

The Domino Theory Revisited

By Sister Renée Mirkes, O.S.F.

On June 5, 1989, with a mixture of incredulous joy, quiet weeping and a sense of renewed hope, people all around the globe, particularly in Western Europe, were riveted to television and radio reports describing the victory of the Solidarity movement of Poland, and the eventual election of a president, Lech Welesa. At the time, I recall reading an editorial which predicted that this development in Poland would be the “first domino” that would trigger a series of similar political revolutions throughout the Eastern block.

By appealing to the domino theory, the prediction was that one by one the remaining Eastern-block countries — East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia and even the Soviet Union — would eventually follow Poland’s lead in the democratization of what was formerly a totalitarian state. The domino theory proved to be an apt analogy in predicting the outcome of consequent political events.

[For those who might need a quick review of the definition of this concept, the domino theory says that if one act or event is allowed to take place, a series of similar acts or events will fol-

low. The theory is based on the fact that if dominoes are stood on end one slightly behind the other, a small push on the first domino will topple the others.]

But I want to focus on the domino theory as it pertains to the moral revolution that has, since the 1960s, gripped the Western world. Similarly, I want to direct your attention not to the first domino of that political revolution, but, rather, to the first domino, or the initial moral posture, that triggered the moral upheaval of our times that has profoundly altered our views about sexuality, human life and marriage and the family.

What got us into this mess? What began the breakdown of our moral infrastructure?

Of the long line of behaviors that comprises the moral revolution — abortion, pornography, homosexual activity, prostitution, incest, single-parent families, higher divorce rate —



the social acceptance of contraception is the first domino that triggered the rest. Contraception as a way of family planning — that is, the separation of sex from procreation within marital intercourse — began the moral breakdown of our century.

If we intend to stem the demoralization of our society, we need to analyze how we might right this first wrong, how we might reverse society’s ready acceptance and promotion of the contraceptive mentality. If we are serious about making a difference in pro-life work, we need to take another long, hard look at the practice of contraception and sterilization as methods of family planning. We cannot afford to be like Nero — that is, to be caught fiddling while Rome burns. We cannot afford to take a laissez-faire attitude amidst the grim reality that engulfs us.

Therefore, we need to analyze why, in and of themselves, these practices are contrary to the basic good of marital fulfillment and also how and why the social acceptance of contraception and sterilization sanction, and, there-

fore, lead to other morally deficient kinds of sexual behavior, behavior that in terms of moral sickness plunges us as a culture into a downward spiral that in many respects is irreversible.

Once we decided that it is “OK” to contracept as a means of regulating the size of our families — that is, once we agreed that it is morally upright to separate the life dimension from the love dimension of marital sexual intercourse, or, if you will, once we no longer said that one of the purposes of marital sex ought to be procreation — we, in effect, said that we no longer recognized the inherent moral goodness of procreation within marriage. And, having said this, we implied that the sex act is an exclusively biological function and that its physiological effect, human conception, should be able to be suppressed at will in order to produce a state of infertility for whatever length of time a couple would decide.

But to agree that contraception, or its permanent form, sterilization, is morally acceptable or at least morally neutral behavior, we must see that we haven’t got a leg to stand on when it

comes to objecting to other kinds of sexual behaviors such as same-sex marriages, homosexual parenting, incest, masturbation, child prostitution, oral and anal sex, or even bestiality. Each of these sexual behaviors is an example of sex separated from procreation. Each is a type of sexual activity that is, by its nature, incapable of begetting life and, therefore, constitutes sex that is permanently separated from procreation. But if we are going to be consistent, we must admit that if sex-closed-to-life in the case of contraceptive intercourse is acceptable, other forms of “lifeless sex” ought also to be sanctioned. And, be assured, this line of argument is never lost on advocates of these kinds of activities. Proponents of every kind of sexual license can and do logically point to the fact that the moral precedent for the social acceptance of their favorite type of sexual behavior is society’s prior approval of contraception.

Listen to the rationale behind this statement of the Rev. Richard Kirker, general secretary of the Gay Christian Movement in England: “The roles of ordained minister and practicing

homosexual are quite consistent since this logically flowed from the Anglican Church’s radical alteration of its teaching as to the purpose of the sexual act through its changed teaching on contraception at the 1930 Lambeth Conference.”

And contraception is not only limited to being the catalyst for other kinds of aberrant sexual behavior. It is also linked with the two “bookends” of life issues — namely, abortion and euthanasia. As evolutionary anthropologist Lionel Tiger put it in his commentary in *U.S. News and World Report*:

“I think the introduction of widespread contraception use in the 1960s caused [this] revolutionary break between men and women. It put biological disputes at the center of our national life — women’s rights, abortion, out-of-wedlock births, the turmoil among African-American men and the rise of angry white men. I do not think anyone is to blame here in the sense that they planned a raid on civil society and got away with it. As it happens frequently, technology (contraception, in this case) has generated an unexpected

result: more abortions, more single-parent families, more men abandoning their role of being good providers and a higher divorce rate.”

Pope John Paul II argues that contraception and abortion, though acts involving different degrees of evil, are fruits of the same tree; contraception is the gateway to abortion (see *Evangelium Vitae* [“The Gospel of Life”], no. 13).

Former Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, one of the strongest advocates of abortion, was not ignorant of the connection between it and contraception. He viewed abortion as an extension of contraception. In fact, for Douglas, *Roe vs. Wade* was nothing more than an extension of his 1965 opinion in *Griswold vs. Connecticut*, which struck down a Connecticut law that limited the use of artificial contraception. And since abortion is an extension of contraception, and euthanasia is an extension of abortion, then, euthanasia is also, logically, an extension of contraception.

In her 1993 novel, “The Children of Men,” P.D. James is “chillingly convincing” in her thesis that if the temporary infertility we choose through contraception would ever evolve into a permanent, universal infertility, the world that would open up before us would look just like ours, only it would be even more sexually crass, even more morally jaded, even more inhospitable to human life. With the story set in Britain in the year 2021, James systematically demonstrates the connection between temporary sterility now turned permanent sterility to every other kind of social evil, including the denigration of human life, the suppression of the authentic meanings of human sexuality, and the disintegration

of marriage and the family. Once life in its transmission is not respected or can no longer be honored, every other stage of life is threatened and every other purpose of human sexual expression is polluted.

In his diary accounts, the main fictional character of “The Children of Men,” Oxford historian Dr. Theodore Faron, offers his opinion about the origin, or the “first domino,” of the disease of universal infertility. As Faron reflects back 25 years, James describes him entering the following into his diary:

“Much of this I can trace to the early 1990s: the search for alternative medicine, the perfumed oils, the massage, the stroking and anointing, the crystal-holding, the non-penetrative sex. Pornography and sexual violence on film, on television, in books, in life, had increased and become more explicit but *less and less in the West we made love and bred children*. It seemed at the time a welcome development in a world grossly polluted by overpopulation. As a historian I see it as the beginning of the end” (emphasis added).

Several points cry out for our attention here. Through the thoughts of her main character, James is implying that our 20th-century liberal view of contraception or birth control not only manages to suppress or deny the beauty of procreation but in the process of sex becoming lifeless, it also becomes loveless and even pleasureless. In another place, Faron writes that in the face of the permanent separation of childbirth from sex: “Sex can still be a mutual comfort; it is seldom a mutual ecstasy. The government-sponsored porn shops, the increasingly explicit literature, all the devices to stimulate

desire — none has worked. Men and women still marry, although less frequently, with less ceremony and often with the same sex. . . . Sex totally divorced from procreation has become almost meaninglessly acrobatic.”

Through all of this, the implications of James’ underlying hypothesis shouts at the reader: “Do we, as a society want to continue to think that the choice to be infertile through birth control is a benign state, a neutral choice, even an enlightened choice, or are we going to wake up and take a more critical look at what originally was hailed,

among other things, as a panacea for our marital and overpopulation problems?”

Without losing a beat, James hastens to demonstrate that a society with zero-population growth is a society that inevitably becomes top-heavy with the aged. From a utilitarian stance, the British elderly of 2021 represented a drain on resources, both societal and familial, as they proved to make little contribution by way of productive output. In Britain, in 2021, James argues that the solution to this contraception-induced difficulty was termed the “Quietus,” the systematic murder of the old, the sick and the senile — that is, euthanasia.

Another character describes the Quietus and the attempts by government officials to make this option of suicide appear to be a freely willed, pleasant choice on the part of the elder-

ly. Commenting to Faron, the character states, “You’ve heard of the Quietus, I suppose, the mass suicide of the old? . . . I remembered one picture, I think the only one ever shown on the television: white-clad, elderly beings wheeled or helped in to the low barge-like ship, the high, reedy singing voices, the boat slowly pulling away into twilight, a seductively peaceful scene, cunningly shot and lit.”

Remorselessly methodical, James holds a very powerful mirror up to every wrinkle and wart of our society in its downward moral trend and captures for us, in almost sickening detail, what we could very well look like as a culture in 25 years — or perhaps what we already look like. And the only hope for the world of 2021 is surely also one of the greatest hopes of the world of 1997: the birth of a child, the fruit of a loving act of sex that is open to life.

In a scene reminiscent of the nativity of Christ, the author of “The Children of Men” pictures government officials and common people coming to look at and pay their homage to what turned out to be the savior of the universe of 2021. Only the birth of a baby could reverse Faron’s prediction that birth control or elective infertility was, indeed, the beginning of the end. This one child, whose birth was the climax of James’ novel, was the last glimmer of hope, indeed, a savior for that dying civilization.

James’ underlying hypothesis ought to hold our imaginations captive. What if the infertility that we freely elect through contraception would become a universal disease, an imposed curse, not something we choose, but a phenomenon we are condemned to learn to live with? Would we want the kind of

world — lifeless, loveless, pleasureless — that follows from procreation permanently separated from sex on a universal scale? If not, why would we ever freely elect infertility or deliberately render our fertile acts of sex sterile, and deliberately bring the same effects into our world on the heels of that choice? As an ancient Chinese proverb counsels, “Unless we change direction, we’re likely to end up where we’re headed.” Should we not want, after all, to seriously consider taking another direction, choosing some other option to the regulation of birth, an option that is true, good and beautiful, an option that enhances our humanity precisely because it reflects God’s plan for human procreation?

Fortunately, the services of the Pope Paul VI Institute provide a humane solution to family planning, a morally acceptable alternative to the destructive effects of the first domino of contraception and sterilization, and an antidote to its moral fallout that adversely affects human sexuality, family and life issues. In short, the Pope Paul VI Institute is all about correcting the first wrong, the first domino, of the sexual revolution. In coming to terms with the evil of contraception, it is coming to terms in a very direct way with just about every other aberration associated with sexuality, with family, and with human life. ✚



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