

Treating Fertility As A Gift, Not A Disease

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Last November, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral letter on marriage titled "Love and Life in the Divine Plan" (<http://usccb.org/laity/loveandlife/>).

The letter contains valuable insights for married and engaged couples as well as those involved in marriage preparation.

In this third of six parts, Christian Meert, co-director of the diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life, examines the bishops' pastoral letter and how it relates to practical realities of married life.]

Can you guess who made the following statement?

"I urge the advocates of artificial methods (of birth control) to consider the consequences. Any large use of these methods is likely to result in the dissolution of the marriage bond and in free love . . . birth control to me is a dismal abyss."

Was it one of the popes? A bishop? No, the above quote is from Mahatma Gandhi, the non-Catholic Indian leader who was murdered in 1947,



FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

With Christian Meert

and it highlights the fact that that openness to life is one of the fundamental norms of marriage. In page 4 of their recent pastoral letter, "Love and Life in the Divine Plan," the U.S. bishops expressed their concern regarding the widespread use of contraception.

"We are alarmed that a couple's responsibility to serve life by being open to children is being denied and abandoned more frequently today," they wrote.

The Catholic Church considers contraception to be a grave sin. Through it, a couple tells God, "We don't want you and we don't trust you in this aspect of our life. We know better than you what is good for us. We will call you when we need you!"

By shutting this door on God, a couple refuses to receive the fullness of the grace received in the sacrament of matrimony. Slowly but surely, their relationship with God and each other will disintegrate, if not disappear.

Not only is contraception spiritually harmful, it is physically harmful. Prolonged use of birth-control pills hurts women by increasing the risks of weight gain, high blood pressure, heart disease, infertility and decreased libido.

The hormones in birth-control pills also harm the environment when they enter the water supply, as evidenced by a recent study done by the University of Colorado. Out of 123 randomly chosen fish, 101 were female; 12 were male and

10 had both male and female features.

The church encourages responsible parenthood and the practice of natural family planning (NFP). In this framework, pregnancy is not seen as a disease, and children are not seen as a commodity or a burden but as a gift of God. NFP is not "Catholic contraception." Rather, it allows couples to use their human wisdom in cooperation with God to build their families in a loving and responsible way.

How good it is for spouses, knowing very well when it is the right time, to say to each other: "Hon, tonight, with the

grace of God, we are going to make a baby!"

A note of clarification: In my first article, I wrote that, "If a man or woman is addicted to sex or pornography at the time of marriage, the sacrament is not valid, because living fidelity in that context is impossible." I should have written, "If a man or woman is addicted to sex or pornography at the time of marriage, the sacrament is not valid if that person cannot stop acting on his/her impulse to have sexual relations with a person other than his/her spouse. In such cases, fidelity is excluded at the time of the wedding."