

Introduction

President Benigno Aquino III signed the Reproductive Health Bill into a law on December 21, 2012, now known as Republic Act 10354, but the Supreme Court has stopped its immediate implementation inasmuch as there were concerned citizens and institutions that raised various issues regarding its unconstitutionality. However, on April 8, 2014, the Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of the RH Law, but modifying and/or deleting those provisions that are deemed as violating the right to life of the unborn and the right of workers in the healthcare profession to adhere to an informed religious conscience, both of which are protected by the Philippine Constitution. Despite watering down the coercive character of the RH Law, the fact remains that, with its promulgation, the government has made the use of contraception legal in the Philippines.¹ The decision of the Supreme Court does not rule against all forms of contraception but only those that compromise the right of the unborn. With this, I am reminded of the principle introduced by the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, which conveys the idea that what is legal is not always moral.² The situation then accords Christian teachers both with an opportunity and a pressing duty to educate the people about the position of the Catholic Church on the issue. One major driving force that prompted the conception of the RH Law by its proponents is the protection of the rights and the respect of the integrity of women. In this article, it will be shown that it is the Catholic Church's backed Natural Family Planning (henceforth NFP) method, rather than the modern methods provided for in the RH Law, that promotes and preserves these values for women.

Having set these objectives, I would like, to offer a critical reading of the RH Law from the perspective of theologico-ethical reasoning. I develop my critique in three progressive stages. Moreover, the approach in this work takes the form of not merely presenting a critique of the RH Law, but also a clarification of the take of the Church on the issue of population. In the first part the wrong presupposition that the Catholic Church condones the unreasonable growth of the population—i.e., the Church encourages married couples to arbitrarily continue on giving birth to infants even if their sustenance is beyond the family's means—is negated. It will be demonstrated responding to the false equation that the RH Law advocates make between the modern methods of birth control and the NFP method that the Church teaches the faithful to practice. In the second step, the theological and biblical principle on which the Church establishes the groundwork of its opposition

¹ See Supreme Court of the Philippines, Decision on G.R. 204819, 204934, 204957, 204988, 205003, 205043, 205138, 205478, 205491, 205720, 206355, 207111, 207172 & 207563, pp. 51-54.

² Cf. Jannel Abogado, OP, *Kantian Morality as Respect*, in *Philippiniana Sacra* 46/130 (Jan.-Apr. 2009), 66. I am appropriating the transcendental notion of morality as originally intended by Kant and apply it here from the perspective moral theology.

to the use of contraceptive methods is expounded. Here the intrinsic meaning of sexuality, as revealed in the biblical narrative on the creation of man and woman, and articulated in the thought of John Paul II, is demonstrated as the basis for the moral unacceptability of contraception. The third and final step demonstrates that while it is not explicitly articulated in its detailed provisions, the promotion of abortion becomes a consequence of the contraceptive culture that will emerge out of its practice. Such conclusion will be substantiated by resorting to the findings of the different scientific surveys made on the trends of contraceptive use conducted in countries where it has been legally sanctioned.

The Natural Family Planning advocated by the Church is no contraception

One form of strategy that RH Law sponsors made use of in advancing their cause is to confuse the general public—or it is more likely that they themselves are ignorant of the fundamental insight of the tenet of the Catholic Church—about the Church's objection against the RH Law, claiming that both the population measures contained in the RH Law and the Church's program of Family Planning have the same objective in sight. RH Law sponsors construct a false correlation between the NFP proposed by the Catholic Church and the contraceptive methods specified in the controversial law. Rep. Edcel Lagman, the principal author of the Law in the Lower House, provides this mistakenly assumed correspondence, in his speech delivered to a group of nursing students:

Both natural and modern family planning techniques are contraceptive methods. Their common purpose is to prevent unwanted pregnancies and the bill does not bias for either method. Section 3(a) of bill unmistakably provides: 'In the promotion of the reproductive health, there should be no bias for either modern or natural methods of family planning.'³

The false correlation trivializes the fundamental reason upon which the Catholic Church based her objection against the practice of contraception. Hence the essential difference of the NFP from the modern contraceptive devices detailed in the RH Law requires explanation. The purpose of NFP method, while it appears the same as the thrust of the contraceptive techniques, when subjected to closer analysis, from the perspective of the ordered nature of sexuality as designed by God, reveals an essential departure from the objective of the latter measure.

But before delving on this issue more profoundly, it should be underscored that the Catholic Church is not against the idea of spacing birth in the family. That family planning and spacing of children according to the desired number of the couple for the purpose of rendering them capable of providing their children substantial

³ Speech delivered at the Graduate School of Nursing Seminar in Arellano University on 20 February 2010.

education and the necessary material provisions for personal development is not condoned by the Church's teaching is one misconceived opinion that the detractors of the Church seem to propose. Bishop Teodoro Bacani, in his brief manuscript, expresses the need for clarification on the stand of the Church on this matter. Addressing himself to those who represent the view of the Church, the good bishop voices out this appeal:

Please clarify the issues involved and present them clearly to the people. Does the Church allow for the admission of a population problem in the Philippines? Some Church people give the impression that it is wrong to even admit the existence of a population problem. They project the Church as being unconcerned with our population growth rate.⁴

It must be maintained that it was not the position of the Church to encourage married couples to procreate and bring into this world children beyond their means, that is, to give birth to children whose basic necessities for integral human development the parents could not provide. God's commandment to "go and multiply" in the Book of Genesis does not mean an unqualified permission to procreate, even if the couple concerned do not have the resources to give their children quality life befitting as creatures sustained by the abundance of God's love. This thought can be sufficiently intuited in the divine design of the sexual activity itself. God so structured the procreative organ of women in a manner that its fertility follows a cycle, thereby allowing the couple, through the use of their God-given faculty of reason and will, to discern the size of their family, such that they would only cooperate with God the Creator to bring into existence children, whom they could sustain in the love of God, both materially and spiritually. This teaching on the proper spacing of children is affirmed in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, when it declares:

The teaching of the Church about the proper spacing of children is a promulgation of the divine law itself. No doubt many will think this teaching difficult to keep, if not impossible. And truly, just as with all good things outstanding for their nobility and utility, [keeping] this law requires strong motivation and much effort from individual men, from families, and from society. Indeed this law is not able to be kept without the abundant grace of God, upon which the good moral choices of men depend and from which they get their strength. Moreover, those who consider this matter thoroughly will see [their] efforts [to keep God's law increase human dignity and confer benefits to human society].⁵

The directive that concerns the proper spacing of children is conceived as a dictate coming from God, as it can be discerned in the structure of human sexuality

⁴ Teodoro Bacani, Jr., *Catholics and HB 5043*, Gift of God Publications 2008, 2.

⁵ HV 20.

itself. It is part of God's wisdom that every sexual encounter between husband and wife even if it is open to procreation, being the only manner in which the total self-giving of oneself to the other is expressed in this act of personal union,⁶ should not always result to new life. Such is the manner that God gives to discerning couple through which, using the very gift of reason and self-control, they could plan the size of the family that they desire to have. It explains the position of the Church and offers a refutation to those who are saying that the Church, by opposing the RH Law that legalizes the use of contraceptive measures, teaches without qualification the biblical mandate "Be fruitful, multiply" (Gen. 1:28), and, in effect, approves of those couple who continually beget children even if they are no longer able to provide for their basic needs.

Having clarified this matter, let us now return to the question at hand about the difference between contraception and the NFP method advocated by the Catholic Church, using the same above-cited declaration from *Humanae Vitae* as springboard of discussion. The passage speaks boldly of the heroic effort married couples must resolutely embrace in order to fulfill the divine mandate to space the birth of children. Such mode of life is consistent with the demand of Christian ethics, whose ultimate end goal is the transformation of the person in Christ. Christian ethics requires the integration of human faculties and their sense appetites, which is difficult but proper thing to do, in the development of the human person, whose vocation is to emulate the virtuous exemplary life of Jesus Christ himself. William Murphy points this out in his work affirming that:

Our transformation in Christ, culminating in the heroic virtue that answers the universal call to holiness, requires that one perform—not avoid—a good action that is both appropriate and help us gain virtuous mastery over our various power.⁷

And then connecting this insight to the issue of contraception, the same author continues:

This requirement, obviously, will include those acts of periodic abstinence that help build virtuous mastery over fertility and the pleasure intrinsic to conjugal acts.⁸

The cultivation of virtues, in this particular case the cultivation of the virtue of marital chastity, whereby the sexual inclinations of man and a woman are integrated, not denied, to the agreed plan of action for the well being of the entire family, is

⁶ This point is further established below.

⁷ William F. Murphy, Jr., *Revising Contraception: An Integrated Approach in Light of the Renewal of Thomistic Virtue Ethics*, in *Theological Studies* 72 (2011), 829.

⁸ Ibid.

promoted here. The Church teaching acknowledges its difficulty as it prescribes the control of one's sexual appetite, which in our present human condition, weakened by the effects of the original sin, is difficult to manage for it involves the willingness to frustrate one's desire for momentary pleasure during the fertile period of the wife. However, such is not a fatalistic appraisal of the human condition as God's providence sees to it that married individuals will have aid that they might achieve what they ought to become. Since the human condition is not able to resist the need of satisfying human sexuality from within itself, there is a need to look for external help that would give them stability confronted with this longing for sexual satisfaction – the needed restraint married couples are able to muster with the help of God's grace. The grace of self-control, a gift supplicated from God, enables the couple to overcome the strong pull of conjugal pleasure in those fertile periods of the wife, when the husband and wife concur that expanding the size of the family will not be beneficial to the whole family nor to the baby that might possibly be born, if they elected to consummate their sexual urge. The grace of God, without which it is impossible for human beings to purify and align human sexuality according to its God's given design, that of being not merely a tool to satisfy one's sexual longing but an expression of self-giving love between individuals in perpetual relationship, preserves the couple from availing of contraceptive methods.

With the above discussion then the essential difference between the contraceptive methods and the NFP method is put in evidence. While it is not denied that the spacing of children is the end result of the NFP, as it is in the usage of contraceptive measures, the former is carried-out through the cultivation of human virtues, such as reasonable restraint of sexual desires, respect for the biological make-up and personal integrity of the partner by not making or permitting him/her use external means to disrupt the healthy functioning of his/her biological faculties. Moreover, in the NFP method the desired spacing of children is realized not independently from the grace of the divine Creator who shared with humanity the vocation of bringing into earthly existence new life, unlike in the alternative proposed by the RH Law which resorts to contraceptive measures to achieve the same end. In a contraceptive culture, the understanding of human sexuality is reduced into mere biological instinct that must be satisfied. If in the process of the satisfaction of sexual need a new birth is reckoned inevitable and the couple mutually regard that enlarging the number of the family is not currently desirable, instead of opting for restraint, it promotes the gratification of the sexual desire by resorting to methods that will prevent conception. On the other hand, the Church's teaching on NFP acknowledges the difficulty of restraining one's sexual appetite thereby it counsels couple to seek help from the abundance of the grace of God from where they can draw the strength to be able to successfully rise above their human inclinations and in the process grow in personal maturity.

For other arguments that we can offer to make more explicit the essential difference of the Church teaching on NFP and that of the modern contraceptive measures, we refer to the work of the acclaimed moral theologian Janet Smith. She argues against those who make this erroneous identification between the natural method the Church encourages the people to practice and the modern methods of contraception, on the pretext that both are aiming for the same objective, specifying her point thus:

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 the NFP are not engaging in an act whose nature they wish to thwart; they are keeping to the principles of sexual responsibility. Their sexual act remains 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 childrearing.⁹

There are several distinctive disparities between the attitude and practice of the specified two kinds of couples that can be deduced from the passage which will help clarify the teaching of the Catholic Church and consequently differentiate the NFP from the modern methods of contraception.

The first difference concerns with the attitude towards sexuality. The natural design of the sexual act, as established by God from the beginning of the history of creation, is preserved in the marital act of couples adhering to the teaching of the NFP. In the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church the marital act is seen as having two distinct but inseparable ends, which are customarily labeled as the unitive and the procreative aspects of human sexuality. Such understanding forbids the severing of these two sexual values to the effect that it declares morally impermissible the justification of its conduct based merely on one or the other aspect, that of sex for the purpose of meeting the sexual need alone, or sex for the purpose of begetting children outside the marital union.

Similarly it is incorrect to speak of a form of hierarchy between the two sexual values. In the past, there had been a dynamic discussion as regards which of these two aspects of sexuality is paramount in the design of God, with the early theologians favoring the procreative aspect, thinking of sexual act merely in terms of sharing in the vocation of God’s act of creation, and the modern theologians sliding more on the other side of the pendulum, specifying that the union of the husband and wife is more important than the duty of bringing into the world a newborn. Either view,

⁹ Janet Smith, *The connection between contraception and abortion*, in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (April 1993), 17.

however, presents a deficient meaning of the act of marital union, diminishing its full significance. For neither one of the ends of the sexual act is to be preferred over the other, nor are they to be separated from each other. The full significance of the act of conjugal union is realized only when both the unitive and the procreative processes are present in its exercise. That is when said act becomes the selfless expression of the marital partners' mutual love in the act of total self-giving, which is preserved only if the same act is open to procreation in that by it the concerned individuals expressly manifest their resolve to take responsibility of the implications of their act that both know will henceforth bind them more profoundly as a unit. This rich meaning of sex is frustrated in contracepted sexual union.

The second difference that separates married couples faithful to the Catholic precept of NFP from the contracepting couples concerns with their disparate postures towards the baby that may result from the sexual union. In the NFP, the sexual union is not divorced from its natural result of the begetting of children inasmuch as the marital act is preserved open to the procreative process. Even if the couple, who adheres to the teaching of the Church on NFP, engages in conjugal intercourse in those periods that the woman is believed to be infertile, guided by their desire to maintain proper spacing of children, still they do not divorce their marital act from its connection to the birth of children as the act is still open to procreation—a disconnection which is very much pronounced in the intention of couples availing of the contraceptive methods—, so much so that if a baby would result from such union, though not directly intended, the baby will still be welcomed as a gift coming from above. The baby will be received because it is acknowledged as the distinctive feature of the mutual act of total self-giving, intimately linked to the act of conjugal union, thereby rousing the couple into accepting unreservedly, if God so wills, that a baby will result from such expression of love.

The third difference that can be derived from the above statement of J. Smith, offered here for consideration, regards the different qualities of the couples themselves. Married couples that submit to the precept of the NFP method, refraining from sexual intercourse during the fertile period of the wife, but actively expressive their love when unable to conceive, as they want to be more responsible about their childrearing, are more likely to have respect for each other. This is because the partner is willing to respect the healthy cycle of his/her significant other, not demanding from or even sanctioning him/her to employ measures that might have physical or emotional fallouts just to satisfy one's sexual need. Moreover, since the NFP method, being part of the doctrine of the Church, is consistent to the rationally perceived will of God, those married individuals who subscribe to its precept are *de facto* the more God-fearing persons inasmuch as they are willing to contain their carnal desires for the sake of not offending the acknowledged will of God on this particular aspect of human life. Also, the attitude of the NFP practicing married individuals towards

sexual intercourse becomes more meaningful compared to contracepting couples, since sex becomes for the former an expression of one's deep commitment to each other,¹⁰ not rooted merely on the need to fulfill one's sexual desire.

The arguments offered herein differentiate the NFP method advocated by the Church and the contraceptive measures stipulated in the RH Law, and likewise the fundamental difference in the attitudes of couples promoting and practicing either method. The next section is concerned with developing the arguments of the Church against the precept of contraception based on the Christian doctrine on human sexuality, which will also serve as logical connection to the third detail, demonstrating the link between contraception and abortion.

Contraception trivializes the true meaning of the sexual act

The arguments forwarded in the above section for the difference of the NPF method from the modern methods of contraception are ultimately founded on the theology of sexuality. The reason of the Church's negative appraisal of the RH Law, more pointedly on the issue of contraception, can be understood if one will make an effort to discern the excellence of the nature of the human person constituted, according to its disposition by the Creator, in such a way that the gift of sexuality is perceived as intrinsic to its growth in achieving maturity. The exposition in this particular section follows the thought of the late John Paul II. Reflecting on the theological meaning of the body, the pope rediscovers the biblical doctrine on sexuality, stipulating it as nothing but a benevolent gift from God for humanity, the exercise of which is humanity's response to God's commandment of love that demands the offering of the entirety of one's personhood to another and so results in a beautiful union of two persons.¹¹ The saintly pope commences his reflection by going back to the very beginning, in the story of creation of the first couple in the book of Genesis, taking inspiration from our Lord Jesus Christ himself who recalled the same fact, when he was confronted by his contemporaries with the question of divorce, then currently practiced in Israel, a custom which Jesus wanted to rectify.¹² It is important to highlight here that within the context of the defense of the inviolability of marriage, Jesus situated the gift of sexuality to both the husband and the wife as it was in the beginning of human history.

¹⁰ J. Smith, *Connection*, 12.

¹¹ The English edition of the reflections of John Paul II on the Theology of the Body is translated by Michael Waldstein and published in 2006 by Pauline Books and Media with the title *Man and Woman He Created Them, A Theology of the Body*.

¹² John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them, A Theology of the Body*, Boston 2006, 131 ff. Hereafter referred to as TOB and for this particular reference TOB 1,1-5 the first number corresponding to the section or the number in the order of the audiences delivered by the Pope, and the other two numbers corresponding to the division of the content of the delivered teaching.

This biblical teaching on human sexuality John Paul II outlines in his collated theological reflections, is given a popular description by many as the Theology of the Body. In the said work, the pope develops a dynamic understanding of sexuality, consisting in the total self-giving of one's person to another, anchoring his arguments in three distinct but integrally linked perspectives. The first argument, as already illustrated above, is drawn from the context in which the notion of sexuality is introduced and constituted by God as a property of the human person. Such is complemented further by justifications proceeding from the understanding of a unified anthropology, and from the acknowledgement of the embodiment of the human person into the complementary genders of masculinity and femininity, understanding this differentiation of human existence from the perspective of what the pope proclaims as the spousal meaning of the body.

In the first place, John Paul II situates the discussion of sexuality in the theological perspective of marriage understood as “a sign of the deep communion of love which characterizes the life of the Blessed Trinity.”¹³ Reflecting on the second narrative of the story of creation in the book of Genesis,¹⁴ in which it is revealed that God, perceiving the experienced solitude of the original man (Adam), decides to make him a suitable companion by taking from his body the constituent out of which said companion was formed, the pope explains that the longing of man for someone who is like him provides us with the indisputable fact that the dynamics of human existence is realized in the experience of relational unity with another person. This then leads the pope to affirm that the notion of the image of God reflected in humanity, now being found in the two complementary ways of being human, that is in the forms of male and female, is found “not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion.”¹⁵

The original solitude which the original man had felt, having realized that in the presence of the creatures that he was mandated to subdue and govern there was no one like himself, awakened in himself not merely his own subjectivity, as a person alone amongst other creatures unlike himself, but likewise the natural desire to exist in communion with another person. The experience of solitude, translated into the natural desire to be in the act of mutual reciprocity, the fulfillment of which paves way the satisfaction of the need for unity, is overcome, according to the biblical account, in the sacrament of matrimony, wherein two persons, in possession of each one's wholeness, by their own volition, decide to give themselves totally to one another in the sacrament of marriage. Hence, the man and woman become husband and wife

¹³ Cf. George J. Woodall, *The Theology of the Body and Responsible Parenthood*, in *La Teologia del corpo di Giovanni Paolo II*, (a cura di) P.A. Pedro Barrajón, L.C., Roma 2012, 212.

¹⁴ Majority of the modern biblical scholars are in agreement that the second story of creation is earlier than the first story that appeared chronologically first in the redacted text of the Book of Genesis.

¹⁵ TOB 9:3.

(Gn 2:24), in order to constitute, from two, a unity. And they become one flesh. It is in this context that sexuality is introduced in the mystery of creation. The experience of solitude is overcome in the decision of the couple to live in mutual love in the sacrament of marriage, the sign of which is evidently, but not exclusively, manifest in the act of marital intercourse.

In other words, the unity spoken of in the Genesis story, following the decision of man to live with his wife, which overcomes the twofold solitude that the male and the female in humanity experience individually, refers to that unity “expressed and realized in the conjugal act.”¹⁶ In his article George Woodal explains the intimate connection between the communion of persons that is desired in the sacrament of marriage and the marital intercourse that married couples employ in order to bring out their promise to give oneself totally, without reservation, to each other, in this fashion:

Of all the many gestures couples may use and use rightly to express and to deepen their love for one another, to foster the communion of persons, the conjugal act is the only act of human beings which could give rise to itself, at the human level, to the transmission of new life.¹⁷

According to this, the fostering of the communion of persons in marital relationship is achieved most fully in that act of sexual union that is capable of bringing up a new life, since such act implies the willingness of both partners to be bound to each other ever more deeply and more responsibly in the upbringing of the possible new born. It is along this line of thought that one can explain the assertion of John Paul II that “it does not allow us to treat the body and sex outside the full dimension of man and the ‘communion of persons’, but imposes on us from the ‘beginning’ to see the fullness and depth proper to this unity, the unity that man and woman must constitute in the light of the revelation of the body.”¹⁸

Secondly, John Paul II likewise determines the intrinsic truth of the sexual act in the light of the insights provided by the understanding of the nature of man as a unity of body and soul. Accordingly, the full intelligibility of the sexual intercourse as a human act can be discerned taking into consideration the inseparable relationship of the two essential components of man, that is, body and soul. Guided by the principle of good reason, the mind component, which is the faculty of the soul, integrates the carnal inclinations into becoming part of the subjectivity of the person that they may contribute, and not hinder, personal growth. When bodily desires, sexual desires in this case, contribute in the promotion of the integrity of the human person, they become the medium, as they ought to be in the original plan of creation before sin

¹⁶ TOB 10:2.

¹⁷ G. Woodall, *Theology*, 216.

¹⁸ TOB 10:2.

frustrated the perfect balance between them, through which the spiritual quality of man is expressed. From this, it is understood that the intrinsic meaning of sexual act is to be a sign of the life of unity that the husband and the wife decide to embrace and live, the true living-out of which in the spirit of mutual reciprocity leads each one to personal growth in virtue and grace.

It means that sex should express the reality of the communion of persons, which the story of Genesis speaks about, the unity that is achieved in the total reciprocal self-giving of both partners to each other and in the process overcome that feeling of incompleteness. The meaning of sex cannot be reduced to mere satisfaction of bodily instinct inasmuch as it touches on the spiritual experience of the person. John Paul II affirms this evaluation, with this assertion:

Sex, however, is something more than the mysterious power of human bodiliness, which acts, as it were, by virtue of instinct. On the level of man and in the reciprocal relationship of persons, sex expresses an ever-new surpassing of the limit of man's solitude, which lies within the make up of his body and determines its original meaning.¹⁹

According to this postulate, the decision of couple to abstain from sexual act, for a good reason, in those periods when a new life may result in the consummation of bodily intercourse, is no mere repression of human sexuality, but rather an act of integrating it in its truly and fully human dimension.²⁰ The couple decides not to engage in marital act, notwithstanding the presence of tension originating from their physiological makeup, because they know in their heart that, if they would do so, it would not be an expression of complete and total self-giving inasmuch as there would be the anxiety of avoiding the possibility of life that might result from it. The desired spiritual unity that is realized in the life of mutual reciprocity is not satisfied in this regard. Pursuing this line of thought the same pope affirms that “only marital sexual act expressing marital union and procreative openness recognize both the spiritual and corporal character of the conjugal union.”²¹

As mentioned above, the wisdom of the Church, guided by the inspiration of the Sacred Writings, has always uphold the teaching that human sexuality, being a gift of God to instill in man a principle enabling him to participate in the divine love,²² has two significant meanings, namely, the procreative and the unitive. They are not two different purposes that can be separated one from the other. Rather, they are like two sides of one and the same reality. One cannot fully express the desire for union, expressed in the intimate experience of the sexual act, if such marital expression is not at the same time open to the possibility of procreation. This point is similarly

¹⁹ TOB 10:2.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 32.

²¹ Cf. Eduardo J. Echeverria, *In the Beginning...*, *A Theology of the Body*, Oregon 2011, 240.

²² This point will be clarified in the third point below.

confirmed in the thought of W. Murphy. With arguments grounded on the basis of a unified anthropology, he avows that sexual activity is intrinsically both a spiritual and bodily reality:

Thus, an act of spiritual self-giving of the kind proper (i.e. uniquely appropriate) to spouses implies a bodily act that is apt for procreation, whereas such an act of bodily procreation between a man and a woman implies spiritual self-giving love.²³

The full significance of the marital intercourse, as the appropriate expression of spousal love, is guaranteed if and when it could be qualified also as open to procreation. For couples who agree to engage in marital act, intending that it be intrinsically open to procreation, conveys therein their mutual commitment to each other, not excluding from it their future, for, if it will so result to the birth of child, both, as a unit, will be committed to take good care of and provide for the child, the best that they know how, as that child is the concretization of the wholehearted love that they both feel for each other. In other words, the act of spiritual self-giving love, expected of spouses, is ascertained in the bodily act of the sexual intercourse that is apt for procreation.

Thirdly, in the reflection of the saintly pope, the human body being constituted, according to the wisdom of the Creator as indicated in the second account of creation in the book of Genesis, into the “two reciprocally completing ways of ‘being a body’ and at the same time of being a human”²⁴ details two important truths about humanity, which has an important import in the understanding of the nature of sexuality. The first concerns about the notion that the definitive sense of human identity is realized in the communion of persons or in the reduction of this perceived duality, that is, the experience of sexual differences, into a unity. While the second point, proceeding from the conclusion of the first, signifies that this vocation of the male and the female to live into unity is ultimately related to their eschatological thrust to live in communion with the Creator.

The Pope imparts that in that stage of the original solitude, the moment before the creation of the female being, the man (Adam) established his human identity by realizing his difference from the rest of the creatures that God had mandated him to govern. At the same time, man (Adam) also experienced, confirmed by the observation of God Himself about man’s need for a suitable partner, that there is a sense of incompleteness within him, having found himself alone with no other creatures like himself to interact. The incompleteness that is experienced in the bodily existence of the man (Adam), God had resolved by reconstituting him, putting him first into deep sleep, understood by the pope as having the sense of returning to the

²³ W. Murphy, *Revisiting*, 833.

²⁴ TOB 10:1.

“moment before creation, in order that the solitary ‘man’ may, by God’s initiative, reemerge from that moment in his double unity as male and female.”²⁵ There are two details that need to be recalled about this event. The first fact is that man’s feeling of solitude was prompted by the fear of falling away from relationship with God. And such solitude is overcome by communing with a woman, which only tells us that the relationship of man and woman is analogous to and dependent on the relationship that God offers to humanity. The other detail indicates that the somatic difference between the male and the female shows that the meaning of humanity, externalized in the process of overcoming existential solitude, will only be realized in the life of communion with the other.²⁶

The fact that the feeling of individual solitude that could only be overcome by communing with a partner was brought about by the possibility of losing God and that this communion is evidently expressed and signified in reference to the act of human sexuality implies that the sexual act has a theological meaning. The notion of sexuality given here, that of an indication of the longing for communion that proceeds from the realization of one’s mortality, takes the form of a gift that propels one to grow as a person, who is mature enough to commit in perpetual relationship with another, characterized by acts of mutual self-respect and self-giving love. In the act of conjugal union the concerned couple, through the reciprocal act of love, progress in personal virtue. They realize the meaning of being person in the act of total self-giving in the union of love. This experience of the completeness of personhood verified by the act of committing one’s entire self to the other, as is epitomized in the marital vow of being there for each other in sickness and health till death parts the spouses, is sustained by the grace of God’s love whereby humanity’s relational nature is imaged. In this regard, the marital act becomes that act through which the image of God’s love is made manifest, allowing the couple to act maturely and responsibly, not apart from but dependent on God’s grace, who nurtures them from the core of their being and enables them to offer to each other nothing short of the entirety of their personhood.

On account of the discussion made above, it is clarified that the justification of the moral unacceptability of every form of contraception is anchored in the right understanding of the nature of sexuality itself and its integral function in the growth of the human person towards the realization of his immortal nature in relationship with God. The Church teaches that only sexual acts that are expressive of marital union and at the same time open to procreation exhibit the intrinsic meaning of human sexuality. Contracepted sexual intercourse is not morally licit because it does not embody this basic truth inasmuch as it destroys the intimate relation of its unitive and procreative character. Contracepted sex does not image the self-giving

²⁵ TOB 8:3.

²⁶ This does not mean to say that men and women who choose to enter the religious life and those who opt a life of single blessedness, on this basis, are prevented from fulfilling their humanity because they too find the fulfillment of human existence in communion with a person, in fact with three persons, with God, the creator of humanity, who disposed humanity’s full significance in such manner.

love of spouses, of which it is a sign. However, it must be given stress here that the required criterion of procreation does not necessarily imply that every sexual union should actually result to the conception of new life, but that its language speaks of the message of perpetual commitment of both partners to the relationship, as their sexual act welcomes both the responsibility of raising a child together and their mutual consent to live consistently as a unity. On this reckoning, it comes to light that the marital act that is open to the possibility of a child is likewise expressive of the unity that the husband and the wife promise each other. A sexual union that does not have this character simply fails to realize “the ultimate fulfillment of the union desired by spousal love”²⁷ and in consequence trivializes the rich meaning of human sexuality.

The connection between contraception and abortion

After having laid out the moral unacceptability of contraception, this study is set to demonstrate the perceived association of the practice of contraception with abortion. The discussion contends that while conceptually the notions of contraception and abortion are distinct, in practice their intimate link is often witnessed. The argument of this section is substantiated both by analyzing how the commonly practiced measures of contraception function and by articulating the implication of the culture or the mentality that is generated by the practice of contraception. It is demonstrated that this perceived link is no mere product of speculation as it is supported by data from studies made in countries where contraception is legal. Also, it reevaluates the argument of pro-contraception advocates that the employment of contraceptive methods reduces the numbers of cases of abortion.

One major point that the RH Law advocates emphasize against its critics is that the said law does not legalize abortion nor does it open the possibility of the talk of the legalization of abortion in the country. Edcel Lagman, for instance, in his address to the Graduate School of Nursing of Arellano University has made this observation:

The measure repeatedly underscores that abortion is illegal, criminal and punishable, and it is not part of the menu of legally permissible and medically safe planning methods... The use of contraceptives will not lead to the legalization of abortion.

The same clarification is verbalized by its principal proponent in the Senate, Sen. Pia Cayetano, in her interview as guest of the program “Headstart” hosted by Karen Davila aired on 18th September, 2012, in reference to the provision of Section 3, which, she claimed, she had revised precisely for the purpose of defending it from the charge that it promotes the crime of abortion:

²⁷ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae: A Sign of Contradiction*, in *Why Humanae Vitae was Right: A Reader*, Janet Smith (ed.), San Francisco 1993, 77.

That was never the case, but nevertheless, binago ko na yung wording para ma-address iyong concern nila. Ang original wording, nakalagay was ‘notwithstanding the provision in the Revised Penal code defining abortion as a crime...’ binago ko na lang [to] ‘abortion is a crime.’ Pareho lang ho iyong ibig sabihin non.

It is not denied that the principal proponents of the RH Law make a clear-cut distinction between the concepts of contraception, which is the prevention of the generation of new life, and abortion, which is a termination of the life that has already begun in the womb of the woman. However, the conceptual demarcation line that separates contraception and abortion is not clear when these two measures are considered in actuality.

There are at least two fronts on which the aggregate relation of these two practices can be established. The first of which concerns with the fact that many of the contraceptive measures are themselves abortifacients. It is on account of this fact that a study on the attitude of conscientious pharmacists in America towards contraception—the study was provoked by the 2012 contraception mandate issued by the US Department of Health and Human Services, which apparently the RH Law, as it is undoubtedly its *primum analogatum*, would also like to duplicate²⁸—documents:

In recent years, an increasing number of pharmacists have refused to dispense contraception and other objectionable medications. Many of those who object to dispensing it claim that the medications may act as abortifacients, preventing a newly conceived human person from implanting in the womb of the mother, and they do not want to be accomplices to such an act.²⁹

Without claiming to be exhaustive and also so as not to detain us with the burden of detailing the abortive effect of the various contraceptive devices, we are going to include in our consideration, for the purpose of demonstrating the point made, only the two most widely availed contraceptive methods, which the authors of the RH Law likewise specify, in section 9 of the original version of the RA 10354, as among those products and services, the Philippine National Drug Formulary System must make available to the public and thus to be included as part of the “regular purchase of essential medicines and supplies of all national hospitals,”³⁰ namely, the oral contraceptive pill and the Intra Uterine Device.³¹

²⁸ Cf. Republic Act 10354 (or RH Law), Sec. 23.

²⁹ Robert L. Kinney III, PharmD, *Contraception and Conscientious Objection, A Pharmacist's Reflection*, in *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* (Winter 2012), 675-676.

³⁰ Republic Act 10354 (or RH Law), Sec. 9.

³¹ The study of Ann E. Biddlecom, et al., *Spouses' Views of Contraception in the Philippines*, in *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 23/3 (Sept. 1997) 108-115, reveals that these two methods are the most widely used in the Philippines.

Let us regard first the hormonal contraceptive, commonly known as oral contraceptive pill.³² In two respects, it can be argued how an oral contraceptive pill works as an abortifacient. First, when it fails in its supposed function to prevent the penetration of the egg by the sperm, which often happens, it thwarts the fertilized egg from being implanted into the uterine wall and therefore becomes a procedure inducing abortion. The association of medical professionals, one of the petitioners that had requested the injunction of the RH Law, quoting the findings of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine in the March 2008 edition of its publication *Fertility and Sterility*, explains the dubious function of the pill thus:

The primary mechanisms of oral contraceptives are to inhibit ovulation and produce a thick mucus hostile for sperm penetration. However if it is not able to prevent ovulation, it has another mode of action which is, modification of endometrium preventing implantation.³³

Secondly, when the implantation, despite its usage, takes place, the risk of fetal mortality is high. The association between fetal deaths and the use of oral contraceptive pill has already been substantiated in several studies conducted on the subject.³⁴ As adverted to above, this device does not work all the time.³⁵ When this happens, the woman, not knowing that she is already carrying a child in her womb, continues to take oral contraceptives, which consequently endangers the health of the baby. In regard to this, there are two likely possibilities to happen, as recorded in the various studies that have been made concerning the exposure of conceived fetuses to

³² Oral contraceptive pill ranks first in the following surveys made on the use of modern contraceptive methods: S. O. Skouby, *Contraceptive use and behavior in the 21st century: a comprehensive study across five European countries*, in *The European Journal of contraception and Reproductive Health Care* (Dec. 2010), 15/S2, 42-53; Ann E. Biddlecom, et al., *Spouses' Views of Contraception in the Philippines*, in *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 23/3 (Sept. 1997) 108-115; While the study of J.L. Duenas, et al., *Trends in the use of contraceptive methods and voluntary interruption of pregnancy in the Spanish population during 1997-2007*, in *Contraception* 83 (2011), 82-87, documents pill, next to condom, as the most widely used method to prevent pregnancy.

³³ Doctors for Life and Filipinos for Life, *Petition of Declaration of Unconstitutionality of R.A. 10354 with Prayer for Issuance of a Temporary Restraining Order, Status Quo Ante Order, and/or Writ of Preliminary Mandatory Injunction*, no. 44. Filed and Received by the Clerk of Court on Feb. 14, 2013, with G.R. no. 205478.

³⁴ See for instance the following works: RH. Gray and T. Pardthaisong, *In utero exposure to steroid contraceptives and survival during infancy*, in *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 134 (1991), 804-811; S. Harlap et al., *Spontaneous fetal losses in women using different contraceptives around the time of conception*, in *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 9 (1980), 49-56; S. Harlap and J. Eldor, *Births following oral contraceptive failures*, in *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 55 (1980), 447-452; M. Vessey et al., *Outcome of pregnancy in women using different methods of contraception*, in *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 86 (1979), 548-556; Royal College of General Practitioners, *The outcome of pregnancy in former oral contraceptive users*, in *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 83 (1976), 608-616.

³⁵ The findings of the study of RW Smithells, *Oral contraceptives and birth defects*, in *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 23 (1981), 369-372, shows, for instance, that approximately 2 to 5 percent of oral contraceptive users experience a breakthrough pregnancy.

hormonal contraceptives. The first harmful consequent is that of fetal genital defects, granting that the couple decides to keep the conceived child.³⁶ Additionally, when the malformation renders the fetus incapable of survival, it leads to spontaneous abortion. Such is corroborated in the findings of AG. Fantal and TH. Shepard whose analysis accounts that more than 30% of their documented cases of spontaneous abortions has been found to suffer from genital malformations.³⁷ In either case, it is the child who mainly suffers the negative effects of the use of the oral contraceptives.

The other popular contraceptive method that needs consideration is the Intrauterine Device (IUD). The IUD is widely preferred by contracepting individuals as it is deemed efficient, having a long-term effect, and its effect is likewise reversible.³⁸ But medical professionals have already determined that the IUD, just like the oral contraceptive pill, prevents the fertilized egg from being implanted into the uterine wall,³⁹ which in effect is a form of abortion, the fertilized egg being already an existing,⁴⁰ not just a potential, human being. The Philippine Medical Association's pronouncement on the use of IUD precisely airs this expert view:

The new IUD, the copper containing edition, is presently favored by the World Health Organization. Its proponents contend that it damages the

³⁶ See, RW Smithells, *Oral contraceptives and birth defects*, in *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 23 (1981), 369-372; L. Raman-Wilms, et al., *Fetal genital defects of first-trimester sex hormone exposure: a meta analysis*, in *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 85 (1995), 141-149.

³⁷ AG. Fantal and TH. Shepard, *Morphological Analysis of Spontaneous Abortuses*, in *Spontaneous and Recurrent Abortions*, MJ. Benett and DK. Edmonds (eds.), Oxford 1987, 8-28.

³⁸ In the study *Divergent Trends in abortion and Birth Control Practices in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine*, published in *Plos One* (Nov. 2012) vol.7, issue 11, 1-11, conducted by Boris P. Denisov et al., IUD was the most frequently and pervasively used method of contraception. Similarly the study of S. O. Skouby conducted in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK, entitled, *Contraceptive use and behavior in the 21st century: a comprehensive study across five European countries*, in *The European Journal of contraception and Reproductive Health Care* (Dec. 2010), 15/S2, 42-53, lists IUD as the most widely employed contraceptive method next to the use of oral contraceptive or pills. This is also true to the findings of the study made in the Philippines by Ann E. Biddlecom, et al., *Spouses' Views of Contraception in the Philippines*, in *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 23/3 (Sept. 1997) 108-115.

³⁹ J. Smith, *Connection*, 10.

⁴⁰ This is the conclusion arrived at by Ward C. Kischer, Ph.D., professor emeritus of Cell Biology and anatomy at the University of Arizona College of Medicine, in his article, entitled, *When Does Human Life Begin? The Final Answer*, appeared in *Linacre Quarterly* 70/40 (Nov. 2003), specifically page on 328. He asserts that: "The facts above along with constancy of the time of gestation, approximately 38 weeks, reasonably declare that the life of the new individual human being begins with fertilization. Virtually every human embryologist and every major textbook of human embryology states that **fertilization marks the beginning of the life of the new individual human being**." (Emphasis is original).

The same view is echoed by the Philippine Medical Association in their position paper on the Reproductive Health Bill, found in page 1 of the document: "Right after fertilization, there is no way one could alter the natural and normal outcome other than a human being until natural death. The fertilized egg, now a human being, unstopably grows by itself and, there is no other path it takes but to evolve into a full mature human being. There is no human embryologist in the world who would deny that life begins at fertilization."

sperm before it meets with the ovum and thus it prevents the pregnancy. Experience from practitioners, however, reveal that still pregnancy is not absolutely prevented by the new version of the IUD and thus, abortion is still a possibility.⁴¹

Moreover, not only is there an identity between the contraceptive action and abortion in the case of the IUD,⁴² but also one effect that results from its practice is the increased risk of spontaneous abortion among its previous users. This conclusion has been determined in the study conducted among younger women from the general population in Denmark on the risk determinants, among others, of spontaneous abortion, wherein the authors point out that the previous use of IUD increases the possibility of its occurrence.⁴³

The second aspect upon which one can establish the connection between contraception and abortion is on the kind of mentality that it fosters among its practitioners. This argument is substantiated in three progressive steps. It is demonstrated, first, that making contraception easily available to the wider public distorts the intrinsic meaning of sex, separating it from its intrinsic connection to marital unity, and thus ushering a sexual revolution that encourages its practice among adolescents and also adults outside their marriage commitment. Secondly, the proposed contraceptive measures, according to many studies, are not hundred percent effective, hence the prevalence of the phenomenon of contraceptive failures resulting to the increasing number of unintended pregnancies. Thirdly, it is argued that the majority of the cases of unplanned pregnancies, since the individuals concerned are conditioned by the culture of contraception, will likely to end up in abortion clinics.

There have been studies conducted in countries where contraception is legally practiced which account for the increasing number of contraceptive use among the young.⁴⁴ It is not without warrant to assume that the reason for this is because the contraceptive mentality not only advocates the disconnection of sex from its natural result, that of begetting of children, but more so it distorts the intrinsic meaning of the sexual act as the expression of the total and life-long commitment of couples in marital relationship. Sex is no longer seen as proceeding from a love expressing deep and permanent commitment of couples to one another. The

⁴¹ PMA Position Paper on the Reproductive Health Bill.

⁴² J. Smith, *Connection*, 10.

⁴³ L. Buss et al., *Spontaneous abortion: A prospective cohort study of younger women from the general population in Denmark. Validation, occurrence, and risk determinants*, in *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica*, 85 (2006), 470.

⁴⁴ S. O. Skouby, *Contraceptive*, 42-53; J.L. Duenas, et al., *Trends in the use of contraceptive methods and voluntary interruption of pregnancy in the Spanish population during 1997-2007*, in *Contraception* 83 (2011), 82-87; Haisun Fu et al., *Contraceptive Failure Rates: New Estimates from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth*, in *Family Planning Perspectives* 31/2 (March/April 1999), 56-63.

contraceptive culture gives impetus to young individuals, who are not yet ready to make a perpetual commitment to each other in the sacrament of marriage, to engage in sexual relationship, thereby relegating the performance of sex to satisfying their biological instincts.

The causal connection between the practice of contraception and its effect in influencing the young in considering sex no longer as a sacred act that is reserved for married couples but a prerogative for one to appropriate according to one's fancy is attested to by many studies. For instance the study conducted by S. O. Skouby on the contraceptive use and behavior in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom⁴⁵ reveals "a noticeable trend in the increasing number of adolescents in European countries who have unintended pregnancies."⁴⁶ Also, the data of the study conducted, on Spanish population from 1997 to 2007 arrives at the same observation stating that the "increasing trend in the use of the contraceptive methods, particularly in the youngest age group," that is, the "contraception patterns in 15 to 19-year-old women... showed that the prevalence of contraceptive use among the adolescents increased substantially over the last two decades and was faster than among older women."⁴⁷

The above surveys confirm that the legalization of contraception in these countries, which inevitably result to abandoning the understanding of the inherent meaning of sexual activity as the expression of profound love between two individuals, who on account of this love, walk together in perfection towards the fulfillment of such love in God, has directly or indirectly encouraged young people to engage in meaningless sexual activity, the warning which the anti-RH Law advocates had called the attention of our policy makers to consider. In the given picture casual or recreational sex becomes common to both the young and adults in married state, but more prevalently among the former. Janet Smith observes the effect of the wide practice of contraception in the US, the one prevailing consequence of sanctioning the use of contraception is that it increases sexual promiscuity, particularly among the young who are most vulnerable to the rhetoric of contraception.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, many studies reveal that the contraceptive measures, which its advocates claim will be able to effectively resolve the cases of unintended pregnancies and consequently the incidents of abortion, do not necessarily deliver their projected results.⁴⁹ These studies account for two main reasons why despite the

⁴⁵ S.O. Skouby, *Contraceptive*, 42-53.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁷ J.L. Duenas, et al., *Trends*, 86. Another study that document the dramatic rise of the use of contraception by young individuals is that of Haisun Fu et al., *Contraceptive*, 56-63.

⁴⁸ J. Smith, *Connection*, 15-18.

⁴⁹ See, Cisely Marston and John Cleland, *Relationship between Contraception and Abortion: A Review of the Evidence*, in *International Family Planning Perspectives* 29/1 (2003), 6-13; Haisun Fu et al., *Contraceptive*, 56-63; J. Bouyer, C. Moreau, and J. Trussel, *Contraceptive Failure Rates in France: Results*

prevalent use of contraception by the population of the studied localities, there is a reported concomitant increase in the cases of abortion.⁵⁰ Accordingly there were simultaneous rises in abortion and contraception due to the ignorance of people as regards the correctness of use. The study of J.L. Duenas and company, strikes an alarming observation, on the attitude of youngsters towards sex. It states:

Youngsters declare engaging in coital sex more frequently and more precociously and not always doing it in safe conditions from the perspective of both unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease.⁵¹

Moreover, it must not be left out that several of these studies likewise note that the levels of abortions in some of the studied countries eventually dropped as the ignorance was solved by effective information campaign.⁵² While the observation that the observed initial simultaneous rise of contraceptive use and abortions, later on, as women profited gradually from contraceptive education, was translated into an inverse relationship between the prevalence of the use of contraception and abortion rates, the present article contends that such argument when used against the Church-backed NFP method is misconceived and so does not consist as its better alternative.

The rise of unintended pregnancies can be attributed to the design of the modern contraceptive methods themselves, which do not, at all, time work as they are expected to. The result of two studies conducted in France and the United States respectively documents the contraceptive failure rates. The study made in France discovers that among its respondents “overall, 2.9 % of women experienced contraceptive failure in the first year of contraceptive use. IUD had the lowest first-year rate failure (1.1%), followed by the pill (2.4%), the male condom (3.3%), the withdrawal method (10.1%), ... and spermicides (19.2%).”⁵³ Meanwhile, “in the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, which collected characteristics, pregnancies and contraceptive use from a nationally representative sample of US women, 12.4% of all episodes of contraceptive use ended in failure within 12 months after initiation of use (9% for oral contraceptives, 17% for condom, 18% for withdrawal).”⁵⁴

The legalization of the use of contraceptive measures, as the above analysis has shown, leads to the situation of increased sexual promiscuity among sexually active individuals, especially among the youth. “Against the background of a society

from a Population Based Survey, in *Abstracts/ Contraception* 74 (2006) 188; K. Kost et al., *Contraceptive Failure Rates: New Estimates From the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth*, in *Contraception* 77 (2008) 10-21.

⁵⁰ Cf. C. Marston and J. Cleland, *Relationship*, 10-11.

⁵¹ J.L. Duenas, et al., *Trends*, 86.

⁵² C. Marston and J. Cleland, *Relationship*, 10; S.O. Skouby, *Contraceptive*, 43; B.P. Denisov et al., *Divergent*, 9.

⁵³ J. Bouyer, C. Moreau, and J. Trussel, *Contraceptive*, 188.

⁵⁴ J.L. Duenas, et al., *Trends*, 86 reporting on the study of K. Kost et al., *Contraceptive Failure Rates: New Estimates From the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth*, in *Contraception* 77 (2008) 10-21.

with that morality, more and more people will have intercourse with little feeling of responsibility, little restraint, and yet they just won't be so careful about always using contraceptives.”⁵⁵ Such sexual culture plus the variable that the contraceptive methods employed do not always account for the prevalence of cases of unwanted pregnancies. Not a few of these will most likely end up in elective abortion. Janet Smith explains why pregnancies resulting from the failure of contraceptive use will likely be terminated: “The connection between contraception and abortion is primarily this: contraception facilitates the kind of relationships and even the kinds of attitudes and moral characters that are likely to lead to abortion.”⁵⁶

With the understanding of sexuality severed from its intimate connection with the profound love characteristic of marital union and drawn away from its natural structure of being open to generative process, the recourse to abortion, when contraceptives fail, becomes the next logical step for contracepting partners, inasmuch as in the first place the engaged sexual activity has already been preconceived and agreed on by both partners involved that it should not result to a conception of new life. Resorting to the alternative of terminating the pregnancy is thought of because the sexual intercourse does not proceed from a deep love that binds the couple. In this regard abortion is seen as a complementary measure, which one will avail of when the attempt to contracept fails. B. Clowes summarizes this thought in a more understandable fashion:

Contracepting couples have espoused an attitude and behavior that adopts a purely unnatural or technological solution to the problem of preventing pregnancy. When the contraceptive method fails, the couple easily feels automatically entitled to another unnatural and purely technological solution—abortion.

G. Woodall affirms the same phenomenon noted by B. Clowes, but approaching it from the theological perspective, arguing that having abandoned the inherent meaning of sexual activity, as designed by God, the measure of abortion becomes, for contracepting couples, a complementary measure of contraception, since such mentality accord them the notion that they alone are the master of their own sexual act, forgetting the fact that it was God's providence that provided humanity with the gift of sexuality, by reason of which man and woman are able to express profound and permanent love, and experience its manifestation as a sign of God's love for humanity. Such point G. Woodall aptly articulates in the following:

The contracepting couple, even if acting with ... the intention of not having a child, not only engage in marital act, but do something additional in contracepting and act as if they alone were to decide about new life, as if

⁵⁵ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Contraception and Chastity*, in *Why Humanae Vitae was Right: A Reader*, J. Smith (ed.), San Francisco 1993, 123-124.

⁵⁶ J. Smith, *Connection*, 12.

God were about to be left out of consideration all together (and this remain true of their behavior even in the case where contraception were to fail); they act not as human ministers in collaboration with God, but as if they were masters and arbiters of the whole matter, as if they were not creatures dependent upon and open to God.⁵⁷

These observations are not mere speculative hypothesis without factual reference to substantiate them. Several surveys have been undertaken which verify that many unintended pregnancies resulting from the failures of contraception end up in abortion clinics. A recent survey conducted in 2012 about the connection of birth control practices and abortion in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine supports the scenario mentioned above. While in Belarus and Ukraine there is a reduction of the abortion rate annually, the situation of Russia is particularly of interest in that the researchers were puzzled of the “paradoxical combination of higher contraceptive prevalence and higher abortion rate in Russia...”⁵⁸ In fact, the researchers declare that despite the availability of modern methods, “today, Russia continues to maintain one of the highest abortion rates among all countries of the world reporting this kind of statistics.”⁵⁹ Another survey worth mentioning is the one that regarded the trend of the use of contraceptive methods and voluntary abortion in Spanish population during 1997-2007. The study concludes that “the rate of elective abortion increased during the study period from 5.52 percent (49,578 cases) to 11.49 per 1000 (112,138 cases) women of reproductive age.”⁶⁰ Similar to the research made in Russia, the researchers who did the study in Spain were puzzled that the increase in the data of abortion was associated with “a remarkable increase in the number of women who used contraceptive methods and the improvements in the education level during both the study periods.”⁶¹

Contrary then to the prediction of the RH Law supporters that contraception will reduce cases of abortion and consequently reduce the health risks of women who will take advantage of it—this is one argument repeatedly stressed by Sen. Pia Cayetano why accordingly RH Law is needed in the Philippines—, because sexually active individuals would become responsible for their behavior towards opposite sex, it is the contrary scenario, as given evidence in the studies enumerated above, that will likely to take place. Having said this, it needs to be clarified that this present work acknowledges that while it is true that the RH Law does not explicitly campaign the open practice of abortion in the Philippines, it is because of the mentality and the culture that such practice cultivates that will usher the necessity of the practice of abortion as a complement to contraception. A ruling of the Supreme Court of

⁵⁷ G. Woodall, *Theology*, 221.

⁵⁸ B.P. Denisov, et al., *Divergent*, 9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁰ J.L. Duenas, et al., *Trends*, 85.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the United States, in its pronouncement on the case of *Planned Parenthood versus Casey*, perceives this implication when it declares:

In some critical respects abortion is of the same character as the decision to use contraception... for two decades of economic and social developments, have organized intimate relationships and made choices that define their views of themselves and their society, in reliance of the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail.⁶²

It is therefore a contraceptive culture or mentality that would result from the constant practice of contraception that will provoke the increase of the rates of abortion in the country.

This article, as evidenced by several scientific surveys, purports to reveal an inverse relationship between the rates of contraceptive use and the numbers of recorded abortion.⁶³ Without discounting the significance of these surveys, whose main agenda is certainly to inculcate the idea among the populace that the prevalent use of contraception reduces the number of cases of abortion, it must be said that these inquiries forget the fundamental fact that the campaign to widely practice contraception prompts a sexual revolution which in turn opens to the possibility of more incidents of abortion. As there are many people who exploit the promised benefit of contraception, it is expected that the incidents of abortion will likewise surge inasmuch as it provides more opportunities for unintended pregnancies to take place.

To further advance this point it requires the identification of three scenarios involving sexually active couples that are otherwise assumed if not muddled in the surveys. The first scenario involves sexually active individuals who use traditional methods but are not educated as regards the intrinsic truth of sexuality. The possibility of their sexual engagements ending with unwanted pregnancies and resorting to abortion is expectedly high. The second situation specifies those who practice contracepted sex and, like in the first instance, have not internalized the intrinsic truth of sexuality. Confronted with unwanted pregnancy, in the event of unsuccessful contraceptives, not a few of them, for the reasons already specified above, would likely opt to terminate the pregnancy. However, this must not be construed to mean that all those who employ contraceptives without exception do terminate their

⁶² Cited in J. Smith, *Connection*, 10-11.

⁶³ S.O. Skouby, *Contraceptive*, 52; C. Marston and J. Cleland, *Relationship*, 10-11; B.P. Denisov, et al., *Divergent*, 1-10. However, in this survey the inverse relationship between the prevalence of contraceptive use and the decrease in abortion cases is documented only in Belarus and Ukraine, but not in Russia; Added to these surveys are the work of Elena Regushevska et al., *Contraceptive Use and Abortion among Women of Contraceptive Age in St. Petersburg, Russia*, in *Perspective on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 41/1 (March 2009), 51-58; Victor Agadjanian, *Is "Abortion Culture" Fading in the former Soviet Union? Views about Abortion in Kazakhstan*, in *Studies in Family Planning* 33/3 (Sept. 2002), 237-248.

unplanned pregnancies, but rather a large percentage of them do abort. In the third scenario, the subjects are those couples using the NFP method advocated by the Church. They practice the traditional methods acceptable to the ethical parameters discerned in the teaching of the Church, and likewise accept the teaching of the Church on sexuality that “sexual intercourse can be engaged in responsibly and safely only within marriage.”⁶⁴

Having made these distinctions, it must be agreed that the second case, which I believe what many of the population surveys promote, is in all respect a better alternative over the first in reducing the rate of abortion and the risks that it brings to women. However, the affirmation made about the second scenario in relation to the first cannot be likewise said when it is considered in regard to the given third picture. In the case of the third, if its promotion is effectively carried-out to reach a wide range of people and accepted by the same, unwanted pregnancies, except in very rare and unusual cases, will be avoided. It is so because, granted the Christian insight on human sexuality is preached and adopted by those who come across with it, the prerogative of sex will be engaged responsibly only by sexually active married couples in those periods when they are prepared to embrace the offspring that might possibly be conceived out of it, even as they likewise do in those periods when the wife is infertile for spacing the birth of children.

With this thought in mind, I am convinced that the young do not need the RH Law type of sex education, but instead they need to learn the true meaning of human sexuality, which is taught in the Church sponsored NFP method. As J. Smith articulately puts it:

Rather than filling young people’s heads with false notions about freedom, and filling their wallets with condoms, we need to see them see the true meaning of human sexuality. We need to help them learn self-control and self-mastery so that they are not enslaved to sexual passions. They need to learn that sexual intercourse belongs within marriage, and that with the commitment to marriage comes true freedom; the freedom to give of one’s self completely to another, the freedom to meet one’s responsibilities to one’s children.⁶⁵

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussions it is unveiled that in the final analysis, it is the NFP method advocated by the Church, and not the contraceptive program contained in the RH Law which is most respectful of the dignity, integrity and the freedom of the human person, especially of women. This conclusion is derived by first distinguishing the NFP method from the contraceptive program of the RH

⁶⁴ J. Smith, *Connection*, 16.

⁶⁵ J. Smith, *Connection*, 16.

Law. It argues that the use of natural methods to regulate fertility, which is an act of responsible parenthood, is no mere repression of sexual activity but a channeling of sexual impulses that it may be integrated in the vocation of marriage, such that when couples do engage in sexual activity, even in those infertile periods, the bodily union expresses the real and free giving up of each other and not just a mere act prompted by the need to satisfy one's sexual impulse. Such is clearly absent in contraceptive sexual practice. Secondly, the intrinsic meaning of human sexuality, revealed in the Scriptures as belonging to the provenance of marital union, as a gift through which married individuals freely express their profound love for each other, the very sign of which is their willingness to welcome and raise together an offspring that might possibly be conceived out of such amorous act, is specified. The Church opposes contraception precisely because its practice results to the devaluation of the meaning of sexuality as a free and total act of mutual self-giving of one's personhood to another. Finally, the devaluation of sexuality encouraged by the mentality emerging from the easy access to the use of contraceptive method is consequently perceived as affront to the dignity of women. Specifically, such point is discussed from the aspect of the strong link between contraception and abortion. With the easy access to contraception then much damage can be done to women through sexual intercourse outside marriage. In this scenario women are more vulnerable to exploitation and the risk of maternal mortality primarily due to elective abortion will be high. ■



Fr. Jannel Abogado, O.P. is a member of the Philippine Dominican Province. He is assigned in the Priory of St. Thomas Aquinas. He holds a doctorate degree in Theology and Patristic Sciences from the *Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum*, Rome, Italy. He teaches Patrology and Latin at the Ecclesiastical Faculties of the University of Santo Tomas, Manila. He is the Director of the Center for Religious Studies and Ethics and the Regent of the University of Santo Tomas High School. He can be contacted at jabogop@yahoo.com.