

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

At the first stage of life, centers for natural methods of regulating fertility should be promoted as a valuable help to responsible parenthood, in which all individuals, and in the first place the child, are recognized and respected in their own right and where every decision is guided by the ideal of the sincere gift of self. (*EV*, #88)

From the scientific point of view, these methods are becoming more and more accurate and make it possible in practice to make choices in harmony with moral values. An honest appraisal of their effectiveness should dispel certain prejudices which are still widely held, and should convince married couples, as well as health-care and social workers, of the importance of proper training in this area. (*EV*, #97)

The Church is grateful to those who, with personal sacrifice and often unacknowledged dedication, devote themselves to the study and spread of these methods, as well to the promotion of education in the moral values which they presuppose. (*EV*, #97)

It is therefore morally unacceptable to encourage, let alone impose, the use of methods such as contraception, sterilization, and abortion in order to regulate births. (*EV*, #90)

In fact, as experience bears witness, not every conjugal act is followed by a new life. God has wisely disposed natural laws and rhythms of fecundity which, of themselves, cause a separation in the succession of births. (*HV*, #11)

If, then, there are serious motives to space out births, which derive from the physical or psychological conditions of husband and wife, or from external conditions, the Church teaches that it is then licit to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions, for the use of marriage in the infertile periods only, and in this way to regulate birth without offending the moral principles which have been recalled earlier. (*HV*, #16)

The Church is coherent with herself when she considers recourse to the infertile periods to be licit, while at the same time condemning, as being always illicit, the use of means directly contrary to fecundation, even if such use is inspired by reasons which may appear honest and serious. In reality, there are essential differences between the two cases; in the former, the married couple make legitimate use of a natural disposition; in the latter, they impede the development of natural processes. (*HV*, #16)

The choice of the natural rhythms involves accepting the cycle of the person that is the woman and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control. To accept the cycle and to enter into dialogue means to recognize both spiritual and corporal character of conjugal communion, and to live personal love with its requirement of fidelity. In this context the couple comes to experience how conjugal communion is enriched with those values of tenderness and affection which constitute the inner soul of human sexuality in its physical dimension also. In this way, sexuality is

respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension, and is never "used" as an "object" that by breaking the personal unity of soul and body, strikes at God's creation itself at the level of the deepest interaction of nature and person. (FC, #32)

In the light of the experience of many couples and of the data provided by the different human sciences, theological reflection is able to perceive and is called to study further the difference, both anthropological and moral, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle: it is a difference which is much wider and deeper than is usually thought, one which involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality. (FC, #32)

Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods, is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality. These methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them and favor the education of an authentic freedom. In contrast, "every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible" is intrinsically evil:

Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality....The difference, both anthropological and moral, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle...involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality. (CCC, #2370)

Taking advantage of the temporary natural sterility in the Ogino-Knaus method does not violate the natural order...since conjugal relations respond to the will of the Creator. (Pius XII, *Allocution to the Members of the Seventh Congress on Hematology*, September 12, 1958)

Free to choose the number of children they desire, the couple must be equally free to use natural methods for the responsible regulation of their fertility, for serious reasons and in conformity with the teaching of the church. These various methods deserve to be known and spread widely. Couples must be offered the means to freely exercise their responsible motherhood and fatherhood. The artificial methods of birth control as well as sterilization do not respect the human person of a woman and man because they eliminate or impede fertility, which is an integral part of the person. (PCF, *The Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends*, March 25, 1994, #76)