

Recent Supreme Court Decisions: The Real Issue

By Jim Seghers

Jerry: "Don't tell anyone, we have an elephant in our living room, but we're pretending it's not really there. Tommy: "But it's enormous, and it smells. The litter must be horrible!"

Jerry: "if ignore it, maybe it will go away."

The elephant in the room is a metaphor for an obvious truth that is either ignored or unaddressed by those who choose to pay no attention to unpleasant realities. The idiom is applied to an obvious problem or danger that no one wants to confront. The term has its origin in Mark Twain's 1882 story, "The Stolen White Elephant," which describes the inept activities of detectives trying to find an elephant that was there all the time. In 1935, Jimmy Durante was accosted by a police officer in the musical "Jumbo" while leading a live elephant. When the officer challenged, "What are you doing with that elephant?" Durante replied with the show-stopping line, "What elephant?"

Although the previous example may be amusing, ignoring the elephant in the living room is not a laughing matter when the real issue touches the redefinition of marriage and the attending fall-out from two recent Supreme Court decisions. Among Christians these decisions have generated a great deal of alarm about the continuing moral slide of our society into paganism. Aside from the relatively small number of those who identify themselves as part of the homosexual community, there is a powerful, well founded, worldwide drive pushing to expunge any semblance of objective Christian morality from public life.

In spite of their expressed concern about the recent Supreme Court decisions, far too few Christians are willing to admit the existence of the elephant in the living room, which is the deep seated cancer that has caused this mess in the first place, that is, the redefinition of marriage by heterosexual Christians caused by their wide acceptance of contraception. Although the issue of contraception goes back to biblical times, the modern movement gained traction in the United States during the Roaring Twenties, which the French called "*années folles*" – the "Crazy Years".

The twenties were an interesting period in US history. Many young people coming out of World War I (1914-1918) were disillusioned and cynical. This led to a desire to break from tradition and a feeling among some that anything seemed possible via modern technology. Prosperity was so great, that the period was also dubbed, the "Golden Years." Radio became the first mass marketing medium. Lindberg completed the first solo non-stop transatlantic flight in 1927, and by that same year Henry Ford sold 15 million cars. The 18th Amendment brought in prohibition in 1919, along with the era of gangsters and speakeasies. Many Americans were flocking to the cities.

Amid all of this change and progress, there was also a growing desire to be sexually active while avoiding the natural consequence – pregnancy. Margaret Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in 1916 and founded the American Birth Control League in 1921, which later became

Planned Parenthood Federation of America. The Roaring Twenties ended with a loud crash when the stock market collapsed on October 24, 1929, followed by more than a decade of depression and despair. The push for contraception was growing in the twenties, but it encountered a great obstacle. For almost 2,000 years all Christian churches taught that contraception was a grave moral evil. That fact, alone, should make any serious Christian rethink his support for contraception. Is it conceivable that all Christian churches were in error for nearly 2,000 years? Has there been a new divine revelation on this subject?

The basis for the traditional Christian condemnation is clear. Contraception is evil because it's a deliberate violation of the design God built into the sexual differences between a man and a woman, which are obviously designed for procreation. This truth is taught in the first chapter of Genesis:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’ (Gen 1: 27-28).

The pleasure that sexual intercourse provides is a blessing from God that serves to strengthen the bond of intimacy, respect, and love between a husband and his wife as well as create new life. It is not an end in itself. The loving environment that marriage fosters is the ideal setting for nurturing children.

Throughout the centuries, the Catholic Church has condemned any form of contraception other than abstinence. Indeed, from the time of its founding, the Christian Church and its leaders have universally condemned contraception. Many of the early Church Fathers wrote and spoke against contraception, which was condemned at the First Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.).¹ Similarly, *Luther*, *Calvin* and *John Wesley* also condemned contraception based on God's punishment to Onan in Genesis 38:8-10 and other passages.

The first break with this unswerving moral teaching came in 1930 by the Anglican Church at the Lambeth Conference. The ambiguous language of **Resolution 15** passed with a vote: For 193, Against 67 (The bracketed comments and highlights are my own):

“Where there is clearly *felt* [You can't base moral principles on feelings] moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on *Christian principles* [What Christian principles?]. The primary and obvious method is complete abstinence from intercourse (as far as may be necessary) in a life of discipline and self-control lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless in those cases where there is such a *clearly felt* [Feelings again, this is ridiculous.] moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a *morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence* [What might those be?], the Conference agrees that *other methods* may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the *same Christian principles* [Those unnamed principles that do not exist.]. The Conference records its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception control from motives of *selfishness*, *luxury*, or mere *convenience* [A meaningless prohibition once the cat is let out of the bag. Besides, isn't contraception usually

¹ Charles Provan. *The Bible and Birth Control* [Monongahela, Pennsylvania: Zimmer Press, 1989].

motivated by selfishness, luxury and mere convenience?].”

What followed was a marked increase in birth control practices among Americans. Catholics were not immune from the pressure to conform their behavior to their non-Catholic countrymen. In 1947, for example, Fr. John Hugo criticized contraceptive practices among Catholics that he declared were motivated by “unrestrained pleasure, physical beauty, leisure, freedom from the responsibility of a family, the opportunity to use all one’s income on luxuries, and the satisfaction of earthly ambition.”² This trend would continue.

By the mid-1960s, many Catholic theologians were taking an approach to marriage and sexual intercourse that separated love, or more accurately the feelings of love, from procreation. This was, in essence, an attempt to redefine marriage. Part of the resulting confusion came from the repeated use of the word “love” without properly clarifying its meaning. The popular notions of love define it in terms of feelings and strong attraction, which is not authentic love at all. Genuine love resides in the will, not in the emotions and certainly not in hormones. Authentic love is a *decision* to sacrifice oneself for another person and to remain faithful to that person when sacrifice is difficult. Thus, genuine love combines two essential elements: self-sacrifice and commitment. Perfect love is total self-sacrifice and absolute commitment.

Under these distortions, the feelings of love were viewed as the primary end of marriage. Love came to mean meeting and fulfilling *my* needs, not sacrificing myself for another person. Conception became irrelevant both in and outside of marriage. Indeed, babies were in many instances the “evil” to be avoided. With the arrival of the contraceptive pill, it became easy to medicate a woman’s healthy fertility to sever the act of intercourse from its natural consequences, a child. Contraception became widespread.

When Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the Church’s 2,000-year condemnation of contraception in his 1968 encyclical [*Humanae Vitae*](#), many theologians were in open rebellion and U.S. bishops seemed paralyzed. Catholics were told the encyclical letter was not infallible teaching, implying that it had no binding authority. It is true that an encyclical letter in itself is not an infallible pronouncement. However, when it affirms a teaching that the Church has always held and formally taught, its teaching is infallible. Few Catholics understood this distinction in 1968. Many do not understand it today. As a result, contraceptive practices became increasingly widespread among Catholics. Lay Catholics were baffled. They wondered, “Why did theologians oppose the Church’s teaching, and why did their bishops not censure them?” “Were laypersons also morally free to disobey?” Many lay people in the 1960s and beyond didn’t understand the Church’s teaching and its biblical basis. Furthermore, the laity often received contradictory advice from their parish priests who were also misinformed or confused.

Now, a generation later, we have the historical perspective to see the disastrous results. Time allows that. Marriage itself was the first casualty. Wedding vows came to mean until *love* do

² Russell Shaw, *American Church*, p. 96.

us part, as opposed to until *death* do us part. Divorce rates skyrocketed. Today, there is hardly a family that has not been impacted by divorce – mine included. When parents sow the wind, it is their children who reap the whirlwind. God declared in the book of Malachi, “I hate divorce” (Mal 2:16), because he desires “godly offspring” (Mal 2:15).

Once pleasure became the primary end of marriage and conception the thing to be avoided in sexual intercourse, it was only a short time before *abortion* became widespread. Sixty-six million baby murders later, Christians bear a large responsibility for this crime that cries out to God for vengeance. Self-centered, promiscuous sex is often called “love making,” but whether in marriage or outside of marriage, the cruel reality is it has little to do with either *genuine* love or *making*. The end game of sexual pleasure also created a lucrative market for pornography, which has now spread rapidly and is so readily available that the onset of addictive pornography is now age 11! For those who fall prey to the addiction, an extremely difficult task lies ahead as they attempt to break away from this hellish obsession.

The next logical consequence of these distortions of marriage and human sexuality was a further redefinition of marriage itself. It is tragically amusing to listen to heterosexuals decry and wail over the idea of same-sex marriages while they cling to their *contraceptives, abortions, adultery, multiple divorces* and *pornography*. The philosophy, “it’s OK for me to cling to my sins, but I feel constrained to condemn yours,” isn’t going to stop our country’s slide into decadence. Trust me on this, we will find no salvation from the Supreme Court. Indeed, it will propagate self-righteousness hypocrisy like the Sanhedrin did two thousand years ago when it condemned Jesus.

The Catholic Church teaches, has always taught and will always teach that contraceptive acts are gravely sinful. The Church teaches, has always taught and will always teach that sexual intercourse is only permissible between a man and a woman who are married to each other. Therefore, *any* sexual activity or fantasy about sexual activity outside of the marriage between a man and his wife is gravely sinful. There are no exceptions.

Some non-Catholic Christians also see the evil of contraception. Surprisingly, the New York Times recently reported a shift in Protestant attitudes.³ The article cites the teachings of Russell D. Moore, the dean of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who warns evangelicals to be skeptical of the “contraceptive culture.” The article continued: “From the beginning of Christian history until the 19th century, the teaching [of Protestant churches] held that contraception was sinful, says Allan Carlson, the author of *Godly Seed: American Evangelicals Confront Birth Control: 1873-1973*. ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’ – until the 1920s, all Protestants formally read that [passage] as a ban on contraception Dr. Carlson said, and all Protestants held to the Christian convention that birth control was sinful, for the same reasons and in the same way abortion was.... For evangelicals, an anti-contraception position is not seen as exclusively Roman Catholic, as it would have been in the

³ Mark Oppenheimer, The New York Times, January 20, 2012, “Many Evangelicals See Something to Admire in Candidates’ Broods.”

past,” said Jenell Paris, who teaches anthropology at Messiah College in Pennsylvania.”⁴ Others have spoken out such as the Reverend Matt Trehwella.

The bottom line is clear. Jesus asked, “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ where there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Mt 7:3-5). I realize that many are deceived on this issue, as I was also at one time. Nevertheless, we owe our Lord the service of seriously investigating this important issue, which is the cancer that causes all the other sexual excesses. Finally, it is also helpful to remember that Jesus began his public ministry with the words, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17).

⁴ Ibid.