

Christians have always condemned contraceptive sex. Both forms mentioned in the Bible, *coitus interruptus* and sterilization, are condemned without exception (Gen. 38:9–10, Deut. 23:1). The early Fathers recognized that the purpose of sexual intercourse in natural law is procreation; contraceptive sex, which deliberately blocks that purpose, is a violation of natural law.

Every church in Christendom condemned contraception until 1930, when, at its decennial Lambeth Conference, Anglicanism gave permission for the use of contraception in a few cases. Soon all Protestant denominations had adopted the secularist position on contraception. Today not one stands with the Catholic Church to maintain the ancient Christian faith on this issue.

How badly things have decayed may be seen by comparing the current state of non-Catholic churches, where most pastors counsel young couples to decide before they are married what form of contraception they *will* use, with these quotations from the early Church Fathers, who condemned contraception in general as well as particular forms of it, as well as popular contraceptive sex practices that were then common (sterilization, oral contraceptives, *coitus interruptus*, and orally consummated sex).

Many Protestants, perhaps beginning to see the inevitable connection between contraception and divorce and between contraception and abortion, are now returning to the historic Christian position and rejecting contraceptive sexual practices.

It should be noted that some of the Church Fathers use language that can suggest to modern ears that there is no unitive aspect to marital intercourse and that there is only a procreative aspect. It is unclear whether this is what some of them actually thought or whether they are intending simply to stress that sexual activity becomes immoral if the procreative aspect of a given marital act is deliberately frustrated. However that may be, over the course of time the Church has called greater attention to the unitive aspect of marital intercourse, yet it remains true that the procreative aspect of each particular marital act must not be frustrated.

THE LETTER OF BARNABAS

“Moreover, he [Moses] has rightly detested the weasel [Lev. 11:29]. For he means, ‘Thou shall not be like to those whom we hear of as committing wickedness with the mouth with the body through uncleanness [orally consummated sex]; nor shall thou be joined to those impure women who commit iniquity with the mouth with the body through uncleanness’” (*Letter of Barnabas* 10:8 [A.D. 74]).

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

“Because of its divine institution for the propagation of man, the seed is not to be vainly ejaculated, nor is it to be damaged, nor is it to be wasted” (*The Instructor of Children* 2:10:91:2 [A.D. 191]).

“To have coitus other than to procreate children is to do injury to nature” (*ibid.*, 2:10:95:3).

HIPPOLYTUS

“[Christian women with male concubines], on account of their prominent ancestry and great property, the so-called faithful want no children from slaves or lowborn commoners, [so] they use drugs of sterility or bind themselves tightly in order to expel a fetus which has already been engendered” (*Refutation of All Heresies* 9:12 [A.D. 225]).

LACTANTIUS

“[Some] complain of the scantiness of their means, and allege that they have not enough for bringing up more children, as though, in truth, their means were in [their] power . . . or God did not daily make the rich poor and the poor rich. Wherefore, if any one on any account of poverty shall be unable to bring up children, it is better to abstain from relations with his wife” (*Divine Institutes* 6:20 [A.D. 307]).

“God gave us eyes not to see and desire pleasure, but to see acts to be performed for the needs of life;

so too, the genital [‘generating’] part of the body, as the name itself teaches, has been received by us for no other purpose than the generation of offspring” (*ibid.*, 6:23:18).

COUNCIL OF NICAEA I

“[I]f anyone in sound health has castrated himself, it behooves that such a one, if enrolled among the clergy, should cease [from his ministry], and that from henceforth no such person should be promoted. But, as it is evident that this is said of those who willfully do the thing and presume to castrate themselves, so if any have been made eunuchs by barbarians, or by their masters, and should otherwise be found worthy, such men this canon admits to the clergy” (Canon 1 [A.D. 325]).

EPIPHANIUS OF SALAMIS

“They [certain Egyptian heretics] exercise genital acts, yet prevent the conceiving of children. Not in order to produce offspring, but to satisfy lust, are they eager for corruption” (*Medicine Chest Against Heresies* 26:5:2 [A.D. 375]).

AUGUSTINE

“This proves that you [Manicheans] approve of having a wife, not for the procreation of children, but for the gratification of passion. In marriage, as the marriage law declares, the man and woman come together for the procreation of children. Therefore, whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, forbids marriage and makes the woman not a wife but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion” (*The Morals of the Manichees* 18:65 [A.D. 388]).

“You [Manicheans] make your auditors adulterers of their wives when they take care lest the women with whom they copulate conceive. They take wives according to the laws of matrimony by tablets an-

nouncing that the marriage is contracted to procreate children; and then, fearing because of your law [against childbearing] . . . they copulate in a shameful union only to satisfy lust for their wives. They are unwilling to have children, on whose account alone marriages are made. How is it, then, that you are not those prohibiting marriage, as the apostle predicted of you so long ago [1 Tim. 4:1–4], when you try to take from marriage what marriage is? When this is taken away, husbands are shameful lovers, wives are harlots, bridal chambers are brothels, fathers-in-law are pimps” (*Against Faustus* 15:7 [A.D. 400]).

“For thus the eternal law, that is, the will of God creator of all creatures, taking counsel for the conservation of natural order, not to serve lust, but to see to the preservation of the race, permits the delight of mortal flesh to be released from the control of reason in copulation only to propagate progeny” (*ibid.*, 22:30).

“For necessary sexual intercourse for begetting [children] is alone worthy of marriage. But that which goes beyond this necessity no longer follows reason but lust. And yet it pertains to the character of marriage . . . to yield it to the partner lest by fornication the other sin damnably [through adultery] . . . [T]hey [must] not turn away from them the mercy of God . . . by changing the natural use into that which is against nature, which is more damnable when it is done in the case of husband or wife. For, whereas that natural use, when it pass beyond the compact of marriage, that is, beyond the necessity of begetting [children], is pardonable in the case of a wife, damnable in the case of a harlot; that which is against nature is execrable when done in the case of a harlot, but more execrable in the case of a wife. Of so great power is the ordinance of the Creator, and the order of creation, that . . . when the man shall wish to use a body part of the wife not allowed for this purpose [orally or anally consummated sex], the wife is more shameful, if she suffer it to take place in her own case, than if in the case of another woman” (*The Good of Marriage* 11–12 [A.D. 401]).

"I am supposing, then, although you are not lying [with your wife] for the sake of procreating offspring, you are not for the sake of lust obstructing their procreation by an evil prayer or an evil deed. Those who do this, although they are called husband and wife, are not; nor do they retain any reality of marriage, but with a respectable name cover a shame. Sometimes this lustful cruelty, or cruel lust, comes to this, that they even procure poisons of sterility. . . . Assuredly if both husband and wife are like this, they are not married, and if they were like this from the beginning they come together not joined in matrimony but in seduction. If both are not like this, I dare to say that either the wife is in a fashion the harlot of her husband or he is an adulterer with his own wife" (*Marriage and Concupiscence* 1:15:17 [A.D. 419]).

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

"Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit, where there are medicines of sterility [oral contraceptives], where there is murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. . . . Indeed, it is something worse than murder, and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God and fight with his [natural] laws? . . . Yet such turpitude . . . the matter still seems indifferent to many men—even to many men having wives. In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife. Against her are these innumerable tricks" (*Homilies on Romans* 24 [A.D. 391]).

"[I]n truth, all men know that they who are under the power of this disease [the sin of covetousness] are wearied even of their father's old age [wishing him to die so they can inherit]; and that which is sweet, and universally desirable, the having of children, they esteem grievous and unwelcome. Many at least with this view have even paid money to be childless, and have mutilated nature, not only killing

the newborn, but even acting to prevent their beginning to live" (*Homilies on Matthew* 28:5 [A.D. 391]).

"[T]he man who has mutilated himself, in fact, is subject even to a curse, as Paul says, 'I would that they who trouble you would cut the whole thing off' [Gal. 5:12]. And very reasonably, for such a person is venturing on the deeds of murderers, and giving occasion to them that slander God's creation, and opens the mouths of the Manicheans, and is guilty of the same unlawful acts as they that mutilate themselves among the Greeks. For to cut off our members has been from the beginning a work of demonical agency, and satanic device, that they may bring up a bad report upon the works of God, that they may mar this living creature, that imputing all not to the choice, but to the nature of our members, the more part of them may sin in security as being irresponsible, and doubly harm this living creature, both by mutilating the members and by impeding the forwardness of the free choice in behalf of good deeds" (*ibid.*, 62:3).

"Observe how bitterly he [Paul] speaks against their deceivers . . . 'I would that they which trouble you would cut the whole thing off' [Gal. 5:12]. . . . On this account he curses them, and his meaning is as follows: 'For them I have no concern, "A man that is heretical after the first and second admonition refuse" [Titus 3:10]. If they will, let them not only be circumcised but mutilated.' Where then are those who dare to mutilate themselves, seeing that they draw down the apostolic curse, and accuse the workmanship of God, and take part with the Manichees?" (*Commentary on Galatians* 5:12 [A.D. 395]).

JEROME

"But I wonder why he [the heretic Jovinianus] set Judah and Tamar before us for an example, unless perchance even harlots give him pleasure; or Onan, who was slain because he grudged his brother seed. Does he imagine that we approve of any sexual intercourse except for the procreation of children?"

(*Against Jovinian* 1:19 [A.D. 393]).

"You may see a number of women who are widows before they are wives. Others, indeed, will drink sterility and murder a man not yet born, [and some commit abortion]" (*Letters* 22:13 [A.D. 396]).

CAESARIUS OF ARLES

"Who is he who cannot warn that no woman may take a potion so that she is unable to conceive or condemns in herself the nature which God willed to be fecund? As often as she could have conceived or given birth, of that many homicides she will be held guilty, and, unless she undergoes suitable penance, she will be damned by eternal death in hell. If a woman does not wish to have children, let her enter into a religious agreement with her husband; for chastity is the sole sterility of a Christian woman" (*Sermons* 1:12 [A.D. 522]).

NIHIL OBSTAT: I have concluded that the materials presented in this work are free of doctrinal or moral errors.
Bernadene Carr, STL, 10 August 2004

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+Robert H. Brom, Bishop of San Diego, 10 August 2004

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Morality & Ethics

THE FATHERS KNOW BEST

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