

9 How can the Church claim to care for people when it is against important things like contraception and embryo research?

How can the Church claim to care for people when it is against important things like contraception and embryo research? There is great moral force in this question because Jesus is seen to care in the Gospels and to call Christians to care. An uncaring Christianity isn't true Christianity.

Attitudes to contraception and embryo research vary across the denominations making it difficult to answer on behalf of the whole Church.

What are the main lines of positive engagement though with those who see Christian opposition to such things as an interfering nuisance?

We should affirm what is meant by procreation. This means that sexual activity is linked to creation 'pro' – on behalf of – the Creator. This is why talk of scientists playing God as they play with embryos isn't so off the mark. In forming human embryos they're creating *instead* of rather than on *behalf* of God.

It's belief that human beings are in God's image that fuels Christian opposition to practices that go against our dignity. So much of western society sees itself as self-contained and without any absolute reference. Those of us who believe human beings are made by God and accountable to him are bound to challenge that attitude.

If the best end of human beings is heaven, anything we do that betrays that end falls short in the Christian view

Why do some Christians oppose contraception? The answer traces back to the nature of love in Christianity. Just as God in Christ attaches no conditions to his love for us, so husband and wife are meant to attach no conditions to their love. Sexual intercourse is seen as a union of life-giving love ideally between husband and wife. Marriage is made by such 'no strings attached' love. It's about union. It's life-giving, not just through procreation but 'through the joy of bodily union'.

This high spiritual view of sex is behind restricting it to marriage. Today people reject this ideal and separate their sexual activity from any ongoing commitment to their sexual partner of the moment.

If contraception encourages sex that isn't loving but selfish, even if it does avoid the creation of unwanted new life, it falls short from a Christian viewpoint. It's something that can damage people, especially when used outside of marriage.

The spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases would cease if everyone adopted the Christian teaching, abstaining from sex before marriage and being faithful to their partner within it

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that every sexual act should be open to procreation. Other churches do not oppose artificial contraception as such but find fault with the contraceptive mentality where sexual intercourse occurs without any overall intention of procreation. Sex is seen as having two purposes: the joyful uniting of husband and wife and the conception and birth of children. Deliberately going against either of these two ends over the duration of a marriage is seen as wrong.

How can the Church claim to care for people when it is against embryo research? Can a human being ever be a guinea pig? Can you make a human being a means to an end and ride over their dignity as an unborn child?

Embryo research involves the destruction of some human beings for the benefit of others. This is to treat human beings as commodities, not as those who're in God's image. Most Christians would oppose the creation of animal-human embryos, saviour siblings or families without a father.

It's hard though even to voice a challenge to developments like the production of saviour siblings. The well illustrated stories of people with terrible hardships and the hope that a tailor made embryo could offer them seem plausible and compelling at a basic human level.

Is it uncaring to stand against such developments? The unborn are invisible until they swell their mother's body. They're the weakest members of society. Isn't it wrong to exploit the weak on the argument that some good can be derived from it? Experimentation on embryos is destructive. Potential human beings are destroyed in the process which is very different morally to their natural wastage.

In taking issue over aspects of contraception and embryo research Christians are saying with Jesus that *the very hairs on our head are numbered* (Matthew 10:30). God's care for those in his image is infinite. We should share this concern and act on it with courage and courtesy.

Total 767 words - just over 4.5 minutes to read

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