

## **Catholic Birth Control**

by Robert Babecka

A woman I met commented that she had trouble explaining to her Protestant friends how natural family planning (NFP) or periodic abstinence is any different from using contraception. I suspect that other faithful Catholics may have the same difficulty. For those not aware, NFP is a technique whereby a woman closely monitors her physical conditions (temperature, mucus, and/or cervix) to determine with a very high degree of accuracy whether she is fertile. The couple uses that information in their decisions regarding when they will have sex.

In order to compare the morality of these acts it is important to understand two aspects of any moral decision--ends and means. The end is what someone is trying to achieve; the means is how that person plans to achieve that end. Let's compare three methods of birth control--periodic abstinence, contraception, and abortion. If we assume that a married couple wishes to delay giving birth for a year for some very "Sound Reasons," all three methods are equivalent regarding the end they are trying to achieve.

The evaluation of the morality of these methods should not end there. If we compare the means being considered, we see that abortion differs from the other two in that it causes the death of an innocent person. Anyone who recognizes the sanctity of human life should consider abortion wrong.

What about NFP? Two things are required to practice NFP--periodic abstinence and awareness of the woman's fertility. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in deciding to abstain from having sex. God has not commanded us to have sex every day. There is also nothing wrong in a woman having knowledge of her body. Knowledge comes from God. It is possible for a couple to use NFP wrongly, but this only occurs if the end they are trying to achieve is wrong. An example would be a married couple unreasonably closed to new life, only concerned with worldly interests.

What about contraception? The Church clearly states that doing anything to deliberately make the sexual act infertile is intrinsically evil. The Church recognizes that God created the sexual act with two purposes--to bring forth new life and to strengthen the bond between spouses. Sexual pleasure is not the end of the act but only a means to encourage us to engage in it. When a couple deliberately prevents the procreative aspect of the act they are changing the purpose of the act and making it unnatural. Although contraceptive sex may appear the same as natural sex, its intrinsic nature more closely resembles masturbation or sodomy. These acts are committed with the main purpose being pleasure. It is only through recognition of God's sovereignty over sexual conduct that someone can understand that masturbation, sodomy, and artificial birth control are wrong. People involved in these practices seek to remove God from the sexual act.

The question is not, "How is NFP any different from contraceptive sex," but "How is contraceptive sex different from sodomy or mutual masturbation?"