the moral law. It is wrong to make it easy for them to violate this law. Indeed it is to be feared that husbands who become accustomed to contraceptive practices will lose respect for their wives. They may come to disregard their wife's psychological and physical equilibrium and use their wives as instruments for serving their own desires. Consequently they will no longer view their wives as companions who should be treated with attentiveness and love.'**

What is the key to this state of affairs that he prophesied in 1968 and which we are seeing today? It is contraception. Pope Paul VI saw this happening within marriage but we can see that in the present time more people are having a sexual relationship outside of marriage and that the institute of marriage itself is more under threat than ever before.

What is contraception? The OCP came on to the market in the 60's and was widely embraced as the answer to growing population, particularly in the third world countries and indeed aid to these countries is still given in conjunction with an aggressive policy on population control. IPPF International Planned Parenthood Federation is given huge grants of taxpayers money to promote condom use, abortion and sterilisation in countries who receive aid. The pill was also seen as a way to enable women to be less tied to the home and have the freedom to have fewer children and return to work. So what does the pill do?

Basically it mimics through artificial hormones the woman's menstrual cycle. It makes the woman's body think it is already pregnant, hence the side effects of increased irritability and depression, weight gain.

I've never seen the leaflet in the packet but I understand it has all the side effects listed including danger of blood clots, high blood pressure. It is designed to suppress ovulation and is a highly effective form of contraception – 99% method effective, 95% use effective. (Explain the difference) If there is breakthrough ovulation the hormones are designed to make the womb hostile so that there can't be implantation. But what it also does is to switch off the brain so that when a couple want a baby the brain doesn't always switch back on again and they are left with reduced fertility. There are other devices and methods which have also been developed with contraception in mind: condoms, depo-provera injection – 1st introduced for those who couldn't be relied on to take their pills such as those with learning difficulties and now increasingly being used, especially those who have had an abortion already. So a contraceptive is something which works against conception, literally it translates 'against the beginning'.

Do we have sympathy with the desire to limit the number of children in a family, as a woman to have the opportunity to go out to work? Of course. Freedom of choice is not confined to only certain members of society. In HV it is stated that it is the responsibility of the parents to choose and decide on the size of their family. But the Christian view differs from our culture's point of view, because we don't decide this alone, it is in prayerful union with our God that the Christian couple decides.

Before 1930 all the Churches accepted that contraception was wrong, but in 1930 the Anglican Church agreed that in certain grave cases there was a case for contraceptive use in marriage. Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical 'On Christian Marriage' reiterating that contraception was intrinsically wrong. The 1st clamouring for change came in the 50's and 60's with the advent of the pill and it was widely expected that the Pope would ok this as it didn't seem to break the integrity of the marriage act between husband and wife. Pope John XXIII set up an advisory committee of 6 theologians to look into this and Pope Paul VI added to this other members with expertise in different fields, including married couples. The majority voted for change in the church's teaching and the commission finished its work in 1966. In 1967 the report was leaked to the Tablet in London and The National Catholic Reporter in the States. There had been a tremendous amount of literature and talk in favour of change between 63 and 67, so when PPVI issued HV there was an outcry! It was a pivotal and historic

moment. What we saw was a growing number of people who rebelled against this teaching and also some who left the church as a result of this encyclical. They believed that what the church was asking was impossible. And I think that remains true today. Does it matter?

Yes, it does. How can we address the problems?

John Paul II pontificate was dedicated to the explanation of HV and what is meant by what he called the theology of the body. And he went back to our origins as expressed in the creation account in Genesis to begin his teaching on what it means to be human. This teaching was given out at his Wednesday audience. Briefly, the Christian view of human beings is that we are made in the image and likeness of God, and our bodies point to the truth of what we are made for: perfect love and union with God himself. Written in our hearts is the desire for love, it's what we hunger for, the yearning as expressed by poets and artists, musicians. Remember the Beatles: 'All you need is Love'. 'She loves you yeah, yeah yeah', Rolling Stones, 'I can't get no satisfaction'. What are they talking about? Sex. This is where our culture is now looking for fulfilment of the desire to love and be loved. But our sex is primarily an identity, not an activity. 'God made man, male and female He created them.' And their form is very important. John Paul goes back to their original nakedness in the garden as the place to understand the real significance of our human nature. We don't make sense individually, it is only as a couple that the truth that we are made for union and perfect love can be seen, and that was shown in Genesis in the garden when Adam and Eve enjoyed a close companionship in union with each other and with God: God came to walk with them in the cool of the evening. Once they had sinned – disobedience – then the first rupture between them happened: they experienced shame and sewed leaves together to hide themselves from each other, and then they hid from God when he came to talk with them.

So how can we hope to be able to return to this state? Through receiving the virtue of chastity. This is made possible through the grace that comes from God through Jesus' death and resurrection. And Jesus promised that to those who seek they will find, to those who ask it will be give them. It's not an easy journey. God knows that a set of rules doesn't do it. He tried that one with the Israelites in the old covenant. We are no different. It is often only when it is

experienced in the depth of one's own being that there is something not 'at ease' that the searching for truth and enlightenment and change can begin. God can reach us when we are down. Now we can use the analogy of the frog in hot water. He jumps out. But put a frog into cold water and gradually heat it up and he will sit there quite happily and not notice he is boiling to death. I would say the same is true of our society. We don't know we are on a path of destruction with contraception – we now recognise homosexual marriages, masturbations ok, abortion is legalised – we need it as a back-up for contraceptive failure. We have become anaesthetised to contraception and see it as ok.

But why does the Church teach that it is wrong? Because as human beings we are not just bodies, we are a union of body and soul. The soul is what our post Christian culture denies. But denial doesn't make it true. We are made in the image and likeness of God and our body and soul are united in our human nature. They can't be separated. What we do to our bodies affects the whole of us, what we express with our bodies tells about who we are. The way we dress, how we look after our health, do our hair, how we live, it all expresses us as people. We are individuals, human beings, the peak of God's creation. Marriage between Adam and Eve was total, faithful and fruitful and so it is still the same. The act of sexual intercourse is designed to express this commitment to be faithful, it is an act of total self giving and by its very nature the act is fruitful, there is a potential for new life to come into existence. Human beings have been given this munus or mission to be participants in God's creative acts in the reproduction of new offspring. Anything which comes in the way of this act which is designed to bond the couple and to co-create new life is therefore a violation of the natural law and leads to chaos. Marriage is also designed to be an icon of the relationship which exists within the Trinity, total, creative and united. In a contracepted act of intercourse the couple are in effect saying I love you except for your fertility and not totally with the whole of myself. This part of myself, the life giving/receiving part, I am withholding. And I'm also shutting God out of this picture because I do not want a child. Now the act has become an idol instead of an icon. The womb becomes a tomb or is rendered sterile. The result is the breakdown of relationships that we have looked at earlier.

Now in the last paragraphs of HV Pope Paul VI appealed to different people to help teach the faithful, as Catholics were called,

about the truth of marriage, and he also appealed to men of science to investigate ways to help couples live the church's teaching through the use of the body's own natural rhythms of fertility and infertility. The work that I do in teaching FertilityCare is a result of this call. The system is based on the Billings ovulation method and is 99.5% method effective, 96.8% use effective to avoid a pregnancy, which is better than the pill and has no side effects. It is equally accurate in achieving in couples of normal fertility.

We Catholics are no different in our desire for good relationships, family sizes of our own choice, freedom to stay at home or go out to work to people of no faith. But because of our belief in a good God who wants the best for us and wants to live in union with us we cannot embrace the culture of contraception. We have to explore and find out the truth of how to live in accordance with God's truth about the human person and therefore we must explore the Church's teachings with humility and with a deep desire to please God first and foremost. Jesus promised He would be with his church until the end of time. It is the wisdom of the Holy Spirit who guides us, not human wisdom alone.

I understand that here in St. Vincent's a group to study the Theology of the Body has been set up and I would encourage as many as possible to find the time to look at the work of Christopher West as he is so good at explaining JP II's teaching. If we want a renewal of our society then the key is a return to an appreciation of the truth of our human nature and a respect for life.

Thank you.

Any questions?

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For more information on Family Planning using the Creighton Model Fertilitycare system, or infertility treatment using NaProTechnology as practised by Life FertilityCare, contact 0114 2301377, or the Life Charity's website: www.lifecharity.org.uk/fertilitycare, or call 01926 834654 and speak with Miss Ira Winter, the FertilityCare coordinator.