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The family is the sanctuary of life 2 – Practising responsible procreation

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In last week's article we spoke of the joy that a new life brings into the world to everyone, and the opportunity that this new life creates to bring people together in the dynamism of love. This week we look at another aspect of the issues surrounding bringing a new life into the world – methods of "*responsible procreation*".

Despite the joy a newborn baby can bring to many people, there are many instances when a newborn baby is seen as an accident or an unwanted burden that the parents are unwilling to deal with.

Many persons indicate that the timing for the pregnancy/baby was wrong for different reasons, either parents are studying, careers are at a particular stage where children could be a distraction or spouses want to spend quality time with each other before they have the responsibility of a baby.

For these reasons and many others many people seek to control when they are able to conceive children. This is where the issue of contraception comes in. The discussion on the methods of contraception ranges from issues relating to abortion to natural methods versus unnatural methods.

The *Compendium* tells us: "Concerning the 'methods' for practising responsible procreation, the first to be rejected as morally illicit are sterilisation and abortion (*Humanae Vitae*). The latter in particular is a horrendous crime and constitutes a particularly serious moral disorder (*Gaudium et Spes*); far from being a right, it is a sad phenomenon that contributes seriously to spreading a mentality against life, representing a dangerous threat to a just and democratic social coexistence (*Gratissimam Sane*)."

With respect to abortion, the Catholic Church is against abortion, because human life is sacred and anything that violates this sacred gift beginning with the direct destruction of human life is to be rejected. This has led to many a discussion on when does human life actually begin, and what about cases where pregnancy has occurred because of rape and incest or it is clear that the baby may be disabled in some way, or the mother's life is endangered by the pregnancy. These issues each require extensive discussion which cannot be done in this article.

Readers are encouraged to do some further reading on these issues. However to briefly address some of these issues that these "hard cases" present, we can first start with accepting that the circumstances surrounding the birth of the baby are not ideal.

But in the case of rape, incest and disabled babies – there comes an EXTRAORDINARY opportunity to exhibit Christian principles of love and acceptance. Children born of rape and incest exist in today's society. Many of them have been able to contribute to the society. However, this is only possible with love and support and with a community of persons united in love. Are children who are disabled not to be loved and accepted? In many parts of the world and

also here in Trinidad, we have seen the courage and the contribution to society that people who are mentally and physically challenged are capable of.

We must also remember those persons who long to have children but have so far been unsuccessful, either because they have been unable to conceive or because they have lost babies either prior to or after birth. We must always appreciate the gift of human life. The Church also rejects “unnatural” contraceptive methods such as birth control pills and condoms.

“Also to be rejected is recourse to contraceptive methods in their different forms (*Gaudium et Spes*): this rejection is based on a correct and integral understanding of the person and human sexuality (*Familiaris Consortio*) and represents a moral call to defend the true development of peoples (*Humanae Vitae*).

On the other hand, the same reasons of an anthropological order justify recourse to periodic abstinence during times of the woman’s fertility (*Humanae Vitae*). Rejecting contraception and using natural methods for regulating births means choosing to base interpersonal relations between the spouses on mutual respect and total acceptance, with positive consequences also for bringing about a more human order in society.”

Why do many persons honestly reject the natural methods of contraception? Perhaps they feel it requires too much effort and discipline, if a couple really wants to limit the number of children they have. The fact that a natural method exists speaks volumes. God has provided a method by which a couple can control the number of children they desire.

Many claim it is not foolproof. But in defense of natural methods, there have also been instances when the other methods have failed to prevent pregnancy. However, the use of the natural methods of birth control presents an opportunity for a couple to intimately understand and get to know each other physically, to respect each other and to be understanding, all of which are essential elements of a happy married life and family life.

“The judgment concerning the interval of time between births, and that regarding the number of children, belongs to the spouses alone. This is one of their inalienable rights, to be exercised before God with due consideration of their obligations towards themselves, their children already born, the family and society (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

The intervention of public authorities within the limits of their competence to provide information and enact suitable measures in the area of demographics must be made in a way that fully respects the persons and the freedom of the couple. Such intervention may never become a substitute for their decisions (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*). All the more must various organisations active in this area refrain from doing the same.”

“All programmes of economic assistance aimed at financing campaigns of sterilisation and contraception, as well as the subordination of economic assistance to such campaigns, are to be morally condemned as affronts to the dignity of the person and the family.

The answer to questions connected with population growth must instead be sought in simultaneous respect for both of sexual morals and of social ethics, promoting greater justice and

authentic solidarity so that dignity is given to life in all circumstances, starting with economic, social and cultural conditions.”