

The vocation of marriage

123. Human sexuality has both a unitive and a procreative dimension. The procreation of new human life is the result of sexual union. This is how nearly all children come into existence. The sexual union of a man and a woman is 'ordained in itself to the procreating of new life' (*On Human Life (Humane Vitae)*, 1968 paragraph 11).

125. The love that is implied by sexual intercourse is exclusive, committed and open to the possibility of new life. This does not mean that the desire for a child is the only acceptable motive for expressing sexual love. Sexual union within marriage can be a moment of celebration, of support, of reconciliation or of a whole range of expressions of married love. Nevertheless, the procreative aspect of sexual love remains an essential part of the human meaning of sexuality, to be respected as such even when the couple is not seeking to have a child. Responsible parenthood will often involve planning when to have children, God willing, but this should not be by means of contraception that places a barrier between the partners, or that suppresses the healthy working of the body to make the act infertile. These actions undermine the full human meaning of sexuality. They also raise other medical and moral questions that should not be overlooked: the long term health implications they may have for women and the serious impact they seem to be having on the environment. In addition to this, some chemical contraceptives do not operate only by preventing conception, but also work by preventing those embryos that are occasionally conceived from implanting.

126. The need for effective family planning requires a different and more radical approach. What is required is reliable knowledge of the cycle of female fertility and a willingness to agree to abstain from sexual union at certain times. The last twenty years have seen great improvements in this area and Natural Family Planning is now regarded by respected medical authorities as being highly effective for those who are instructed by trained teachers and who are strongly motivated. There are also some attractive elements in this approach to family planning. These include self-control, greater awareness of bodily function, the involvement of both partners on an equal basis, and the absence of health risks or dependence on constant use of pharmaceuticals. The values of this holistic and human approach to family planning deserve to be considered seriously.

QUESTIONS

The church says that the 'unitive and procreative' aspects of procreation of the marital act must not be separated without threatening the integrity and inner truth of the act itself. Discuss

The Planned Parenthood arm of the United Nations is pushing an agenda for fertility control on to the developing world which is 'at loggerheads' with the Holy See which has 'observers' at the United Nations meetings. Discuss

Does the group think that the basics of natural family should be taught in the upper classes of catholic secondary schools instead of treating conception as a disease against which they need to protect themselves by artificial means?