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Sexual union has a well-recognized meaning; it means “I find you attractive”; “I care for you”; “I will try to work for your happiness”; “I wish to have a deep bond with you”. Some who engage in sexual intercourse do not mean these things with their actions; they wish simply to use another for their own sexual pleasure. They have lied with their bodies in the same way as someone lies who says “I love you” to another simply for the purposes of obtaining some favour from him or her.

It is easy for us to want to have sexual intercourse with lots of people; but we generally want to have babies with only one person. One is saying something entirely different with one’s body when one says “I want only to have sexual pleasure with you” and when one says “I am willing to be a parent with you”.

In fact, one of the most certain ways to distinguish simple sexual attraction from love is to think about whether all you want from another person is sexual pleasure, or whether you would like to have

a baby with him or her. We generally are truly in love with those with whom we want to have babies; we do want our lives totally tied up with theirs. We want to become one with them in the way in which having a baby makes us one with another – our whole lives are intertwined with theirs; we buy diapers with them, and give birthday parties, and pay for college and plan weddings. A non-contracepted act of sexual intercourse says again just what our marriage vows say “I am yours for better or worse, in sickness and

health, till death do us part.” Having babies with another is to share a lifetime endeavour with another.

A sexual act open to the possibility of procreation ideally represents the kind of bond to which spouses have committed themselves. Contraceptives, however, convey the message that while sexual intercourse is desired, there is no desire for a permanent bond with the other person. The possibility of an everlasting bond has been willfully removed from the very act designed to best express the

desire for such a relationship. It reduces the sexual act to a lie.

Contraception, then, is an offense against one’s body, against one’s God, and against one’s relationship with one’s spouse.

Church wants couples to be happy

The church condemns contraception not because it wants to deny spouses sexual pleasure but because it wants to help them find marital happiness and to help them have happy homes for without these our well being as individuals and as a society is greatly endangered. Section 18 of *Humanae Vitae* states:

[I]t is not surprising that the church finds herself a sign of contradiction – just as was Christ, her Founder. But this is not reason for the church to abandon the duty entrusted to her of preaching the moral law firmly and humbly, both the natural law and the law of the Gospel.

Since the church did not make either of these laws, she cannot change them. She can only be their guardian and interpreter; thus it would never be right

for her to declare as morally permissible that which is truly not so. For what is immoral is by its very nature always opposed to the true good of Man.

By preserving the whole moral law of marriage, the church knows that she is supporting the growth of a true civilization among men.

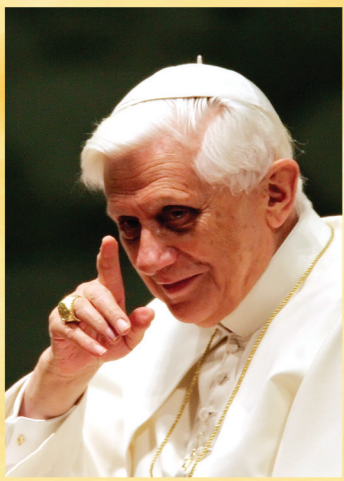
In teaching that contraception is intrinsically immoral, the church is not imposing a disciplinary law on Catholics; she is preaching only what nature and the Gospel preach. By now we should have learned – the hard way – that to defy and overindulge our sexual nature, to go against the laws of nature and God, is to inflict terrible damage on ourselves as individuals and our society as a whole. □



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She has written extensively on church teachings on morality, in particular on the evils of contraception and abortion. This article is adapted from her article, “*Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later*”.

Pope Benedict XVI defends the church’s teaching against artificial birth control and said its wisdom has become clearer in light of new scientific discoveries and social trends. He says that the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* was a “gesture of courage”. He acknowledges that its teachings have been controversial and difficult for Catholics, but in an age in which sexual activity can become like a drug, people need to be reminded that married love should always involve the whole person and be open to new life.



The right way to plan a family

By Janet Smith

MUST SPOUSES HAVE as many children as is physically possible? This has never been the teaching of the church. Spouses are expected to be responsible about their child-bearing, to bring forth children that they can raise well. But the means used to limit family size must be moral.

Methods of Natural Family Planning are very effective means and moral means for planning one’s family; for helping spouses to get pregnant when they want to have a child and for helping them to delay having a child when it would not be responsible to have a child. NFP allows couples to respect their bodies, obey their God, and fully respect their spouses.

Natural Family Planning is not the outmoded rhythm method, a method which was based on the calendar. Rather, NFP is a highly scientific way of determining when a woman is fertile based on observing various bodily signs. The couple who want to avoid a pregnancy, abstain from sexual intercourse during the fertile period. The statistics on the reliability of NFP rival the most effective forms of the Pill. And NFP is without the health risks and it is moral.

Couples using NFP find that it has positive results for their marital relationships and their relationship with God. When couples are abstaining during the fertile period they are not thwarting the act of sexual intercourse since they are not engaging in sexual

intercourse. When they are engaging in sexual intercourse during the infertile period they are not withholding their fertility since they do not have it to give at that time. They learn to live in accord with the natural rhythms of their body. In a word, use of NFP may involve non-procreative acts, but never, as with contraception, anti-procreative acts.

Many find it odd that periodic abstinence should be beneficial rather than harmful to a marriage. But abstinence can be another way of expressing love, as it is between

Do not be misled. Natural Family Planning is not the outmoded calendar-based rhythm method. Rather, NFP is a highly scientific way of determining when a woman is fertile.

those who are not married, or between those for whom engaging in sexual intercourse involves a significant risk. Certainly most who begin to use NFP, especially those who were not chaste before marriage and who have used contraception, generally find the abstinence required to be a source of some strain and irritability. Abstinence, of course, like dieting or any form of self-restraint, brings its hardships; but like dieting and other forms of self-denial, it also brings its benefits. And after all,

spouses abstain for all sorts of reasons – because one or the other is out of town or ill, for instance.

Spouses using NFP find that the method helps them learn to communicate better with each other – and abstinence gives them the opportunity to do so. As they learn to communicate their affection in non-genital ways and as they learn to master their sexual desires, they find a new liberation in the ability to abstain from sexual intercourse. Many find that an element of romance re-enters the relationship during the times of abstinence and an element of excitement accompanies the reuniting. They have gained the virtue of self-mastery since now they can control their sexual desires rather than being in the control of their sexual desires.

Women using NFP generally feel revered by their husbands since their husbands do not make them use unhealthy and unpleasant contraceptives. Men using NFP generally have greater self-respect since they have gained control over their sexual desires and can now engage in sexual intercourse as an act of love not as an act of mere sexual urgency.

A proof that NFP is good for a marriage is that whereas in the U.S. over fifty percent of marriages end in divorce (and it is safe to assume that most of these couples are contracepting), very, very few couples who use NFP ever divorce; they seem to bond in a deeper way than those who are contracepting. □

NFP in Singapore: Few takers

NFP works as well as the pill, so why isn’t it more popular or better promoted here?

By Daniel Tay

SINGAPORE – A World Health Organization trial in five developing countries shows NFP to have an effective rate of more than 99 percent if used according to the guidelines. That is as good as oral contraceptives without any negative side effects.

Additional benefits that come from using NFP include shared responsibility for a pregnancy which lifts the burden of fertility control from one partner, and it encourages an attitude of mutual and responsible loving that is the foundation of successful and intelligent family planning.

According to “The Billings Method” by Dr Evelyn Billings and Dr Ann Westmore, “When a woman knows the days when she will not conceive, she loses her fear and expresses her love generously. Thus mutual love is generated.”

About 90 percent of women can learn to identify her fertile days within a month of usage of NFP, but most take up to four cycles (or six months) to become confident of using NFP properly.

NFP is not limited to Catholics only, but, as it is a scientific method, it is available for use with any woman, regardless of the length and regularity of her menstrual cycle.

But if NFP is such a good method to delay pregnancies why are there so few NFP practitioners, and why do many priests seem reluctant to support and promote NFP in their parishes? And why doesn’t the government promote it more?

“Perhaps it is because we confuse NFP with the rhythm method,” Gynaecologist Dr Douglas Ong told priests at their monthly day of recollection at the St. Francis Xavier Major Seminary on Jun 18. The secular media has been effective in promoting the rhythm method as ineffective, and many people, priests included, confuse the rhythm method with NFP, he said.

Dr John Hui, Immediate Past Master of the Catholic Medical Guild of Singapore, related that during his studies in medical school, budding doctors were never even told of the existence of the Billings Ovulation Method. “We only heard of the rhythm method, which our professors immediately dismissed as unscientific and ineffective,” he said.

Also, with contraception, which is heavily promoted, “there’s money to be made” through the sale of chemicals and devices, explained Luke Anthony, an NFP instructor. □

“Contraception changes our fertility to suit our behaviour; NFP changes our behaviour to suit our fertility,” Dr Douglas Ong, gynaecologist

FAITH & LIFE

NFP in Singapore

Year	2007	2006	2005
No. of Catholic marriages	805	821	841
No. of couples at NFP classes	294	274	211

NFP clients: 60 percent come from Marriage Preparation Course; 20 percent from Engaged Encounter; 20 percent from other sources.

NFP CAN BE learnt at one of the 15 NFP centres in Singapore parishes.

While it is not required for Catholics in Singapore to learn NFP before getting married, there are some priests who direct couples to learn NFP before going through their wedding ceremony. Among them are Fathers Richards Ambrose, Francis Lee, and Anthony Hutjes.

Catholic couples who are preparing for marriage are required to go through either the Marriage Preparation Course (MPC) or to attend Engaged Encounter (EE). One of the six weekends at MPC is devoted to human sexuality, contraception, and NFP, after which couples will get to meet the NFP instructors.

One of the sessions at EE focuses on this topic as well.

For more information on NFP go to www.catholic.org.sg/NFP

NFP centres at parishes

- Blessed Sacrament
- Christ the King
- Holy Cross
- Holy Family
- Holy Spirit
- Immaculate Heart of Mary
- Our Lady Star of the Sea
- Risen Christ
- St. Anne's
- St. Anthony
- St. Bernadette
- St. Francis Xavier
- St. Mary the Angels

- Catholic Archdiocesan Youth Centre*
- Mt. Alvernia Hospital*

A matter of (some) opinion

SINGAPORE – CatholicNews emailed some of our readers for their thoughts on questions on Humane Vitae and Natural Family Planning. We received 37 responses, most of which were from people in their 20s.

We did not try to make it a scientific survey and the responses may not be representative of our readers or of the Catholic population in Singapore. In fact, some of the answers from the respondents appear inconsistent or ambiguous. There were no responses to questions in some cases.

But “the survey” still makes interesting and, perhaps, useful reading.

All respondents said that they know what the church teaches about contraception.

However, when asked if they would encourage people to practise contraception, 24 said “no” but six said “yes” and the rest were uncertain – depends on circumstances, they said. If I were a missionary in Africa

or a poor country, maybe contraception is a lesser evil than asking them to abstain, one said.

Thirty respondents said they had heard of Natural Family Planning and seven had not.

Only 14 were interested to learn know more about NFP. Ten were not interested, some because they knew about it already. (A few said that they heard about NFP from the Marriage Preparation Course.) There was confusion too with some thinking that NFP is the rhythm method.

As to when and where was the last time they heard a priest talk, advise or teach about church teachings on contraception and NFP, 22 said they had never heard it mentioned by a priest. Fifteen had, but most could not remember when, or, if they could recall, it was usually a long time ago and only superficially. One year ago at a prayer rally, said one respondent. Another said he remembered Msgr Francis Lau mentioning it briefly some time back, in his homily.

Almost everyone – 32 of them – agreed that Catholics need to be better informed about church teachings.

Two mentioned that they learned about church teaching from CatholicNews. The section on family life is fairly good, but it is also very wordy, one said.

An undergraduate said she learned of NFP during the Theology of the Body talks, which are held twice a semester. She suggested that not only should more efforts be made to impart information but more innovative and interesting ways, e.g. the use of humour in advertisements/talks/roadshows even, should be used to spread such knowledge.

Young people need to be introduced to a framework where they can appreciate and understand the church’s teachings on sexuality, not just contraception, better so that they can more readily embrace them and share them with their peers, one respondent suggested. □

Britain’s brave new world?

Britain’s new hybrid embryo bill ignores ethical concerns. Will Singapore go the same way?

By Austen Ivereigh

THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT’S decision on May 19 to allow laboratories in Britain to create a new kind of embryo, part human and part animal, was hailed as a victory for science over religious (and specifically Catholic) doctrine. In reality, it was the victory of a newly fashionable secularist dogma – the notion that scientific inquiry should be unconstrained – over the far more reasonable idea that tampering with human life for medical purposes requires a compelling ethical justification. The Parliament, in other words, has declared science in Britain to be an ethics-free zone.

This was made clear during a panel discussion held on the eve of the vote on the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill. The case in favour was put by a professor of genetics at Newcastle University, John Burn, a pioneer of stem cell research in the same institute that in the mid-1990s brought Dolly, the cloned sheep, into the world. Instead of a passionate defence of how vital embryonic stem cells are to future cures of Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease, Professor Burn candidly admitted that most of the funding and resourcing at his Center for Life went into ethically incontrovertible adult stem

cells, where all the therapeutic advances have so far been made.

Embryonic research, he said, was a small sideline, involving just five percent of its research grants and only two scientists. But he believed that embryonic stem cell research (legal in Britain since the original H.F.E. Act of 1990) should continue, because it could yet yield results; and because there was a shortage of human eggs available for cloning, he wanted to be able to take a cow’s egg and fuse it with human cells. The future of embryonic research, in other words, requires hybrids (half-animal, half-human) as well as cybrids (99 percent human, 1 percent animal). Embryonic research was justified because it gave scientists more information about the behaviour of early stem cell development, not because it was expected to lead to cures. Professor Burn had no ethical problem with embryonic research and did not see why the Catholic Church – which, he claimed, had bizarre theories about 14-day-old embryos having souls – should be allowed to stop him.

Unlike the British prime minister, Gordon Brown, who has adopted the hype of the medical research lobby that embryo experiments are vital to achieving “breakthroughs” using stem cell research, Professor Burn stuck to facts. But what was missing from his justification was any moral calculation; there was no weighing up of the benefits of the ends against the ethical quandaries of the means. Having opened the door,

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he just wanted to open it farther, and he failed to see why anyone should block it with dogma.

Ethical considerations missing

Although the British press tried to raise it, Galileo’s ghost was nowhere to be seen in this debate. In their mostly gentle statements (with the exception of Cardinal Keith O’Brien of Edinburgh, who could not resist some Frankenstein metaphors), Catholic bishops have been careful to point out the benefits of stem cell research while reminding people that “scientific pragmatism is always counterbalanced with ethical considerations”, as the Archbishop of Birmingham, Vincent Nichols, put it. The ethical duty that society owes to human life requires a stringent scrutiny of claims of possible benefits, he said. “If not, then early human life will become unprotected ‘fair game’ for any use at all.”

The church, in other words, was proposing a reasoned examination

of the ethics weighed against the anticipated benefits – while the medical research lobby has been resorting to an entirely unreasonable claim to be free of any such examination.

The government went further, claiming that the prospect of cures made the research an “inherently moral endeavour”. By focusing a skeptical public on the prospect of freedom from crippling diseases and by conflating the achievements in adult stem cell research with embryonic research, there was no need to deal with the ethical reservations. Prime Minister Gordon Brown claimed quite untruthfully that scientists “are close to the breakthroughs that will allow embryonic stem cells to be used to treat a much wider range of conditions”, before adding, wildly, that medical researchers “argue that the safest way to maintain progress is to make use of animal eggs from which the animal genetic material is almost entirely removed”.

Yet the progress of adult stem cell research in no way depends on or has even benefited from embryonic stem cell research. As a number of leading stem cell scientists wrote in a letter to The Times of London, “such proposals are highly speculative in comparison to established sources of human stem cells and we remain unaware of any cogent evidence suggesting any might yield significant therapeutic dividend”. Ethical considerations aside, it would be far too dangerous: they are prone to forming tumours.

Some months ago the highly regarded New England Journal of Medicine regretted that “the technical difficulties and ethical complexities” of using cloned human embryonic stem cells “were always likely to render it impractical”. As the neuroscientist Professor Neil Scolding wrote recently, “Few serious embryonic stem-cell scientists will speak in support of cybrid embryos specifically on the basis of their intrinsic potential for therapeutic research.”

The idea that there is no need to weigh ethical reservations about the use of human life against the anticipated benefits of research makes Britain’s neighbours nervous. In Germany, where creating chimeras (human-animal hybrids) is against the law, the German Medical Association said it showed that the British were “developing a completely different relationship to growing life”. Germany’s 20th-century experience of the commodification of human beings has sensitized its culture to the need for placing moral fences around scientific research. But in Britain, members of Parliament who had the same sensitivity were drowned out by the panegyrics to scientific freedom and the scornful dismissal of “religious” reservations. As Professor Burn told the panel, under the microscope 14-day-old human embryos “look just like semolina”.

Austen Ivereigh, former adviser to Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, is a writer and journalist based in London. □