

Protestants and Birth Control

by Robert Babecka

In "[Always a Sin](#)" we saw how Christian teachings (i.e., Catholic) before the Schisms of the Eastern Churches and the Protestant Reformation were opposed to contraception and sterilization and that the Catholic Church maintains this view. In "[Where Are We Going and Why Are We In This Hand Basket?](#)" we saw how contraception and sterilization were introduced to the Christian community of the twentieth century by unbelievers desiring to modify social norms.

It's time to look at how Protestant's throughout history have viewed sex deliberately made non-procreative. Let's start at the beginning...

(Note: I owe much credit to the research of Protestant scholar, Charles Provan. In 1989 Mr. Provan published a book, *The Bible and Birth Control*. Most of his research into historical Protestant views on this subject came from reading commentaries on *Genesis* 38, in which Onan, who married his deceased brother's wife to fulfill his familial obligation, withdrew from her during intercourse rather than impregnate her. God then killed Onan.)

Martin Luther and John Calvin are recognized as fathers of the Reformation.

Martin Luther (1483 to 1546) - "Onan must have been a malicious and incorrigible scoundrel. This is a most disgraceful sin. It is far more atrocious than incest or adultery. We call it unchastity, yes, a Sodomitic sin. For Onan goes into her; that is, he lies with her and copulates, and when it comes to the point of insemination, spills the semen, lest the woman conceive. Surely at such a time the order of nature established by God in procreation should be followed."

John Calvin (1509 to 1564) - Deliberately avoiding the intercourse, so that the seed drops on the ground, is double horrible. For this means that one quenches the hope of his family, and kills the son, which could be expected, before he is born. This wickedness is now as severely as is possible condemned by the Spirit, through Moses, that Onan, as it were, through a violent and untimely birth, tore away the seed of his brother out the womb, and as cruel as shamefully has thrown on the earth. Moreover he thus has, as much as was in his power, tried to destroy a part of the human race.

Also, John Wesley is recognized as the founder of the Methodism.

John Wesley (1703 to 1791) - "Onan, though he consented to marry the widow, yet to the great abuse of his own body, of the wife he had married and the memory of his brother that was gone, refused to raise up seed unto the brother. Those sins that dishonour the body are very displeasing to God, and the evidence of vile affections. Observe, the thing which he did displeased the Lord - And it is to be feared, thousands, especially single persons, by this very thing, still displease the Lord, and destroy their own souls.

Examining sermons and commentaries, Charles Provan identified over a hundred Protestant leaders (Lutheran, Calvinist, Reformed, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Evangelical, Nonconformist, Baptist, Puritan, Pilgrim) living before the twentieth century condemning non-procreative sex. Did he find the opposing argument was also represented? Mr. Provan stated,

"We will go one better, and state that we have found not one orthodox theologian to defend Birth Control before the 1900's. NOT ONE! On the other hand, we have found that many highly regarded Protestant theologians were enthusiastically opposed to it."

So what happened?

It's the old story of Christians attempting to conform the world to Christ and the world trying to conform Christians to its ways. Protestants fought bravely, but in 1930 the first hole appeared in the dike (in the Anglican Church) and led to a flood. In the next thirty years all Protestant churches were swept away from their historic views on this subject. One interesting point is that just a few years earlier the Anglican Church condemned contraception.

In 1908 the Bishops of the Anglican Communion meeting at the Lambeth Conference declared, "The Conference records with alarm the growing practice of the artificial restriction of the family and earnestly calls upon all Christian people to discountenance the use of all artificial means of restriction as demoralising to character and hostile to national welfare."

The Lambeth Conference of 1930 produced a new resolution, "Where there is a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, complete abstinence is the primary and obvious method."... "but if there was morally sound reasoning for avoiding abstinence,"... "the Conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of Christian principles."

By the 1958 Lambeth Conference, contraception was an accepted part of life among most Anglicans, and a resolution was passed to the effect that the responsibility for deciding upon the number and frequency of children was laid by God upon the consciences of parents "in such ways as are acceptable to husband and wife."

The Anglicans present an excellent microcosm of what happened among Protestant churches in the 1900s.

A constant Christian teaching was completely undone among Protestants in a mere thirty years. This brings up an unsettling choice...either the Holy Spirit was not guiding Christians before 1930 or Protestant Churches have been ignoring His guidance after 1960.