

# AN ETHICAL APPRAISAL OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE THEORY ON THE ISSUE OF BIRTH CONTROL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

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Samuel Olusanya Asaolu  
Baptist College of Theology, Igede, Ekiti State  
08034724808, [revasaolusam@gmail.com](mailto:revasaolusam@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The history of life on earth has been a history of interaction between living things and their surroundings. To a large extent, the physical form and the habits of the earth's vegetation and its animal life have been moulded by the environment, as Rachael Curion would observe. The theory of convergence, as founded by Clark Kere and his colleagues in 1960, was located in the tradition of functionalist analysis that assumes industrialism as part of a particular society with specific needs for which life solutions will be found, resulting in the development of similar types of society. The carrying capacity of an ecosystem is the number of inhabitants that can support it without suffering permanent damage. When the population exceeds carrying capacity, the environment degrades. As the population continues to increase while carrying capacity decreases, we are running out of earth. For this reason, some ecologists agree that the human race must recognise the limits to economic growth. This paper aims to explore the interaction between birth control and ecological issues, thereby providing some insight into biblical perspectives on birth control and ethical views on birth control and ecological issues. The result of this study reveals the Christian view and its implication in relation to the convergence and divergence on birth control and ecological issues with a drawn conclusion. The paper aims to explore the interaction of gender with diversity, religiosity and spirituality, thereby providing some insight into the differences that influence ethical reasoning about gender. The results of this study suggest that the gender approach to spirituality accurately reflects the powerful consequences of divisive and dichotomous thinking about the experiences of corporeality in spiritual life, anchored in daily life. Indeed, instead of women being more spiritual than men, there is simply a difference in how men and women express their spirituality.

## Introduction

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The carrying capacity of an ecosystem is the number of inhabitants that can support it without suffering permanent damage. When the population exceeds carrying capacity, the environment degrades. As the population continues to increase while carrying capacity decreases, we are running out of earth. For this reason, some ecologists agree that the human race must recognise the limits to economic growth.

With the above in view, the task of this paper will be a brief introduction, definition of terms, discourse on birth control and ecological issues, biblical perspectives on birth control, ethical perspectives on birth control and ecological issues, Christian view in relation to convergence and divergence on birth control and ecological issues with a drawn conclusion.

Convergence is the act of converging or coming closer together. Encarta Dictionary explained it as coming together from different directions, especially a uniting or merging of groups or tendencies that were originally opposed or very different. It is also the tendency of different species to develop similar characteristics in response to a set of environmental conditions (*Microsoft Encarta Dictionary*).

Divergence is a difference between two or more things, such as opinions or attitudes. It is the development of different characteristics by organisms that come from the same ancestors caused by the influence of different environments (*Microsoft Encarta Dictionary*).

Birth control is any act or device that keeps apart two persons or opposite sexes with the potential for procreation. It is also known as the application of any device that can destroy the product of conception (the zygote formed from male and female gametes) regardless of the age of the product of conception (Henry 62). It also means preventing childbirth and termination of pregnancy at an advanced stage (Kunhiyop 216).

Ecology is defined as the branch of biology that deals with the relationships that living things have with each other and their environment. The study of ecology increases man's understanding of the world and all its creatures. This is important because man's survival and well-being depend on relationships that exist on a worldwide basis (*The World Book Encyclopedia* 37).

## **Discourse on Birth Control and Ecological Issues**

### **Birth Control**

Birth control, also known as contraception and fertility control, refers to methods or devices that are used to prevent pregnancy. The planning and provision of birth control is called family planning. Effective birth control methods include barriers like condoms, diaphragms, and contraceptive sponges. Birth control methods have been used since ancient times, but effective and safe methods only became available in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Birth control increases economic growth because of less dependence on children, more women participating in the workforce, and less consumption of scarce resources ([www.wikipedia](http://www.wikipedia), the free encyclopedia accessed 22/5/2013). Birth control renders males or females incapable of performing the totality of sexual intercourse.

Given this, Christians are called to be aware that the control of human reproduction is necessary in individual families and in geographical areas or nations and ethnic groups in the light of economies, the prevention of suffering, and the long-term view of adequate food supply. Christian ethics of birth control are based upon the biblical view of the sanctity of marriage and its resultant family life, on the sanctity of human life and our obligation to perceive it. As human beings, we are bound by God's moral law, and for non-Christians, the dilemma may not be pressing, depending upon the sensitivity of conscience (Henry 62-63).

### **Origin and Growth of Birth Control**

Birth control or a strong tendency to limit family size is likely to have begun in France during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The decline in fertility that ensued became evident throughout Western Europe after 1875. Except in Ireland, the critical factor in this development was probably the invention of effective contraceptive devices, especially a condom made of animal membrane (until the vulcanisation of rubber in 1843-44) and later the diaphragm. The decline in birth rate began among the upper classes and in urban centres where knowledge of these devices spread more rapidly (Whalen 576).

Birth control denotes a voluntary control of the reproductive effect of sexual intercourse. Margaret Sanger (1983) claims to have coined the expression 'birth control' in 1914 when she and several friends were selecting a name for a national organisation to promote family limitation in the United States. Subsequently, the term 'planned parenthood' came to be preferred. In 1942, the Birth Control Federation of America was renamed the Planned Parenthood Prevention of America to emphasise the avowed positive objective of proponents of birth control. This is defined as the utilisation of medical

knowledge for the procreation of the number of children desired by a couple and at the intervals desired (576).

People have used birth control methods for thousands of years. Today, many safe and effective birth control methods are available. Most of these methods are typically used before or during sex, while emergency contraception is effective for up to a few days after intercourse. Some of the methods of child control are discussed below.

### **Methods of Child Control**

**Hormonal Contraceptives:** These include oral pills, subdermal implants, and injectable contraceptives, as well as the patch, hormonal IUD, and vaginal ring. The most commonly used hormonal contraceptive is a combined oral contraceptive pill, commonly known as ‘the pill’, which includes a combination of estrogen and progesterin (progestogen). Oral contraceptive renders the risk of ovarian cancer and endometrial cancer but increases the risk of breast and cervical cancer.

**Barrier Contraceptive:** These are devices that attempt to prevent pregnancy by physically preventing sperm from entering the uterus. The condom is most commonly used during sexual intercourse to reduce the livelihood of pregnancy and of spreading sexually transmitted infections.

**Intrauterine Devices:** This is a small T-shaped birth control device containing copper or progesterone inserted into the uterus. IUDs are a form of long-acting reversible contraception, and the most effective type of reversible birth control. As of 2003, IUDs were the most widely used form of reversible contraception and the most effective type of reversible birth control ([www.wikipedia](http://www.wikipedia) 20/5/2013).

**Sterilisation:** This is the most efficacious means of birth control. There are circumstances in which it is morally justifiable, such as when the mother’s health is at particular risk with pregnancy or when the couple has consciously determined that they have achieved the desirable family size.

**Voluntary Restrains:** Couples can agree to retrain or control their family size. Theocentric ethics backs a preference for voluntary restraints. To relate to persons in a manner appropriate to their relation to God requires honouring their capacities for self-determination. These capacities are part of the nature of human life. The range of control individuals and families have over their actions is part of the distinctiveness of human life.

**Assurance of Social Security:** This is another method of birth control, as viewed by Gustafson. It is an inducement to be rationally persuaded that limitations of birth can meet a larger common good. This explains, in part, the reduction of birth rates that often accompany greater prosperity and higher standards of living (Gustafson 246-248).

**Withdrawal:** This is also known as ‘pull out method.’ It is the practice of enduring sexual intercourse (‘pulling out’) before ejaculation. The main risk of coitus interruptus is that the man may not perform the manoeuvre correctly or in a timely manner. This is used as a method of birth control by about 3% of couples.

**Dual Perfection:** This is the use of methods that prevent birth, sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. This can be with condoms alone, with another birth control method, or by avoiding penetrative sex.

**Abstinence:** This is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy. However, not everyone who intends to be abstinent refrains from all sexual activity, and in many populations, there is a significant risk of pregnancy from non-consensual sex.

**Fertility Awareness Method:** This involves determining the most fertile days of the menstrual cycle and avoiding unprotected intercourse. They are used by about 3.5% of couples. Techniques for determining fertility include monitoring basal body temperature, cervical secretions or the day of the cycle ([www.wiipedia](http://www.wiipedia) 28/5/2013).

**Infanticide:** This has been practised as a means of birth and population control since the dawn of human culture. Its use in particular families and groups can be interpreted as a matter of survival of the mature in the face of a desperate food shortage. The issue of infanticide in a modern medical context is raised as a choice made to permit certain radically defective infants to die.

**Abortion:** This is another human intervention in the reproductive process. It is widely held that rapid birth growth in Japan was restrained in 1950 due to the lowering of the legal prohibition against abortion. This method is one of the most commonly used among many other methods (Gustafson 240-245). Abortion, as viewed by Shields, is the deliberate and artificial induced removal of an embryo or a foetus from the womb (237).

**Natural Methods:** The method commonly called 'the natural method' is the rhythm method. A woman can only get pregnant at the time of the month when she is ovulating. If the woman takes care to know which days and abstains from sexual intercourse on those days, pregnancy can be avoided. This is the only method of contraception approved by the Roman Catholic Church (Kunhiyop 216).

**Individual Rights:** Any individual can refuse treatment of themselves of a particular ailment and die rather than live because their body and their life are at stake. For example, a patient with kidney failure may refuse dialysis treatment because he does not want to live what he feels would be an undignified life of dialysis patients and prefers to die. Other patients may refuse surgery, radiation and chemical therapy because of what it would do to their bodies and lives as they see these. All of these come under individual rights to birth control (Thiroux 152). Above all, Smith Ebbie, in his submission, is of the opinion that some methods of birth control are open to question, especially those methods that function as post-conceptual controls or morning-after pills, etc). Any method that proves detrimental to health should be avoided (191).

### **Ecological Issues**

One goal of ecologists is to intelligently manage and control the living and non-living things in the world. They are concerned about the rate at which man uses such natural resources as coal, gas and oil. Ecologists also worry about the world's increasing population and decreasing food supply (*The Worldbook* 37). The environmental problems of 2012 cannot be described as a good year for global ecology. The problems continue to grow, not only in number but also in size, pushing the world a step closer to the excellent symbol of one entire civilisation in which everything is judged primarily by money and material goods, while some seem to be of very little importance.

Our entire planet's environmental conditions are constantly deteriorating, yet this does not seem to worry the world populace. It is like we purposely ignore environmental issues, not giving them the importance they deserve. Climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, ocean and acidification, and deforestation are far more serious than most people think they are ([www.ecologicalproblems.blogspot.com](http://www.ecologicalproblems.blogspot.com) 29/5/2013).

The Earth is the only planet in the solar system with life. If one looks down at the earth from a plane, such a person would see how wonderful our planet is: The blue seas and oceans, rivers and lakes, high snow-capped mountains, green forests and fields. For centuries, man lived in harmony with the natural environment. Today, the contradictions between man and nature have acquired a drastic character. With the development of civilisation, man's interference in nature has increased. Every year, the world's

industry pollutes the atmosphere with millions of tons of dust and other harmful substances ([www.km.ru/referats](http://www.km.ru/referats) 28/5/2013).

Given the above, the seas and rivers are poisoned with industrial waste chemicals and sewage discharge. People who live in big cities are badly affected by harmful discharge from plants and city transport, increasing noise, lack of fresh air and clean water. All these are bad for human health. Among the most urgent problems are the ozone layer, acid rains, global warming, toxic pollution of the atmosphere, the disappearance of forests, contamination of underground waters by chemical elements and destruction of soil in some areas.

Another ecological problem is that most of the forests are dying from acid rain. Deforestation, especially the destruction of tropical forests, affects the balance of nature in many ways. It kills animals and changes the climate and ecosystem in the world. Ecological problems have no borders. Developing countries like Europe solve these problems together as they take necessary measures through congresses and conferences on solving ecological problems that threaten their environment ([www.km.ru/referentsk](http://www.km.ru/referentsk) 29/5/2013).

### **Biblical Perspectives on Birth Control**

As affirmed in I Timothy 5:8, Apostle Paul says, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied faith and is worse than an unbeliever." With this in view, biblical perspectives on birth control will be discussed under these headings.

#### **The Responsibility to Provide for One's Family**

Apostle Paul emphasised an important point about one's responsibility to one's family. He does not say that conceiving and giving birth to children is one's most important point about one's responsibility to his family. He neither says that conceiving nor giving birth to children is one's most important duty. What God is really concerned about is that we care for the families we have. Failure to do so is tantamount to denying the faith, for one is acting even worse than an unbeliever. Based on the above, Paul believes it is better not to bring children into the world when one would not be able to provide for them (Kunhiyop 219).

#### **Opposition to Contraception**

The use of contraceptives is contrary to natural law. Natural law is understood to dictate certain types of behavior for all human beings such behaviours are understood to be consistent with the nature and the true nature of the universe and the law of God. Contraceptives can make people devalue one another when this occurs. It makes sexual partners to be treated as means to an end rather than as fellow human beings (220).

#### **Assertions of the Image of God in Man**

In this aspect, Kunhiyop buttressed his point that in the creation story, the Bible reveals that God made man in His own image (Gen. 1:26-29). To tamper with an embryo by aborting it, as a result of child control, is tampering not just with human life, but with the very image of God. In addition, the sixth commandment (Exo. 20:13) prohibits individuals from killing their fellow; this tallies with the sanctity of human life. Applying this to the issue of birth control through abortion raises the question of whether an embryo or a fetus is not a human person (Shields 238). As someone created by God, the child deserves respect. To destroy a foetus is tantamount to destroying a human being as well as all that the person would have accomplished in life Jer. 1:5 (Kunhiyop 342).

#### **Ethical Perspectives on Birth Control and Ecological Issues**

Understanding ethical perspectives on birth control and ecological issues will be considered below.

### **Technological Pragmatism**

Relationships with elements in the environment, both animate and inanimate, are seen simply as aspects of management, embracing both normal use and solutions to any problems that arise. The ethical questions are not faced explicitly. The solution to a problem consists of findings and appropriate techniques to control and eliminate it. It does not face the questions as to whether or why the human species should in any sense be “worth preserving, and it assumes an anthropocentric focus which considers human material advance as the paramount value” (Atkinson 349).

### **Evolutionary Humanism**

This is an evolutionary humanist view. Evolution is seen as an overriding ontological principle in that the human species is the most complex product of that process by its intellectual development that can determine its evolution and by its technological ingenuity can also control the course of development of other species and, indeed the planet as a whole (349).

### **Liberal Christianity**

The view of the ethic of the use of nature by humankind emphasises that ethics are intimately interwoven with theology. This led to the explicit link of the redemption of nature to the redemption of individual men and women into a new creation in Christ, pointed to by Paul in Romans 8:18-25.

### **Conservative Christian View**

Under this, Francis Schaffer had already set out the biblical view that creation is good but misused and damaged by humankind in self-centred disobedience to God. He stressed further that Christians have also contributed, arguing that a comprehensive biblical approach provides a workable and justifiable ethic for the use of the environment's resources and care for the natural world itself (350).

In addition to the above, Gustafson expressed his own view that any circumstance of sustained poverty that makes significant family savings and communally guaranteed security impossible makes it difficult to persuade couples who will be dependent upon their own offspring for their care in old age to limit the number of births (248). He buttressed his point by saying that it is permissible for couples to limit the number of their children, but self-restraint of sexual activity is the only morally limited means. Every act of sexual intercourse in marriage must be open to the possibility of the transmission of life (208).

In his submission, Geisler opined that our ecological system will not be transformed until our ethical system is. After all, it is people who are abusing the environment. Hence, we must transform people before we can hope to transform their environment.

### **Christian View in Relation to Convergence and Divergence Areas in Birth Control and Ecological Issues**

Of all the great religions and philosophical systems, none gives greater dignity to material creation than Judeo-Christian traditions. Both the Old and New Testament Scriptures support the contention that the physical universe is good and reflects the glory of its Creator (Psa. 19:1; I Tim. 4:4). Like everything else, Christian ecology flows out of Christian theology. Christians believe that God created all things; hence, the Christian view of the environment grows out of the doctrine of creation, which has several important implications for ecological control, as discussed below.

### **The World is a Possession of God**

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it belongs to Him. He made it, and He owns it. God is the owner of the garden, while man is the keeper of it. God owns the environment; human merely occupies it. Hence, God's ownership is the basis of our stewardship.

### **The World is Sustained and Operated by God**

From the biblical accounts, God is not only the original cause of the world but also the Sustaining cause of it. He causes everything to continue to be (Col. 1:17). Since God is the upholder and operator of the natural world necessary to sustain life, ecological interference with His operation is a creaturely presumption with serious ethical implications (Geisler 303-304).

### **Mankind is the Keeper of the Environment**

God is the Creator and owner of the world, but man is the keeper. When God created humans in His image, He commanded them: “Be fruitful and multiply (*rabah*) and fill (*maae*) the earth” (Gen. 1:28). As a result of this, our first obligation to the natural world is to propagate the human species. The imperative is only to populate, not to overpopulate, since plants and animals are told to reproduce and since they are necessary to human existence, there is an implied obligation not to let one kind overrun the other; a balance is needed between plants, animals and mankind (304-305).

### **The Law of Good Stewardship**

Ecology is good stewardship. God has entrusted the earth and its resources to our care, and we must act responsibly with them. In I Corinthians 4:2, Paul made us know that those who have been given a Trust must prove faithful. It is not good stewardship to destroy our valuable resources. God’s garden must not be turned into a desert but be kept properly by the human race as good keepers (stewards).

### **The Law of Sanitation**

Pollution of the environment is largely a matter of bad disposal methods. The book of Leviticus emphasizes much on this very issue. The law intensifies the need for keeping and maintaining the environment (306-307).

### **Living Species Are Manifestation of God**

God manifest a nature with great diversity. Each living species is a manifestation of God. Hence, it is necessary to preserve the multiplicity of species that exist, as specific preservation is an ethical obligation that God enthroned into human rule to carry out during the creation order (299).

### **Conclusion**

The paper in view presented a discourse on birth control and ecological issues. It also revealed ethical and biblical perspectives with Christian views on areas of convergence and divergence on birth control and ecological issues. The paper concludes that we need to be called back to the truth of the Scripture for our true responsibility towards the environment and human sanctity of life. It further points our attention to the fact that the biblical world is not to be blamed for ecological problems but our failure as individuals to live according to the standards of proper care and maintenance of the environment. Also, the issue of birth control raises many moral issues for couples and Christians, which are not to be taken lightly. The concerned people on birth control should seek proper moral advice and counsel as well as weigh both the ethical and medical merits of different methods of birth control.

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