

The Connection between Contraception and Abortion

by

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Many in the pro-life movement are reluctant to make a connection between contraception and abortion. They insist that these are two very different acts -- that there is all the difference in the world between contraception, which prevents a life from coming to be and abortion, which takes a life that has already begun.

With some contraceptives there is not only a link with abortion there is an identity. Some contraceptives are abortifacients; they work by causing early term abortions. The IUD seems to prevent a fertilized egg -- a new little human being -- from implanting in the uterine wall. The pill does not always stop ovulation but sometimes prevents implantation of the growing embryo. And, of course, the new RU 486 pill works altogether by aborting a new fetus, a new baby. Although some in the pro-life movement occasional speak out against the contraceptives that are abortifacients most generally steer clear of the issue of contraception.

This seems to me to be a mistake. I think that we will not make good progress in creating a society where all new life can be safe, where we truly display a respect for life, where abortion is a terrible memory rather than a terrible reality until we see that there are many significant links between contraception and abortion and that we bravely speak this truth. We need to realize that a society in which contraceptives are widely used is going to have a very difficult time keeping free of abortions since the lifestyles and attitudes that contraception fosters create an alleged "need" for abortion.

Planned Parenthood v. Casey, the recent Supreme Court decision that confirmed Roe v. Wade, stated, "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 views of themselves and their places in society, in reliance on the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail."

The Supreme Court decision has made completely unnecessary any efforts to "expose" what is really behind the attachment of the modern age to abortion. As the Supreme Court candidly states, we need abortion so that we can continue our contraceptive lifestyles. It is not because contraceptives are ineffective that a million and half women a year seek abortions as back-ups to failed contraceptives. The "intimate relationships" facilitated by contraceptives are what make abortions "necessary". "Intimate" here is a euphemism and a misleading one at that. Here the word "intimate" means "sexual"; it does not mean "loving and close." Abortion is most often the result of sexual relationships in which there is little true intimacy and love, in which there is no room for a baby, the natural consequence of sexual intercourse. Contraception enables those who are not prepared to care for babies, to engage in sexual intercourse; when they become pregnant, they resent the unborn child for intruding itself upon their lives and they turn to the solution of abortion.

Contraception currently is hailed as the solution to the problems consequent on the sexual revolution; many believe that better contraceptives and more responsible use of contraceptives will reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions and will prevent to some extent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

To support the argument that more responsible use of contraceptives would reduce the number of abortions, some note that most abortions are performed for "contraceptive purposes". That is, few abortions are had because a woman has been a victim of rape or incest or because a pregnancy would endanger her life, or because she expects to have a handicapped or deformed newborn. Rather, most abortions are had because men and women who do not want a baby are having sexual intercourse and facing pregnancies they did not plan for and do not want. Because their contraceptive failed, or because they failed to use a contraceptive, they then resort to abortion as a back-up. Many believe that if we could convince men and women to use contraceptives responsibly we would reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and thus the number of abortions. Thirty years ago this position might have had some plausibility, but not now. We have lived for about thirty years with a culture permeated with contraceptive use and abortion; no longer can we think that greater access to contraception will reduce the number of abortions. Rather, wherever contraception is more readily available the number of unwanted pregnancies and the number of abortions increases greatly.

The connection between contraception and abortion is primarily this: contraception facilitates the kind of relationships and even the kind of attitudes and moral characters that are likely to lead to abortion. The contraceptive mentality treats sexual intercourse as though it had little natural connection with babies; it thinks of babies as an "accident" of pregnancy, as an unwelcome intrusion into a sexual relationship, as a burden. The sexual revolution has no fondness -- no room for -- the connection between sexual intercourse and babies. The sexual revolution simply was not possible until fairly reliable contraceptives were available.

Far from being a check to the sexual revolution, contraception is the fuel that facilitated the beginning of the sexual revolution and enables it to continue to rage. In the past, many men and women refrained from illicit sexual unions simply because they were not prepared for the responsibilities of parenthood. But once a fairly reliable contraceptive appeared on the scene, this barrier to sex outside the confines of marriage fell. The connection between sex and love also fell quickly; ever since contraception became widely used, there has been much talk of, acceptance of, and practice of casual sex and recreational sex. The deep meaning that is inherent in sexual intercourse has been lost sight of; the willingness to engage in sexual intercourse with another is no longer a result of a deep commitment to another. It no longer bespeaks a willingness to have a child with another and to have all the consequent entanglements with another that babies bring. Contraception helps reduce one's sexual partner to just a sexual object since it renders sexual intercourse to be without any real commitments. Certainly one can easily imagine how attractive abortion would be in the face of a contraceptive failure -- one has made not commitment to one's sexual partner or exacted one, so how can one expect one's self or one's sexual partner to take on the responsibility of raising a child. Some clinics report that up to 50% of the abortions are of pregnancies that resulted from contraceptive failure.

Furthermore, the casualness with which sexual unions are now entered is accompanied by a casualness and carelessness in the use of contraceptives. Studies show that the women having abortions are very knowledgeable about birth control methods; the great majority -- eighty per cent -- are experienced contraceptors but they display carelessness and indifference in their use of contraception for a variety of reasons. Contraception has enabled them to enter a sexual relationship or a life style, but while the relationship or life style continues the contraceptive practice does not

continue..

One researcher reports the reasons why sexually active, contraceptively experienced women stop contracepting: she observes that some have broken up with their sexual partners and believe they will no longer need a contraceptive but they find themselves sexually active anyway. Others dislike the physical exam required for the pill, or dislike the side-effects of the pill and some are deterred by what inconvenience or difficulty there is in getting contraceptives. Many unmarried women do not like to think of themselves as sexually active; using contraceptives conflicts with their preferred self-image. The failure to use birth control is a sign that many women are not comfortable with being sexually active. That is, many of the women are engaged in an activity that, for some reason, they do not wish to admit to themselves.

One researcher, Kristin Luker, a pro-abortion social scientist, in a book entitled Taking Chances: Abortion and the Decision not to Contracept attempted to discover why, with contraceptives so widely available, so many women, virtually all knowledgeable about contraception, had unwanted pregnancies and abortions. The conclusions of her studies suggest that it is not simple "carelessness" or "irresponsibility" that lead women to have abortions, but that frequently the pregnancies that are aborted are planned or the result of a calculated risk. She begins by dismissing some of the commonly held views about why women get abortions; she denies that they are usually had by panic-stricken youngsters or that they are had by unmarried women who would otherwise have had illegitimate births. She also maintains that statistics do not show that abortion is an act of final desperation used by poor women and "welfare mothers" or that abortion is often sought by women who have more children than they can handle. What she attempts to discern is what reason women had for not using contraception although they were contraceptively experienced and knew the risks involved in not using contraception. Luker seeks to substantiate in her study that "unwanted pregnancy is the end result of an informed decision-making process. That pregnancy occurred anyway, for the women in this study, is because most of them were attempting to achieve more diffuse goals than simply preventing pregnancy."

Luker argues that for these women (women who are having non-contracepted sex, but who are not intending to have babies), using contraceptives has certain "costs" and getting pregnant has certain

"benefits". The women make a calculation that the benefits of not using contraception and the benefits of a pregnancy outweigh the risks of getting pregnant and the need to have an abortion. She concurs that many women prefer "spontaneous sex" and do not like thinking of themselves as "sexually active". She notes that some wondered whether or not they were fertile and thus did not take contraceptives. The "benefits" of a pregnancy for many women were many; pregnancy proves "that one is a woman", or that one is fertile; it provides an excuse for "forcing a definition in the relationship"; it forces a woman's or girl's parents to deal with her"; it is used as a "psychological organizing technique."

In the end, almost all of the unmarried women Luker interviewed had the option to marry (and supposedly to complete the pregnancy) but none chose this option. Luker attributes this to unwillingness of women to get married under such conditions, to the disparity between this kind of marriage and their fantasy marriage, and to their belief that they were responsible for the pregnancy, and thus they had no claim on the male's support.

One of her examples is of an unmarried woman who did not like using the pill because it made her gain weight. Coupled with this was her wish to force her boyfriend to openly admit his relationship with her to his parents who rejected her, and possibly to force marriage and thus she decided not to use contraception. Upon becoming pregnant, this woman had an abortion.

Much of this data suggests that there is something deep in our natures that finds the severing of sexual intercourse from love and commitment and babies to be unsatisfactory. As we have seen, women are careless in their use of contraceptives for a variety of reasons, but one reason for their careless use of contraceptives is precisely their desire to engage in meaningful sexual activity rather than in meaningless sexual activity. They want their sexual acts to be more meaningful than a handshake or a meal shared. They are profoundly uncomfortable with using contraceptives for what they do to their bodies and for what they do to their relationships. Often, they desire to have a more committed relationship with the male with whom they are involved; they get pregnant to test his love and commitment. But since the relationship has not been made permanent, since no vows have been taken, they are profoundly ambivalent about any pregnancy that might occur. They are very likely to abort a pregnancy they may even have desired. It may sound far-fetched to claim that some women may in some sense "plan" or "desire" the very pregnancies that they abort but this analysis is borne out

by studies done by pro-abortion sociologists.

Contraception clearly leads to many abortions by those who have sex outside of marriage. Even within marriage, those who contracept are more likely to abort than those who do not, especially those who use NFP. It is easy to understand why contraceptors would be more likely to abort. Those using contraception who get pregnant unexpectedly, are generally very angry, since they did everything they could to prevent a pregnancy. The pregnancy is seen as a crisis. The married have often planned a life that is not receptive to children and are tempted to abort to sustain the child-free life they have designed. I am not, of course, saying that all those who contracept are likely to abort; I am saying that many more of those who contracept do abort than those who practice natural family planning.

It should be no surprise that unlike contraceptors, those using methods of natural family planning are highly unlikely to resort to abortion should an unplanned pregnancy occur. Some argue that couples using natural family planning are as closed to having babies as are those that use contraceptives; that they too wish to engage in "baby-free" sexual intercourse. But the crucial difference is that those using NFP are not engaging in an act whose nature they wish to thwart; they are keeping to the principles of sexual responsibility. Their sexual acts remain as open to procreation as nature permits. They are refraining from sexual intercourse when they know they may conceive and engaging in sexual intercourse when they are unable to conceive -- precisely because of their desire to be responsible about their child-bearing.

It should be no surprise that countries that are permeated by contraceptive sex, fight harder for access to abortion than they do to ensure that all babies can survive both in the womb and out. It is foolish for pro-lifers to think that they can avoid the issues of contraception and sexual irresponsibility and be successful in the fight against abortion. For, as the Supreme Court stated, abortion is "necessary" for those whose intimate relationships are based upon contraceptive sex.