

**Let the Church Preach the Gospel,
Lest the Cross of Christ Be Emptied of Its Power!** (*Cfr. 1 Cor 1:17.23-24*)

2nd of the Series of Pastoral Letters of His Grace,
the Most Reverend Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., D.D., Archbishop of Caceres,
*On the Guiding Principles for Discernment
of the Issues Contained in the Reproductive Health Proposals*

Introduction

I have stated in my first pastoral letter the reason why the Church has the right and duty to speak about socio-political issues. The Church has the right to speak because she has been entrusted by Christ with the sacred duty to lead the faithful to the truth, so that, illumined by it, they may live in freedom by the Truth. “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn 8:32)

Objective of the Pastoral Letter

In this second pastoral letter, I wish to state the moral principles, on the basis of which, the Church grounds her right to proclaim the truth and her duty to lead the faithful to true freedom in the truth. These are also the guiding principles ¹ that may help us in our discernment of the issues contained in the Reproductive Health Bill.

Guiding Moral Principles

1. Respect should be given to the sacredness of human life in all its stages from natural conception to natural death. The Church teaches that from the moment the ovum is fertilized (fertilization), human life starts, which is neither that of the father nor of the mother. Right from fertilization the adventure of human life begins.²
2. Marriage and the marital act have two aspects: the unitive and procreative, which can never be separated through man’s initiative. ³ However, it is not forbidden for couples to engage in the marital act during infertile periods of the wife.
3. Directly willed abortion, the use of abortifacients (use of means or methods that lead to abortion), sterilization, and contraception are wrong in themselves. ⁴ They are wrong not because the Church forbids them, but rather, the Church forbids them because they are morally wrong. Since they are intrinsically immoral, “no circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since this is contrary to the Law of God, which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church.” ⁵
4. Because the Church regards artificial contraception as wrong in itself, the Church will object to its dissemination and use. Further, Church personnel and institutions cannot be expected to cooperate with the dissemination and use of contraceptives.
5. The Church teaches the need for responsible parenthood. This means, among other things, that couples should bring into the world generously only the children whom they can raise as good human beings.⁶

6. The Church advocates natural family planning as the only morally acceptable way of practicing responsible procreation. This is because only natural family planning ensures that the procreation, nurturing, and education of the children are achieved in a truly human and Christian way.⁷
7. The Church rejects the contraceptive mentality, i.e., the attitude that selfishly avoids the procreation of offspring solely because the couples do not want to bear the responsibility that comes with having a child. It is wrong to use even natural family planning methods in pursuit of such contraceptive mentality.
8. The Church teaches that the decision on the number of children lies solely on the parents. No one, not even the bishops or the government, can make the decision for them. But the parents are to make the decision responsibly to each other, to the children already born, to their children still to be born, to society, and to God.
9. The population growth, according to circumstances, provided this is achieved within the parameters of freedom of conscience and the observance of the principles of sexual and family morality, is the responsible decision of couples.
10. The Church respects religious freedom and freedom of conscience. But she has the duty to announce and promote the moral law regarding the regulation of population and the integral development of men, women, as well as children.

Conclusion

Called to share in the prophetic mission of Christ, the Church has to preach the Gospel of Truth and Life, “lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” The preaching of the Gospel may be a “stumbling block” to the passage of the RH Bill and “folly” to those who support it. Or it may also be a transforming power and energy to those who walk in the light of the Truth. But the Church cannot and will never renounce her charge to proclaim the Truth. As Jesus before Pilate proclaimed, “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world: to bear witness to the Truth” (*Jn 18:37*), so will also the Church do faithfully before the society and the world.

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¹ Cfr. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, OP, DD, *Guiding Principles of the CBCP on Population Control* (10 July 1990)

² See, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (18 November 1974), nos. 12-13; John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no.60; *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 51.

³ See, Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, nos. 12, 16; *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, nos. 1066-1088; *EV*, no. 97.

⁴ See, John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, nos. 80-81, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27.

⁵ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 62; Cfr. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 96.

⁶ See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2201-2206; *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50; *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, nos. 1011, 1026

⁷ Cfr. *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, no. 1108.