

## CONTRACEPTION: IS ITS USE PERMISSIBLE?

We must always approach this question with the understanding that God loves us and has a plan for our lives so that we might reflect his loving goodness and be happy with him for eternity.

God is love. God is the author of human love. Human sexuality was his idea as a part of his sacred plan for our lives and our happiness. Only by following his plan for our lives can we come to the perfection of happiness. Consider this passage from the Bible.

### Psalm 119: 1-9

*Happy those whose way is blameless, who walk by the teaching of the LORD.  
Happy those who observe God's decrees, who seek the LORD with all their heart.  
They do no wrong; they walk in God's ways.  
You have given them the command to keep your precepts with care.  
May my ways be firm in the observance of your laws!  
Then I will not be ashamed to ponder all your commands.  
I will praise you with sincere heart as I study your just edicts.  
I will keep your laws; do not leave me all alone.  
How can the young walk without fault?  
Only by keeping your words.*

### Almost 2000 Years of Agreement among all Christians

Few realize that up until 1930, all Protestant denominations agreed with the Catholic Church's teaching condemning contraception as sinful. At its 1930 Lambeth Conference, the Anglican church, swayed by growing social pressure, announced that contraception would be allowed in some circumstances. Soon the Anglican church completely caved in, allowing contraception across the board. Since then, all other Protestant denominations have followed suit. Today, the Catholic Church alone proclaims the historic Christian position on contraception.

~ From Catholic Answers website: <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/birth-control>

### Official Catholic Teaching

#### Contraception is a grave offense against marital chastity.

The Church has always taught the intrinsic evil of contraception, that is, of every marital act intentionally rendered unfruitful. This teaching is to be held as definitive and irreformable. Contraception is gravely opposed to marital chastity; it is contrary to the good of the transmission of life (the procreative aspect of matrimony), and to the reciprocal self-giving of the spouses (the unitive aspect of matrimony); it harms true love and denies the sovereign role of God in the transmission of human life. (Pontifical Council for the Family, *Vademecum for Confessors concerning some aspects of the morality of conjugal life*, March 1, 1997)

In 1930, in his encyclical, *Casti Cunnubii* (56), Pope Pius XI declared, "any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin." By identifying contraception as "an offense against the law of God and of nature," the Church reveals that contraception is not merely a violation of a disciplinary church law, but a violation of both divine and natural law.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), par. 2370, quotes Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*: "... '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..."

The Catechism goes on in this paragraph to quote Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*,

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...

Pope John Paul II explains: "By describing the contraceptive act as intrinsically illicit, Paul VI meant to teach that the moral norm is such that it does not admit exceptions. No personal or social circumstances could ever, can now, or will ever, render such an act lawful in itself. (Pope John Paul II, Moral Theology Congress, Rome, 1988)

Fecundity is a good, a gift and an end of marriage. By giving life, spouses participate in God's fatherhood. The regulation of births represents one of the aspects of responsible fatherhood and motherhood. Legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means (for example, direct sterilization or contraception).

(CCC, 2398, 2399)

### **Is it a mortal sin?**

"Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent" (CCC, 1857). Mortal sin therefore has three components: one objective (grave matter) and two subjective (full knowledge and deliberate consent). On the objective level, contraception is mortal or serious sin because it involves an intrinsic evil, which can never be justified under any circumstances. We call this "grave matter." On the subjective level, only God can judge the heart as to whether there is full knowledge and deliberate consent. So while contraception, or artificial birth control, is clearly in the category of "mortal or serious sin" on the objective level, whether it is an actual mortal sin for any individual (the subjective level) depends on whether they know it involves grave matter and are completely free in their deliberate choice. But one should also be aware that "no one is deemed to be ignorant of the principles of the moral law, which are written in the conscience of every man (CCC, 1860). And, once one becomes aware that something is objectively evil (grave matter) one has a moral obligation to avoid it. We cannot compromise ourselves when it comes to mortal sin. "Mortal sin ... results in ... the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell." (CCC, 1861)

Pope Paul VI reminded us of the following:

The observance of the moral law in the field of sexuality and the practice of chastity have been considerably endangered, especially among less fervent Christians, by the current tendency to minimize as far as possible, when not denying outright, the reality of grave sin, at least in people's actual lives. ...

According to the Church's teaching, mortal sin, which is opposed to God, does not consist only in formal and direct resistance to the commandment of charity. It is equally to be found in this

opposition to authentic love which is included in every deliberate transgression, in serious matter, of each of the moral laws.

(Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith & Pope Paul VI, *Persona Humana*, 1975)

### **The relationship between contraception and abortion:**

In 1995 Pope John Paul II declared that "...the pro abortion culture is especially strong precisely where the Church's teaching on contraception is rejected.

Despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree. It is true that in many cases contraception and even abortion are practiced under the pressure of real-life difficulties, which nonetheless can never exonerate from striving to observe God's law fully. Still, in very many other instances such practices are rooted in a hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality, and they imply a self-centered concept of freedom, which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfillment. The life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception.

The close connection which exists, in mentality, between the practice of contraception and that of abortion is becoming increasingly obvious. It is being demonstrated in an alarming way by the development of chemical products, intrauterine devices and vaccines which, distributed with the same ease as contraceptives, really act as abortifacients in the very early stages of the development of the life of the new human being.

(Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 13)

Pope John Paul II affirmed on February 14, 2001 that, "The promotion of the culture of life should be the highest priority in our societies."

### **What about Natural Family Planning (NFP)?**

Natural Family Planning is encouraged. In par. 2370, the Catechism states:

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. ... '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.'

(quoting *Familiaris Consortio*)

Current day methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) are 99% effective - at least as effective as any artificial methods. In addition, natural methods do not carry the baggage of adverse health side effects as do artificial methods of birth control. The *Couple to Couple League* (<http://www.ccli.org>) is one of several organizations that offer training in this safe, healthy and effective method of regulating births. Couples who practice NFP also have less than a 2% divorce rate. They readily testify that this natural approach nourishes and strengthens their marital bond.

### Is it really possible to follow this teaching?

"When the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Mat 19: 25-26)

"The teaching of the Church on the regulation of birth, which promulgates the divine law...would not be practicable without the help of God, who upholds and strengthens the good will of men." (Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 20)

"In their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50)

Let married couples, then, face up to the efforts needed, supported by the faith and hope which "do not disappoint ... because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us;" let them implore divine assistance by persevering prayer; above all, let them draw from the source of grace and charity in the Eucharist. And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is poured forth in the sacrament of Penance. In this way they will be enabled to achieve the fullness of conjugal life described by the Apostle: "husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church"...

(Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 25)

### Catholic Commentary

"The Catholic Church clearly teaches that the use of artificial contraception in all its forms, including direct sterilization, is gravely immoral, is intrinsically evil, is contrary to the law of nature and nature's God...Catholics who practice artificial birth control may not receive Holy Communion without committing sacrilege" – Bishop G.P. Flavin, Bishop of Lincoln Nebraska, 1991.

"How could I...ask my wife, whom I dearly loved, to take oral contraceptives or have an IUD put into place or become sterilized? How could I say to her that I loved her for all of who she is except one major area of her person?" – T. W. Hilgers, M.D., 07/25/93.

"Contraception compromises the intimacy between husband and wife because it negates part of their being; in particular, that which is ordered to procreation...The unselfishness of their spousal love is diluted by the presence of self-interest" – Dr. Donald DeMarco, St. Jerome's College, Waterloo Ontario.

"How right and prophetic are the teachings of the Catholic Church on sexual morality as expressed especially in Pope Pius XI's *Casti Cunnubi* and Pope Paul's VI's *Humanae Vitae*... In 91 countries I find no country where contraception has not lead to abortion, to increasing fornication among the young, to divorce, and all those other evils we see today..." – Fr. Paul Marx, 1998.

### Sacred Scripture

"He [Onan] when he went into his [deceased] brother's wife, spilled his seed upon the ground, lest children should be born in his brother's name. And therefore the Lord slew him, because he did a detestable thing." (Genesis 38: 8-10)

## Teaching of the Early Church Fathers

The Early Fathers of the Church condemned any form of contraception in the strongest of language. This shows the consistency of this teaching from the early days of the Church.

**Clement of Alexandria** wrote in **191 AD**: "To have coitus other than to procreate children is to do injury to nature" (The Instructor of Children, 2:10:95:3).

Again he writes: "Because of its divine institution for the propagation of man, the seed is not to be vainly ejaculated, nor is it to be damaged, nor is it to be wasted" (The Instructor of Children, 2:10:91:2)

Around **307 AD**, **Lactantius** explained that some "complain of the scantiness of their means, and allege that they have not enough for bringing up more children, as though, in truth, their means were in [their] power . . . or God did not daily make the rich poor and the poor rich. Wherefore, if any one on any account of poverty shall be unable to bring up children, it is better to abstain from relations with his wife" (Divine Institutes 6:20).

**Epiphanius of Salamis** wrote in **375 AD**: "They [certain Egyptian heretics] exercise genital acts, yet prevent the conceiving of children. Not in order to produce offspring, but to satisfy lust, are they eager for corruption" (Medicine Chest Against Heresies 26:5:2).

**St. Jerome** wrote in **393 AD**: "But I wonder why he [the heretic Jovinianus] set Judah and Tamar before us for an example, unless perchance even harlots give him pleasure; or Onan, who was slain because he grudged his brother seed. Does he imagine that we approve of any sexual intercourse except for the procreation of children?" (Against Jovinian 1:19).

**St. Augustine** wrote in **400 AD**: "You [Manicheans] make ... [your followers] adulterers of their wives when they take care lest the women with whom they copulate conceive. They take wives according to the laws of matrimony by tablets announcing that the marriage is contracted to procreate children; and then, fearing because of your law [against childbearing] ... they copulate in a shameful union only to satisfy lust for their wives. They are unwilling to have children, on whose account alone marriages are made. ... When this is taken away, husbands are shameful lovers, wives are harlots, bridal chambers are brothels, ..." (Against Faustus 15:7 [A.D. 400]).

Augustine writes again in **419 AD**, "I am supposing, then, although you are not lying [with your wife] for the sake of procreating offspring, you are not for the sake of lust obstructing their procreation by an evil prayer or an evil deed. Those who do this, although they are called husband and wife, are not; nor do they retain any reality of marriage, but with a respectable name cover a shame. Sometimes this lustful cruelty, or cruel lust, comes to this, that they even procure poisons of sterility [oral contraceptives]" (Marriage and Concupiscence 1:15:17).

**Caesarius of Arles** wrote in **522 AD**: "If a woman does not wish to have children, let her enter into a religious agreement with her husband; for chastity is the sole sterility of a Christian woman" (Sermons 1:12 [A.D. 522]).

## Teaching of the Protestant Reformers

Martin Luther said, "[T]he exceedingly foul deed of Onan, the basest of wretches . . . is a most disgraceful sin. It is far more atrocious than incest and adultery. We call it unchastity, yes, a sodomitic sin. For Onan goes in to her; that is, he lies with her and copulates, and when it comes to the point of insemination, spills the semen, lest the woman conceive. Surely at such a time the order of nature

established by God in procreation should be followed. Accordingly, it was a most disgraceful crime. . . . Consequently, he deserved to be killed by God. He committed an evil deed. Therefore, God punished him."

John Calvin said, "The voluntary spilling of semen outside of intercourse between man and woman is a monstrous thing. Deliberately to withdraw from coitus in order that semen may fall on the ground is doubly monstrous. For this is to extinguish the hope of the race and to kill before he is born the hoped-for offspring."

John Wesley warned, "Those sins that dishonor the body are very displeasing to God, and the evidence of vile affections. Observe, the thing which he [Onan] did displeased the Lord—and it is to be feared; thousands, especially of single persons, by this very thing, still displease the Lord, and destroy their own souls." (These passages are cited in Charles D. Provan, *The Bible and Birth Control*, which contains many quotes by historic Protestant figures who recognize contraception's evils.)

### **What should one do if they have been using contraception?**

Pray. Study what the Church teaches on this subject. Read *Humanae Vitae*. Learn about natural family planning (NFP) methods. Check out the *Couple to Couple League* website at <http://www.ccli.org> (1-800-745-8252). Or visit the website for *One More Soul* at <http://www.omsoul.com> (1-800-307-7685). Go to confession to a priest you trust as knowledgeable on the teachings of the Church (yes, unfortunately you will find even some priests who are confused on basic Church teachings such as this one). Talk to your spouse. Pray together as a couple. Make a resolution to follow the commandments of God in all areas of your life – even if this requires serious sacrifice. Stop using artificial birth control.<sup>1</sup> Sign up for an NFP course to learn the natural and morally acceptable way to approach family planning. Hope in the mercy of God to bring the joy of his salvation to even this most intimate area of your life!

If at this time, you find it too difficult to refrain from using artificial birth control, because you are unwilling to abstain from sexual relations and are fearful of becoming pregnant, you should refrain from receiving Holy Communion. Until one is able to make a firm resolve to follow the teaching of the Church in this area and is reconciled with the Church through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, one should not receive Holy Communion. The Church on her part prays for all of her children that they will have the courage and grace to accept and live by the commandments of God in this area.

*"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."* 1John 5:3

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<sup>1</sup> If you have any medical condition that a doctor might use as the basis for prescribing artificial birth control, you may want to consult with an NFP friendly doctor. You could get a referral from *One More Soul* by visiting their site or calling 1-800-302-7685. While there may be some morally permissible, doctor prescribed treatments that may result in infertility as an unwanted side-effect, oftentimes there are better treatments available.