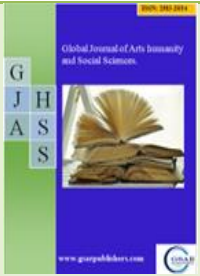
	Global Journal of Arts Humanity and Social Sciences					
	ISSN: 2583-2034					
	Abbreviated key title: Glob.J.Arts.Humanit.Soc.Sci					
	Frequency: Monthly					
	Published By GSAR Publishers					
Journal Homepage Link: https://gsarpublishers.com/journal-gjahss-home/						
Volume - 5		Issue - 9		September 2025	Total pages 708-716	DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17164138

The use of modern contraceptives in Pentecostal Church of Rwanda– *Association des Eglises de Pentecôte au Rwanda (ADEPR) in Kigali City.*

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Article History

Received: 11- 09- 2025

Accepted: 16- 09- 2025

Published: 18- 09- 2025

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Abstract

The church leadership and female believers of the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda *Association des Eglises de Pentecôte au Rwanda (ADEPR)* face the challenge of making an informed decision regarding the use of artificial contraceptive. This article then asks: How might a theological understanding regarding modern contraception assist the leadership and members of the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda (ADEPR) to teach about modern contraception? Using Smith's synthesised systematic theology approach, the article analyses the use of contraceptives, explores the biblical view about contraception and established that the use of contraceptives is not explicitly discussed in the Bible. The article deduced that the legitimate use of contraceptives does not contradict the Bible. Finally, it suggests some practical guidelines regarding the use of artificial contraceptives as an effective way to promote the welfare of Christian families of the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda (ADEPR) in Kigali City.

Key words: Modern contraceptives, African culture, African women, birth, children.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sub-Saharan Africa has a high fertility rate than that of any other region in the World (Chilongozi 2017, 51; Mbacké 2017, 331; World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa 2012, 20). The high fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa is influenced by early marriages as well as religious and cultural beliefs in which children are symbols of prosperity and safety for old people (Chilongozi 2017, 51). Additionally, the use of modern contraceptives¹ is prevalent in Southern African countries (Westoff 2013) and in Eastern Africa countries (where Rwanda is located) (Rossier and Corker 2017, 204). Additionally, a study conducted in Burkina Faso shows that religious leaders who participated in the study know about the use of modern contraceptives (Abibata Barro et al. 2021). The use of modern contraceptives among married couples in Rwanda increased from 17% to 52 %, between 2005 and 2010,

making Rwanda one of the top countries that use modern contraceptives in Sub-Saharan Africa (Muhoza 2014, § 1.1).

Culturally, African men make all decisions in the family, including matters of reproductive health. Regrettably, men were not included in past research studies on the use of modern contraceptives (Duze and Mohammed 2006, 54). Hence, Adewuyi and Ogunjuyigbe (2003, 36) argue that ignoring men in reproductive health programs impedes all efforts to promote the use of modern contraceptives while Pool et al. (2000, 210) note that men generally have a negative perception towards contraceptives, hence the need to educate men about the benefits of the female-controlled contraceptives.

Salami (2017, §13) argues that the availability and accessibility of contraceptives are not sufficient. Women need to change their mentality vis-à-vis contraception. Due to some religious beliefs, some women may not use contraceptives, because they think its use is a sin. She also affirms that feminism is one of the main factors that have mobilised several women to want to have access to reproductive health services (Salami 2016: §33).

¹This article uses modern contraceptives and artificial contraceptives interchangeably.



From church perspective, many preachers teach about contraception in the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda— *Association des Eglises de Pentecôte au Rwanda* (ADEPR) and their teachings emphasized extra-biblical sources and individual prophecies, rather than focusing on the biblical truth, on one hand while some Christians taught and knew about contraception was scientifically incorrect on the other hand.

To this end, the main purpose of this article, that flow from a MTh study (Uwimana, 2022), is to offer a biblical, theological, and ethical view about the use of modern contraception for the leaders and members of the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda (ADEPR) in Kigali.

According to Benda (2012:52, 64) The Swiss missionaries who had stationed on the eastern part of the country established the ADEPR in 1940. It is one of the four largest denominations alongside the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda (EPR), the Anglican Church also known as the Episcopal Church of Rwanda (EER). It is currently the largest Pentecostal church in the country with more than one million members, mostly Hutus (Rutagambwa 2021:21).

The ADEPR leadership commends the use of contraception for medical and family welfare purposes, namely: spacing births, children caring, family development, in case of caesarean delivery (ADEPR 2018, 35-36). They neither criticise natural nor artificial contraceptive methods. However, ADEPR officially accepts only natural contraception (37). Hence the question: How might a theological understanding regarding modern contraception assist the leadership and members of the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda (ADEPR) to teach about modern contraception?

The article uses Smith's synthesised systematic theology approach (Smith 2013, 53-54) for doing evangelical systematic theology to answer the main question. Smith synthesizes Osborne's nine-step model (Osborne 2010, 406-409) into four steps, namely, biblical teachings, church history, theological formulation and practical implications (Smith 2013, 53-54). The associated subsidiary questions are: What does Psalm 127: 3-5 teach on childbearing? How have theologians viewed the matter of contraception throughout the church history? How might a relevant theological formulation regarding modern contraception be structured? What are the practical implications of this relevant theological formulation regarding modern contraception for the leadership and members of the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda (ADEPR) in Kigali City?

Accordingly, this article is organised into four sections addressing Smith's four step: Looking at Psalm 127:3-5 (an exegetical study of this Psalm is appropriate as it assist to address the matter of procreation and will lay the necessary basis to engage the use of modern contraceptives); views from different denominations and African females; formulating a theological position for Pentecostal Church of Rwanda (ADEPR) in Kigali City; and practical implications.

2. LOOKING AT PSALM 127:3-5

2.1 A suggested translation of Psalm 127:3-5

³ Lo, sons are an inheritance of YHWH and the fruit of the womb is His reward.

⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are sons born in one's youth.

⁵ Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they shall not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.

2.2 Authorship

Scholars disagree on the authorship of Psalm 127. Gill (2020, §1-3) argues that David composed it upon being informed by Nathan that Solomon would be the one to build the Lord's temple. He bases his argument on the fact that the Syriac title reads, "It was said by David concerning Solomon." Pietersma and Wright (2007, 611) seem to hold the same view by translating the title in the Septuagint as "pertaining to Solomon." Henry (2021, §1) argues that David wrote for Solomon with the intent to exhort him to depend on God's providence, without which all his effort would be vain in administration.

Barnes (2020, §0) notes that those who attribute the authorship to David, affirm that he composed this Psalm near the close of his life to guide his son regarding "the principles which should govern him in his reign." However, he remarks that in the Hebrew title, there is no special pertinence to the entrance on the administration of a government.

Background

Psalm 127 is the eighth of the fifteen brief Psalms (120-134) that are known as "songs of ascents" or "songs of degrees." Some suggest that they have been sung while returning from exile (see Ezra 7:9) or were sung by pious Jews as they approached Jerusalem on their way to the temple three times annually for festivals (Fee and Stuart 2002: 142; Kafang 2006: 746; MacArthur 2008: 875; Strong and McClintock 2019: §1). Others propose that it refers to the melody to which the Psalm was to be chanted (Strong and McClintock 2019: §1). However, the *Mishnah* Sukkah (5.4) indicates that they were sung by Levites who stood on the fifteen steps leading down from the court of the Israelites to the court of women.

Calvin (2020: §1) remarks that Solomon wrote this Psalm for two purposes. First, he wanted to confirm that "nothing happens prosperously to us except in so far as God blesses our proceedings." His second purpose was to "beat down the foolish presumption of men, who, setting God aside, are not afraid to undertake to do anything, whatever it may be, in exclusive reliance upon their own wisdom and strength."

2.3 Date and audience

Goulder (1998, 65-66) states assertively that Psalm 127 fits in the context of Nehemiah. He also notes that during Nehemiah's time, Jews went to bed late and rose early. In addition to the construction work, they had to harvest crops from their fields; however, the return was so small that they defaulted on their debts (66).

After siding with those who ascribe authorship to Solomon, Dahlberg (2007, 27) deduces that it is better to date the Psalm in the middle of the tenth century (971-941 BC). The period which corresponds to the zenith of the building project during Solomon's rule.

2.3 Discussing Psalm 27

The variants in Psalm 127:3-5 do not pose any serious problem because the basic message is not altered. The discussion below highlights some divergence in translation that may complicate the understanding of this Psalm, thus an accurately contextual approach is needed.

2.3.1 Sons vs children in verses 3 and 4

The author checked forty-two English Bible versions of Psalm 127:3-4, twenty-seven versions have *children*, ten versions including RSV, YLT and NABRE have *sons*, three versions, namely GNT, EHV and ERV have *children* on verse three and *sons* on the fourth verse. The Hebrew word *banim* used in verse three and four means *sons* and it is not generally used to refer to *children* in the Old Testament. In Genesis 5, *banim* and *banot* are used to mean respectively *sons* and *daughter*. Exodus 21:4-5 used *banim* for sons, *banot* for daughters, and *yeledim* for children.

Mariottini (2013, 103-105; also see footnotes of the NET Bible on Psalm 127) remarks that our contemporary society which is gender-inclusive would not appreciate the use of *sons*. However, he warns that if today's readers prefer *children* over *sons*, "they find themselves separated from the cultural reality that gave birth to this Psalm." He reiterates that children in Psalm 127:3 portrays a translation that does not take seriously the historical context. It is observed that *banim* can be gender-neutral when referring to infants, however, he also asserts that Psalm 127 deals exclusively with sons (Krauss in McKeown 2014, 114). Miller (1986, 134) holds the same view, he also affirms that Psalm 127:3 seems primarily to have in view *sons and the father* rather than *children and parents*. However, he suggests that the contemporary society should interpret it in a more inclusive manner, "recognizing the joy and the reward for both mothers and fathers in having both sons and daughters." Additionally, *sons* is better as it reflects the underlying idea of protection and defense in verses 4 and 5 (Dahlberg 2007, 62).

2.3.2 Youth in verse 4b

In MT and Targum, the Hebrew word נָעַר "youth" is used 8 times in Psalms (25:7;71:5,17;103:5;127:4; 129:1-9 and 144:12). Additionally, 127:4, LXX and Vulgate agree with MT by using respectively νεότης which means "youth" and *iuventūte*. In Psalm 127:4, the LXX reads ἐκτετιναγμένον which comes from ἐκτινάσσω meaning "to shake off, shake out" (see Matt 10:14; Mark 6:11; Acts 13:51,18:6). Vulgate seems to follow LXX by using *excussorum*

The translation of Aquila's Greek version in the second century AD. reads "sons of young and vigorous parents" (Ellicott 2020, §4). Contrary to the positive note found in verses 3-5, the words "expelled" (Pietersma and Wright 2007: 611) or "outcast" (Brenton 1851, 738) as expressed in LXX and Vulgate have a negative

connotation. Thus, "youth" would be the better rendering, the sons born when someone is young would be helpful in his old age, this is the underlying idea in verse 5.

2.3.3 Quiver in verse 5a

Kim (2011, 8) and Cook (2001) highlight divergence in translating the Hebrew word "אֶשְׁכֵּחַ". MT (אֶשְׁכֵּחַ) and Peshita reads "his quiver" while LXX (τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν αὐτοῦ) and Vulgate read it as "his desire/longing" (the Ethiopic and Arabic versions also follow LXX) and the Targum (בֵּית מִדְרָשִׁיהּ) reads it as "house of study" or "academy" (Cook 2001). Crow suggests that the translators of LXX may have misled אֶשְׁכֵּחַ as אֶתְּחִיל, which prompts them to translate it as ἐπιθυμίαν. Allen thought that the translators of LXX did not understand the original meaning, thus they confusedly translated it (Kim 2011, 9).

A quiver holds arrows hence Dahood (1970: 224) observes the use of quiver together with arrow in Ugaritic text. He also indicates that there is metaphorical similarity between quiver and arrow in this Psalm; hence his preference for quiver (225). Estes (2019: 481-482) notes the emphasis on rearing a child in the proper manner. One may argue that children are a blessing in the same manner in which a person having many arrows is considered blessed.

3. Views of Church Fathers on procreation

This section is first sections of the article's aim of promoting a theological stance for the use of contraceptives by discussing the theological views of four renowned Church Fathers (*Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom Augustine (AD 354-430) and Jerome*) regarding procreation.

3.1. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215)

Procreation occurs during sexual intercourse. In expressing his theological views about procreation and marriage, Clement only accepts marriage due to the intrinsic task of d for producing children. He contends that sexual intercourse should be undertaken just for procreation and encouraged couples not to have sex during pregnancy (Trenham 2003, 34).

3.2. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407 AD)

Chrysostom promoted a radical view about procreation. He equates preventing conception with murder, and denounced men who encourage their wives to avoid conception for economic reasons and to maintain their beauty (Chrysostom 1889, 24; Noonan 1986, 98) and those who practice of self-castration to avoid procreation and for ascetic purposes (Chrysostom 1888, 62:3; Trenham 2003, 200).

3.3. Augustine (AD 354-430) and Jerome (c. AD 347-420)

Augustine and Jerome represent the theological views of third century Church Fathers. Augustine rejects all actions that interfere with procreation and argues that according to God's will, children are the outcome of marriage (Augustine 1887, 15:7). He further accuses the Manicheans, who were proponents of preventing conception, of turning "marriage into adulterous connections" and the "bed-chamber into brothel." He contends that the word matrimony implies that a man marries to enable his wife to become

a mother of children (1887, 19:26). Jerome shares these perspectives by rejecting other forms of sexual intercourse than for procreation (Jerome 1893, 1:20) and denounces women who take potions to cause infertility as murderers (Jerome 1893, 22:13).

4. VIEWS FROM DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS ON THE USE OF MODERN CONTRACEPTIVES

This section adds to the article's aim of promoting a theological stance for the use of contraceptive. It shows that traditionally, most denominations opposed the use of contraceptives and began to make a shift from the traditional to the pro-contraception stance (Blanchard 2007: 226; Hollinger 2013: 683).

4.1 Views in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC)

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has consistently held the traditional view of rejecting all forms of artificial contraceptives (Ambrose 2007: 15; The Catholic Bishops of Zambia 1997: §29-30) and taught the use of artificial contraceptives is sinful (Nonan 1986: 6). On the contrary, Nunez (2019: §1) challenges this position, noting that Scripture does not explicitly address contraception and further notes that his church (RCC) uses "philosophical arguments that appeal to the natural law without relying on God or revelation." He praises those approaches because they can attract people of any faith.

4.2 Views in Orthodox Churches

Within the Russian Orthodox Church Archpriest Chaplin indicates that only non-abortive contraceptives, like condoms, are permissible in the Russian Orthodox Church (*Interfax-Religion 2010*, see also Cleenewerck 2007: 402). On the other hand, he stresses that the Church does not support "the selfish refusal of a couple to have children" (*Interfax-Religion 2010*). Gleason (2015) disagree completely with the Chaplin's stand by arguing that sperms are not to be neither killed nor put in an unnatural location. He advises that a Christian man may legitimately issue his seed in the woman's vagina (her sacred chamber). He concludes by reiterating that "every form of birth control" is prohibited. This anti-contraception stance is noticed in Irinej's (2020) strong pronatalist convictions.

4.3 Views in Protestant Churches

Contrary to the conservative standpoints of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, many Protestant denominations in the United States—including the United Methodist Church, Assemblies of God, Presbyterian Church USA, and Evangelical Lutheran Church—promote a relaxed standpoint (Lenow 2018). All these supports the use of contraception for family planning and health-related reasons (Lenow 2018; MacArthur (020).

A relax view on the use of contraceptives raises two views, namely, artificial contraceptives seem to have directly or indirectly promoted promiscuity (Lenow 2018: 14-17; Mohler 2006). and that some Christians may reject the use of contraception due to the lack of enough biological knowledge (Hollinger 2013: 686).

An example is many Protestants in Russia who condemn the use of contraceptives, because they think that all forms of contraception are abortive in nature Hollinger 2013: 686).

5. VIEWS FROM AFRICAN FEMALES ON THE USE OF MODERN CONTRACEPTIVES

This section also adds to the article's aim of promoting a theological stance for the use of contraceptive by providing the views of some African female theologians and feminists regarding using contraceptives.

5.1 African female theologians

Houssou-Gandonou (in Tokponou 2018) links spousal violence and the suppression of women's rights to how men have always been interpreting the Bible. Making the matter touch contraception and religion and patriarchy. She grounds her argument on moral, medical and social concerns and revisiting theological concerns so that women have the right to choose from available family planning options. Phiri and Nadar ((2006: 9) introduce that institutional opposition to contraception within many African churches has a direct, negative impact on women's health. This situation calls for a re-interpretation of the biblical texts.

5.2 African feminists

Tamale's (2016: 118) assert that modern contraceptives provide women with control over their bodies and futures. This echo Solanke et al. (2014: 125), Ramtohul (2019:260) and Sowa in Wiklandr (2013) views that they can control their reproductive health and enjoy sexual encounter without the fear of being pregnant., and careers without the constant threat of unintended pregnancy. The argument is fundamentally about empowerment and self-determination.

The section on African feminists also acknowledges practical challenges. Nyanzi (2014) point about the struggle to access affordable contraceptives. Megabiaw (2012: 2) singles out a highly vulnerable group—sex workers—who face a double-bind of sexual exploitation and a low rate of contraceptive use. She advocates that they be assisted like all women.

6. A THEOLOGICAL FORMULATION ON THE USE OF CONTRACEPTIVES FOR THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH OF RWANDA

The article's introduction mentioned that ADEPR leadership commends the use of contraception for medical and family welfare purposes, namely: spacing births, children caring, family development, in case of caesarean delivery (ADEPR 2018, 35-36). They neither criticise natural nor artificial contraceptive methods. However, ADEPR officially accepts only natural contraception (37).

Psalm 127:3–5 plays a vital role in providing the background and basis for the proposed theological formulation of using contraceptives in the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda— Association

des Eglises de Pentecôte au Rwanda (ADEPR), Kigali as it shows that children are an inheritance from God. Thus rebutting the view that human life originates from human actions. It further shows that God has created space for humans to be part of the procreation process.

6.1 The biblical view about procreation in marriage

Brownson (2013: 115) observes that procreation in the Bible always entails the context of marriage; however, he remarks that Genesis 1:27-28 does not directly dictate that “marriage always assumes and requires the purpose of procreation.” He indicates that the phrase “be fruitful, multiply” is not uniquely used for human beings, but also the other animal species in Genesis 1:22. He observes that the phrase “be fruitful and multiply” in Genesis 1: 22 and 28, is preceded by the words “God bless them.”

The teachings of Jesus shows that he seems to emphasise the importance of procreation while predicting the cataclysmic events during the siege of Jerusalem and the Apocalypse. It would be more challenging for pregnant and nursing women than barren women (Brownson 2013: 116, also see Matt 24:19, Luke 23:29).

Jütte (2008: 21) also remarks that only a few passages in the New Testament deal with the duty of procreation. For instance, Paul states that women would be saved through childbearing (1 Tim 2:10); he further encourages young widows to marry and have children (1 Tim 5:14). He argues that Paul seems to change his view, compared to 1 Corinthians 7:8, wherein he discourages widows from remarriage because he instructs his protégé to combat the Gnostics' heresies including their tendency against the conception of children. A careful reading of both 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Timothy 5 reveals that there is no contradiction. He counsels widows not to remarry if they can master their bodies, and to remarry if they cannot (1 Cor 7:9). In the same line of reasoning, he exhorts the Ephesian young widows under the leadership of Timothy to remarry, because their sensual desires often override their dedication to Christ. Thus, his primary intention seems not to be childbearing, but self-control against sensual lust.

6.2 The biblical view about sex in the marriage

Adams (1980: 6) notes that if marriage and sexual unions were the same, fornication would not be considered as illicit sexual intercourse, but informal marriage; adultery would be no longer considered as adultery but informal bigamy (or polygamy). Brownson (2013: 117) remarks that in 1 Corinthians 7 which is “the most extended discussion on marriage in the New Testament,” Paul does not mention procreation as the purpose of marriage, he does not even use either the word “procreation” or any related term. However, he insists that husbands must have sexual relations with their wives and vice versa (verses 2–5, NIV).

De La Torre (2007: 24) opines that, if it is legitimate to have sexual relations with a barren woman or with a postmenopausal woman; then, procreation does not justify sex among the married couples. In other words, if procreation is the only reason to justify sex, those two cases must be considered as scandalous and biblically unacceptable. However, he indicates that a man was not allowed to have sexual relations with a menstruating woman, because she

could not conceive during this phase of her cycle (see Lev 15:24). But this verse explains clearly that prohibition was related to the uncleanness of the woman and not infertility.

6.3 The biblical view about infertility in the marriage

Some of the famous women in the Bible, namely, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, the mother of Samson, Hannah, and Elizabeth, were barren before they conceived and gave birth to children (Gen 11:30, 25:31, 29:31; Judg 13:31; Luke 1:7).

Contemplating on the experiences of barrenness, Moss and Baden (2015: 30) indicate that barrenness is often associated with social vulnerability such as widowhood and poverty (Ps 113:7; Job 24:21) and sometimes, infertility could end in divorce. In the rabbinic law, if a woman could not produce at least a son within ten years, her husband could take another woman (Moss and Baden 2015: 32; Deut 24:1).

6.4 The biblical view and the scientific evidence

Shannon and Wolter (in May 1992: 77-78) argue that the cells resulting from the mitotic division of the zygote are totipotent, that is, they can develop into many distinct individuals, for instance, twins. Thus, they conclude that zygote and the preimplantation embryo (pre-embryo) do not have humanhood and personhood. In the same line of reasoning, Ford (1991: 119–123, 170; see also May 1992: 78) claims that the zygote is “a real, biologically identifiable human individual, but contends that it is not “ontologically” the same as the post-implantation embryo and eventual baby.”

On the other hand, Condit (2009: 131) claims that scientifically, human life commences at conception, thus, the zygote is a fully human organism. Reece et al. (2010: 255–256) hold the same view, as they affirm that the fusion of a haploid sperm and a haploid egg is the beginning of the human life cycle. Condit (2009: 131) notes that the behaviour of the zygote is utterly different from either the sperm or ovum separately, but of a typical human being. Unlike gametes which contains either paternal traits (sperm cells) or maternal traits (ova), zygote, embryo, foetus and adult have both paternal and maternal traits. Thus, science corroborates the biblical record; with some few exceptions (Adam, Eve and Jesus), all other human beings result from intimacy between a man and a woman, hence the diploidy (Gen 4:1-2; Luke 1:34).

6.5 The biblical view on promiscuity

Kunhiyop (2008: 216) also observes that, sex is usually seen as “mere recreation” in the West. He (Kunhiyop 2008, 220) further remarks that one of the arguments against artificial contraceptives is that it incites promiscuity. However, Dreweke (2019: 29) concedes that for “most people, sex is a normal part of adolescence and adulthood.” Noonan (1986, 549) indicates that the RCC denounces artificial contraceptives of encouraging sexual promiscuity among the young.

In Africa, people seem to associate the use of artificial contraceptives with promiscuity. Blackstone and Iwelunmor (2017: 6) remark that the likely use of contraception is low among couples in Nigeria, wherein men opine that those artificial contraceptives promote promiscuity in their wives. Håkansson et

al. (2018: 1) indicate that some participants in their research in Kenya believe that the use of contraceptives prompt adolescents to engage in premarital sex. Some even affirm that when girls use contraceptives, they are likely to become sex workers.

6.6 Side effects of modern contraceptives

Stilwell (2003: 8–9) indicates that all artificial contraceptive methods can have negative side effects on the human body. She points that although artificial contraceptives have negative side effects, yet they could be used as medical doctors use some dangerous treatment like radiation to kill cancer cells in a body. Thus, she claims that there are no moral problems in using contraceptive methods to cope with extreme medical predicaments (9). Moreover, those side effects are not universally found in all users of contraceptives. Mechanically contraceptives have slight or no side effects, as they do not use hormones, that is, they do not affect menstrual cycles.

Kunhiyop (2008: 220) remarks that research has proved that pregnancy is more likely to induce serious health problems than artificial contraceptives. The side effects of artificial contraception do not criminalize it; otherwise, believers would end up suspending using all types of medical drugs.

7. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH OF RWANDA-ADEPR

This section addresses the last sub-question by providing the implication of using contraceptives in the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda— *Association des Eglises de Pentecôte au Rwanda* (ADEPR).

7.1 The moral use of modern contraceptives

One can deduce from the discussion in the previous sections, that all human life is sacred, and life begins with fertilization (the fusion of egg and sperm). Artificial contraceptives prevent fertilization from happening; thus, their use cannot always be considered as morally wrong. However, any birth control method that acts to end a human life at any pre-birth stage (zygote, embryo, or foetus) is morally wrong.

The use of artificial contraceptives is not legitimate in case the motives behind them are egocentric and for motive of indulgence. For instance, those who may use some forms of contraceptives for beautification purposes, that is, considering pregnancy and breastfeeding as something which inconveniently affects their physical appearance. Some Christian couples, despite being able to procreate, may choose not to have children for ministerial purposes, for instance, missionaries.

7.2 Birth spacing and parental responsibility

Kunhiyop (2008: 219) remarks that Paul in 1 Timothy 5:8 emphasizes the believer's responsibility, especially, to their own nuclear families. He asserts that the apostle implies that "conceiving and giving birth to children is not the parents' most important duty" (Kunhiyop 2008:219). Caring for one's family is at the centre of the parents' responsibility. He further claims that

"To fail to do so is tantamount to denying the faith, for one is acting even worse than an unbeliever" (Kunhiyop 2008: 219). Kunhiyop (2008: 219) further argues that "it is better not to bring children into the world when one cannot provide for them." He advises that contraception may be the wise option. From the same line of reasoning, one may deduce that it is morally good to use contraceptives when they prove to be the best way to promote the well-being and betterment of his or her household. Couples may postpone childbirth so to first achieve higher levels of life, for instance: higher education, higher incomes, etc. This, in turn, benefits children and society as well (Kallner and Danielsson 2016: 252).

7.3 Medical purposes

Couples may also decide to use artificial contraceptives to prevent pregnancy-related complications or other issues related to the woman's body conditions. Kallner and Danielsson (2016: 252) indicate that, in addition to contraception, the use of artificial contraceptives has preventive and curative effects. For instance, they assert that "hormonal contraceptives reduce the risk of some types of cancer, dysmenorrhea, heavy menstrual bleeding, and anaemia and are a treatment for endometriosis" (Kallner and Danielsson 2016:252).

7.4 Informed choice and decision-making

Not all artificial contraceptive methods and approaches are suitable; each married couple is unique. Thus, each couple should exercise discretion to decide on their sexual and reproductive health. Married couples should make an informed choice and jointly decide about the type of contraceptives to be used and the duration of child spacing. Thus, it is better to seek guidance from experts, such as medical doctors and other well-trained healthcare personnel. Informed ministers, like church leaders, may play a key role to counsel couples through connecting spiritual and physical aspects of life. In so doing, they would effectively avoid serious consequences that may result from scientific ignorance or misunderstanding and misapplication of the biblical passages about conception and contraception.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The leadership and members of the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda— *Association des Eglises de Pentecôte au Rwanda* (ADEPR) face a challenge of making an informed decision regarding the use of artificial contraceptive. This article then asks: How might a theological understanding regarding modern contraception assist the leadership and members of the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda (ADEPR) to teach about modern contraception? Smith's four step research method was used to answer this question using Psalm 27 as a biblical basis to assist in making an informed decision regarding the use of modern contraceptives among church members.

The article shows that the contextual analysis of Psalm 127 indicates that the central theme is about trusting in a sovereign God and not about natalism. In additions, different denominations have

shifted from the traditional position of opposing the use modern contraceptives to embracing the use of modern contraceptives.; a stance that resonates with African female theologians and feminists who support the use of artificial contraceptives.

It was also found that the Bible neither supports nor rejects the use of contraceptives. Hence, the article eventually inferred that the legitimate use of contraceptives does not contradict the Bible. It proceeded to suggest some practical guidelines regarding the use of artificial contraceptives as an effective way to promote the welfare of Christian families and society in general.

Consequently, the article suggests two recommends:

The ADEPR leadership should harmonize and issue an official document on the use of artificial contraceptives, which should not just reflect the opinion of pastors, but also experts in that field.

The ADEPR should organize consistent teachings on reproductive health. It seems that the reproductive-related topics are taboo in ADEPR and just left in the hands of medical and health personnel as well as teachers of biology at schools. Members should be taught about both the biblical view and the physiology of reproduction. This will promote sexuality realities and issues awareness. In so doing, unplanned pregnancies and complications will be avoided or effectively mitigated. The ADEPR should help, youth especially, not to take advantage of artificial contraceptives and start indulging in sexual relations.

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