

Next Ethic seminar set for April 6, 2014

Message from Kieran Dickinson: Thanks everyone for the good discussion tonight. For those not present, we discussed the first sections of Martin Rhonheimer's essay on The Perspective of the Acting Person and found ourselves also discussing contraception. I mentioned Fr. Rhonheimer's popular article from 2004, published in The Tablet, called "The Truth About Condoms." Unfortunately, the article is no longer available on the Internet. At least I could not find it. If any of you can find it, please pass it on to the rest of us. Many references and articles discussing the 2004 article are available.

Of these, I have chosen two to bring to your attention: Fr. Rhonheimer's Reply to Luke Gormally, from December 2010 (see the Chiesa article) and Prof. David Crawford's article in *Communio*. The setting for the Reply to Luke Gormally was the reaction to Pope Benedict's remarks in 2010, in which he said that the use of a condom by a prostitute could be a step in the direction of moral responsibility. Gormally, of the Pontifical Institute for Life, George Weigel, and others criticized Pope Benedict for this statement, as it seemed to imply that there is something positive about the use of condoms at least in a narrow case. Rhonheimer defended Pope Benedict's statement and in doing so returned to arguments he'd made in his article in *The Tablet* and, indeed, on arguments he makes in the essay we have been reading.

David Crawford's article in *Communio* was the best critical response to Rhonheimer's 2004 article in the *Tablet* that I've found. Note that Crawford was or is a professor at the JPPI Institute for the Study of Marriage and Family, and his article relies heavily on JPPI's theology of the body.

I also include below a link to a 1-page statement by Bishop Cullinane, the former head of the New Zealand Catholic bishops' conference, on issues of contraception. It's not a philosophically sophisticated piece, but it is very clear and direct and it does come from a Catholic bishop. (I hasten to add that not all Catholic bishops would agree with it.)

Finally, to make sense of these articles, one really must know the key passages from Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*. The key paragraph is paragraph 14: in particular this statement "Similarly excluded is every action which, either in anticipation of the CONJUGAL ACT (emphasis mine!), or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, PROPOSES (emphasis mine!), whether as an end or a means, to render procreation impossible." Paragraphs 15 (which approves of the use of the birth control pill if necessary to cure disease) and 16 (which approves of the use of periodic abstinence during the woman's fertile days) are also relevant. It is also important to note that, historically, one of the facts that prompted Pope Paul VI to issue *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 was the development of the birth control pill and, in particular, arguments made in the 1960s that use of the pill is licit because, unlike a barrier method, it is "natural" in

the sense of not interfering with the deposit of the man's sperm into the woman's vagina. Paragraphs 14-16 of HV are pasted below.

OK, so where does this leave us? I didn't want to get sidetracked into an extended discussion of contraception, but we are on the verge of it now and maybe it's best to go ahead with it. That's OK with me so long as we also continue reading Rhonheimer closely, using questions of contraception as examples. But let's not let the discussion of contraception become the end in itself, at least before we have a fuller grounding in the philosophy. Therefore, let's read pp. 209-217 of Rhonheimer's essay for next time, and let's use the case of contraception as a rich source of examples, without, however, letting it dominate the discussion. Focus on pp. 209-217 and read the rest as you find it of interest (in any case, it's much easier to read than The Perspective of the Acting Person).

<http://www.pn.catholic.org.nz/dox/Bishops/More%20Catholic%20than%20the%20Pope%20-%20Comment%20on%20Card%20Martinis%20comments.pdf> "More Catholic than the Pope."

<http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1346021?eng=y> "Reply to Luke Gormally"

<http://www.communio-icr.com/files/crawford33-3.pdf>

From *Humanae Vitae*:

14. In conformity with these landmarks in the human and Christian vision of marriage, we must once again declare that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun, and, above all, directly willed and procured abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as licit means of regulating birth.¹⁴

Equally to be excluded, as the teaching authority of the Church has frequently declared, is direct sterilization, whether perpetual or temporary, whether of the man or of the woman.¹⁵ **Similarly excluded is every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible.**¹⁶

To justify conjugal acts made intentionally infecund, one cannot invoke as valid reasons the lesser evil, or the fact that such acts would constitute a whole together with the fecund acts already performed or to follow later, and hence would share in one and the same moral goodness. In truth, if it is sometimes licit to tolerate a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater evil or to promote a greater good,¹⁷ it is not licit, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil so that good may follow therefrom;¹⁸ that is, to make into the object of a positive act of the will something which is intrinsically disorder, and hence

unworthy of the human person, even when the intention is to safeguard or promote individual, family or social well-being. Consequently it is an error to think that a conjugal act which is deliberately made infecund and so is intrinsically dishonest could be made honest and right by the ensemble of a fecund conjugal life.

15. The Church, on the contrary, does not at all consider illicit the use of those therapeutic means truly necessary to cure diseases of the organism, even if an impediment to procreation, which may be foreseen, should result therefore, provided such impediment is not, for whatever motive, directly willed.¹⁹

16. To this teaching of the Church on conjugal morals, the objection is made today, as we observed earlier (no. 3), that it is the prerogative of the human intellect to dominate the energies offered by irrational nature and to orientate them towards an end conformable to the good of man. Now, some may ask: in the present case, is it not reasonable in many circumstances to have recourse to artificial birth control if, thereby, we secure the harmony and peace of the family, and better conditions for the education of the children already born? To this question it is necessary to reply with clarity: the Church is the first to praise and recommend the intervention of intelligence in a function which so closely associates the rational creature with his Creator; but she affirms that this must be done with respect for the order established by God.

If, then, there are serious motives to space out births, which derive from the physical or psychological conditions of husband and wife, or from external conditions, the Church teaches that it is then licit to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions, for the use of marriage in the infecund periods only, and in this way to regulate birth without offending the moral principles which have been recalled earlier.²⁰

The Church is coherent with herself when she considers recourse to the infecund periods to be licit, while at the same time condemning, as being always illicit, the use of means directly contrary to fecundation, even if such use is inspired by reasons which may appear honest and serious. In reality, there are essential differences between the two cases; in the former, the married couple make legitimate use of a natural disposition; in the latter, they impede the development of natural processes. It is true that, in the one and the other case, the married couple are concordant in the positive will of avoiding children for plausible reasons, seeking the certainty that offspring will not arrive; but it is also true that only in the former case are they able to renounce the use of marriage in the fecund periods when, for just motives, procreation is not desirable, while making use of it during infecund periods to manifest their affection and to safeguard their mutual fidelity. By so doing, they give proof of a truly and integrally honest love.

On Sun, Mar 9, 2014 at 11:19 PM, Kieran Dickinson <kieranesq@gmail.com>

wrote:

<http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1346021?eng=y>

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Bishop Cullinane, "More Catholic than the Pope"