

THE BILLINGS OVULATION METHOD AND CHURCH TEACHING

On one of the occasions when Pope John Paul II spoke with us he said, ‘When you teach, always teach in the context of Marriage’, and then he added with a smile, ‘I know you always do.’

If the precepts of BOM are followed, it means that all the principles guarding life are followed. This means that abortion is rejected, as the BOM teaches love for the child. Euthanasia is also rejected for the same reason; in fact, the BOM teaches respect for temporal life from conception to natural death.

The BOM therefore is seen to respect the natural law and also the spiritual component of mankind and everlasting life from the moment of human existence, i.e., conception. Once conceived, a human being comes into existence forever.

Civil libertarians maintain that only someone present and personally involved in a concrete situation can judge correctly the goods at stake; consequently only that person would be able to decide on the morality of each choice. At other times, it is claimed that civil law cannot demand that all citizens should live according to standards higher than those all citizens themselves acknowledge and share. They further claim that the law should always express the opinion and will of the majority of citizens and consider that they have at least the right to abortion and euthanasia. This assumes that the majority will get it right but such a notion is not rationally sound.

Some go so far as to maintain that in a modern and pluralistic society, people should be allowed complete freedom to dispose of their own lives and the lives of the unborn. It is asserted that it is not the task of the law to choose between different moral opinions, nor can the law impose one particular opinion to the detriment of others. It logically follows that the only determining factor that would respect the freedom of the citizens in a democratic system, would be the will of the majority.

As a result, we have what would appear to be two diametrically opposed tendencies. On the one hand, in the moral sphere, individuals claim for themselves a complete *freedom of choice* and demand that the state should not adopt or impose any ethical position.

Individuals expect that the State will guarantee maximum space for the freedom of each individual.

At the basis of all these tendencies, lies the ethical *relativism* which characterises much of the present-day culture. There are those who respect such relativism as an essential condition of democracy, inasmuch as it alone is held to guarantee tolerance, mutual respect between people and acceptance of the decision of the majority whereas moral norms considered to be objective and binding are judged to be leading to authoritarianism and intolerance.

It is precisely the issue of *Respect for Life* that demonstrates what misunderstandings, contradictions and other impractical consequences are concealed in the aforementioned position.

Democracy cannot be idealized to the point of being made a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality. Fundamentally, democracy is a 'system' and as such is a means and not an end. Its 'moral' value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law to which it, like every other form of human behaviour, must be subject. In other words, its morality depends upon the morality of the ends that it pursues and the means it employs. If today we see an almost universal consensus in regard to the value of democracy, this is to be considered a positive 'sign of the times', as the Church's Magisterium has frequently noted. But the value of democracy stands or falls with the values it embodies and promotes.

The basis of these values cannot be provisional and changeable 'majority' opinions. The acknowledgement of an objective moral law, the 'natural law' written in every human heart, can be the only obligatory point of reference for civil law itself. If, as a result of a tragic obscuring of the collective conscience, an attitude of scepticism were to succeed in bringing into question even the fundamental principles of the moral law, the democratic

system itself would be shaken in its foundations; it would be reduced to a mere mechanism for regulating different and opposing interests on a purely empirical basis.

It is easy to see that without an objective moral grounding, not even democracy is capable of ensuring a stable peace. Peace which is not built upon the values of the dignity of every individual and of solidarity between all people could only prove to be illusory.

Consequently, there is a need to recover the *basic elements of a vision of the relationship between civil law and moral law*, which are put forward by the Church, but which are also part of the patrimony of the great juridical traditions of humanity.

Certainly the purpose of civil law is different and more limited in scope than that of the moral law. But “in no sphere of life can the civil law take the place of conscience or dictate norms concerning things which are outside its competence”, which is that of ensuring the common good of people through the recognition and defence of their fundamental rights and the promotion of peace and of public morality. The real purpose of civil law is to guarantee an ordered, social co-existence in true justice, so that all may “lead a quiet and peaceful life, Godly and respectful in every way.” (1. Tim 2:2)

Precisely for this reason, civil law must ensure that all members of society enjoy respect for certain fundamental rights which innately belong to the person; rights which every positive law must recognise and guarantee. The legal toleration of abortion or of euthanasia can in no way claim to be based on respect for the conscience of others, precisely because society has the right and duty to protect itself against the abuses which can occur in the name of conscience and under the pretext of freedom.

In the encyclical *Pacem In Terris* Pope John XXIII pointed out that, “It is generally accepted today that the common good is best safeguarded when personal rights and duties are guaranteed. The chief concern of the civil authorities must therefore be to ensure that these rights are recognised, respected, coordinated, defended and promoted, and that each individual is able to perform his duties more easily. Any government which refused to recognise human rights or acted in violation of them would not only fail in its duty, its

decrees would be wholly lacking in binding force. Laws which legitimise the direct killing of human beings through abortion or euthanasia are in complete opposition to the inalienable right to life, proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law”.

Thus, abortion and euthanasia are crimes which no human law can claim to legitimise. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a *grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection*.

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27): “Promote” life.

Thus, when we teach the Billings Ovulation Method, we teach Truth and Love, two of the fundamentals of Marriage and the expression of Natural Law for all people.