

## Jesus never said . . .

When it comes to hard teachings of the Church, especially those which touch upon issues which are very personal to people, we have often heard the retort “*Well, Jesus never said anything about that!*” Jesus never said a word about abortion. He doesn’t utter one syllable about homosexuality or transgenderism. And, he never addressed matters like in vitro-fertilization, or embryonic stem-cell research.

It is frustrating to get a response like this from someone with whom you are trying to have an intelligent conversation. Of course Jesus did not say anything about highly technological, bioethical issues! He was self-limited by entering time in the first century of the last millennium! That Jesus doesn’t outright condemn something that did not yet exist really/only underscores why he would have felt it necessary to establish a system of authoritative teaching through the Church and the successors of the Apostles.

Obviously, as the centuries pass by, there are developments in human society; different technologies and ways of thinking emerge which have to be evaluated by Gospel principles concerning the nature of the human person.

So, for example, the fact that Jesus does teach about the sacredness of marriage, the impropriety of divorce, and the sinfulness of adultery provides ground upon which to formulate teaching about other matters in human sexual relations, (Matt 19:6, Jn 8:1-11). Marriage between a man and a woman is a sacred norm for life and an inviolable, indissoluble covenant relationship. The fact that he goes on to describe this union precisely as the “two becom[ing] one flesh” indicates the complementarity of male and female and situates sexual functioning within that relationship, (Mark 10:8). Within all of this there are implications for the way the Church will confront relatively modern issues like “gay marriage,” “transgenderism,” and so forth.

Moreover, one cannot simply appeal to the fact that Jesus never said something explicit about some given issue because, in fact, he seems to have left it to his designated spokespersons to do so. St. Paul addresses the issue of homosexual acts as contrary to the “truth of God,” (Romans 1:27). And, more

generally, he holds up male-female marriage as the one context in which sexual desire is controlled and properly directed, (1 Cor 7:9).



Jesus never clearly condemned abortion, but would he have need to do so if it was taken for granted in his society that such an assault on life was a grave evil? The Hebrew scriptures allude to the sanctity of the unborn in several places, (Ps 127:3, 139:3, Jer. 1:5, Job 31:15). And, there is even a place in these scriptures which could be applied to the challenge of unplanned pregnancy wherein the following is said: “*As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.*” (Ecclesiastes 11:5)

Of course Mary’s “unplanned pregnancy” put her at great risk of losing her life in a very conservative culture wherein adultery was punishable by stoning to death. While there is consideration on Joseph’s part to “quietly divorce” Mary in order to spare her any shame or harm; there is no thought of sabotaging the pregnancy in order to cause some sort of miscarriage. Granted, this whole circumstance is bathed in the light of a mysterious, divine intervention such that some may wish to bracket it against ordinary life circumstances. Nevertheless, its hard to imagine a more stressful situation for a young, pregnant woman.

The whole point here is to underscore how weak is the common response to difficult teachings around modern issues; to say that Jesus never said anything on this or that topic.” The fact is that the Apostles immediately begin extrapolating from his public teaching to matters which did not arise during his public ministry. Even the principle of a “natural law” is implied wherein God’s will can be discovered from observing the order or nature. This will be much more highly developed, up to our day, to deal with the hard bioethical issues, but it is present in seed, (Romans 1:18ff)