

Contraception and Abortion Closely Connected

by Lisa Everett

In the decades since *Roe v. Wade* was decided, many people have come to believe that contraception is part of the solution to the problem of abortion. Even within the pro-life movement, conventional wisdom often dictates neutrality or silence on the question of contraception. What is becoming increasingly clear, however, is just how closely contraception and abortion are connected. Contraception is not part of the solution to the culture of death—it is part of the problem.

The close connection between contraception and abortion can be seen on several levels. The most obvious one lies in the fact that the most effective “contraceptives” available today can also function as abortifacients. The Pill, Depo-Provera, Norplant, and even moreso “Plan B,” not only inhibit ovulation; they can interfere with the implantation of a newly conceived embryo and therefore induce an early abortion. How often this mechanism of action comes into play is not clear, but there is no doubt that these pharmaceutical products cause the lining of the uterus to become thin and shriveled and therefore unable to shelter and sustain an embryo.

Contraception and abortion are also closely linked on the level of morality. Contraception attempts to sever the link between sex and procreation, which, if unsuccessful, can be definitively accomplished through an abortion. In his 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium vitae*, Pope John Paul II clarified this connection:

“Despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree. It is true that in many cases, contraception and even abortion are practiced under the pressure of real-life difficulties which nonetheless can never exonerate from striving to observe God’s law fully. Still, in very many other instances such practices are rooted in a hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality, and they imply a self-centered concept of freedom, which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfillment. 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.”

Finally, contraception and abortion are closely linked on the level of actual practice. That many people do use abortion as a back-up to failed contraception is shown by studies which have found that among women who have abortions, over 80% are experienced contraceptive users, and over half say they were using a contraceptive in the month they conceived. In addition, the Alan Guttmacher Institute (the former research arm of Planned Parenthood) published data in 2000 which clearly showed that states (such as New York and California) that ranked highest in access to contraception also had the highest abortion rates in the country.

Pope John Paul II noted how closely contraception and abortion are linked on the level of actual practice in *Evangelium vitae*:

“It may be that many people use contraception with a view to excluding the subsequent temptation to abortion. But the negative values inherent in the “contraceptive mentality’—which is very different from responsible parenthood, lived in respect for the full truth of the conjugal act—are such that they in fact strengthen this temptation when an unwanted life is conceived. Indeed, the pro-abortion culture is especially strong precisely where the Church’s teaching on contraception is rejected.”

Just a few years before this encyclical was issued, a similar cultural connection between contraception and abortion was noted in a striking, even startling, way by the U.S. Supreme Court in its 1992 *Casey* decision which reaffirmed *Roe v. Wade*:

“...in some critical respects abortion is of the same character as the decision to use contraception...for two decades of economic and social developments, people have organized intimate relationships and made choices that define their view of themselves and their places in society, in reliance on the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail.”

This link between the promotion and practice of contraception and reliance on abortion when it fails is especially pronounced in the teenaged population. According to a survey done for Planned Parenthood, American teenagers who learn about birth control in school are significantly more

likely to become sexually active. This leads inevitably to higher rates of teen pregnancy and abortion. Going a step further and targeting teens for contraceptive “services” only makes the problem worse. Stan Weed, director of the Institute for Research and Evaluation, documented this fact in two separate studies which found that as the number and proportion of teenage family-planning clients increased, there was “a corresponding increase in the teen-age pregnancy and abortion rates: 50 to 120 more pregnancies per thousand clients rather than the 200 to 300 fewer pregnancies as estimated by researchers at the Alan Guttmacher Institute.... In that same time period, when the size of the teen population was little changed, teen abortion went from 190,000 to 430,000.... Apparently the programs are more effective at convincing teens to avoid birth than to avoid pregnancy.” Recent studies in England have reaffirmed that increased access to contraception for teens leads to higher abortion rates.

However well meaning, those who promote contraception in the hope of reducing unwanted pregnancies and abortion are rather fueling the fires of the culture of death. As Pope John Paul II put it so pointedly:

“It is an illusion to think that we can build a true culture of human life if we do not help the young to accept and experience sexuality and love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and their close interconnection. Sexuality, which enriches the whole person, ‘manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love.’ The trivialization of sexuality is among the principal factors which have led to contempt for new life” (*Evangelium vitae*, #97).