

Contraception and the Sexual Revolution

By John Kippley | February 25, 2008

There is less talk today about the Sexual Revolution than there was in the eighties, and that's because the revolution has become institutionalized. What seemed revolutionary in the 1960s became commonplace by the end of the 20th century.

Back in the 1950s, contraception, though widely practiced by non-Catholics, was still a taboo subject; people didn't talk about it. Over the following 30+ years, good Catholics would still become emotionally disturbed to learn that one of their children or relatives was using an unnatural form of birth control.

Today, this sinful behavior is so common that parents are grateful when they have good reason to think that their own children and other relatives are not sinning in this way. Similar things can be said about sex outside of marriage and cohabitation.

And what about the other unhappy facets of early 21st-century life that give rise to the dishonored description, the "culture of death"? You know them too well—the social acceptance of abortion, adultery, divorce and remarriage, fornication, sodomy, masturbation, *in vitro* fertilization with its many abortions of "unused" embryonic babies, embryonic stem-cell research, cloning to produce embryos for research and destruction, and euthanasia.

Is there a common, underlying cause? Yes. In each, there is a presumption that modern man can take apart what God has put together in the sacred areas of life and love, marriage and sexuality.

Where did this presumption start? The presumption, the ensuing sexual revolution, and the culture of death started with the acceptance of contraception. Just ask yourself two very simple questions:

- (1) Who put together what we commonly call "making love" and "making babies"? Every theist has to answer, "God."
- (2) What is contraception except the studied effort to take apart what God has put together in what is supposed to be the marriage act? Well, that's precisely what it is.

How did this start? I think the sexual revolution started with a combination of fear, lust, and pride. St. John teaches us that "perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn. 4:18). The opposite is also true: perfect fear casts out love.

The element of fear was introduced by Thomas Malthus, an economist and Anglican clergyman. In 1798 he predicted that a growing population would outstrip food supplies and result in famine. His solution was late marriage and total abstinence once you reached your desired family size. Just 25 years later, in an article in the 1823

Encyclopedia Britannica, the neo-Malthusians kept alive the alarming hypothesis of Malthus but, very significantly, they dropped his morality and instead recommended contraceptive practices. This was revolutionary.

After the American Civil War, the neo-Malthusian propaganda spread to the United States. In reaction, Congress and various states passed the Comstock Laws in 1873 to prohibit the sale and distribution of contraceptives. These laws held for over 60 years.

In 1930, however, a committee of the Federal Council of Churches declared that contraception was morally licit, and the laws lost their moral force. By 1936 the federal courts were finding ways to dismantle the Comstock laws. Supreme Court rulings in 1965 and 1972 declared that anti-contraception laws were unconstitutional by reason of a constitutional guarantee of privacy (to be found nowhere in the U.S. Constitution). In 1973, the Supreme Court applied the same fiction to abortion in *Roe v Wade*, and the culture of death was firmly established as U.S. federal policy. Ironically, the United States went from banning contraception in 1873 to banning all laws against the killing of unborn children exactly 100 years later.

Each of the culture-of-death practices identified above involves the separation of what God Himself has put together in the sacred areas of love and life, marriage and sexuality. What can be done to restore respect and adherence to God's order of creation?

Since the disastrous downward cycle started historically and philosophically with the acceptance of marital contraception, the place to start the counter-revolution of life and love is with the rejection of marital contraception. In 1989, a committee of U.S. bishops urged that every engaged couple should be required to take a full course of instruction in natural family planning as a normal part of preparation for marriage. Unfortunately, they did not repeat that exhortation in their 2006 pro-NFP booklet, *Married Love and the Gift of Life*.

Despite that setback, gradually this is happening here and there as the occasional priest understands the realities of the current situation. When it is fully implemented, things will change for the better in the Church and in Catholic education. Can you imagine Catholic colleges still teaching dissent from *Humanae Vitae* when the vast majority of families who support the schools exercise their rightful leverage on behalf of teaching the truth?

During Lent, please pray and sacrifice that every priest in your own diocese will start immediately to implement the 1989 recommendation of the American bishops. Only the Catholic Church can save America from its substitution of license for liberty, but first the Church has to be true to herself. She has to preach, teach, and live the divine truth about human love.

On a different topic: On Monday of the second week of Lent I finally used a stepladder to get a book on Lent off its top-shelf resting spot. In his 1952 book simply titled *Lent*, Father Conrad Pepler, O.P., has a several-page commentary on each day of this

penitential season. For Ash Wednesday he comments on the reading from Joel, and for some reason puts part of his text in a footnote. Commenting on the verse, “Let the bridegroom go forth from his bed and the bride out of her bride-chamber,” he offers the following footnote commentary:

“Although this refers primarily to the need for all without exception, from the infants in arms to the old men, to be present at the congregation, St. Jerome in his commentary applies it to a general abstinence from pleasures, saying that fasting and the other Lenten works are nothing without continence even between husband and wife. This continence used to be a general practice during Lent.”

If you accept this form of penance, please offer it up for a rebirth of chastity, a stop to contraception and abortion, and for the establishment of a new civilization of life and love.