

42. Natural Family Planning is Sinful Birth Control

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What is Natural Family Planning?

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is the practice of deliberately restricting the marital act exclusively to those times when the wife is infertile so as to avoid the conception of a child. NFP is used for the same reasons that people use artificial contraception: to deliberately avoid the conception of a child while carrying out the marital act.

Antipope Paul VI explained correctly that NFP is birth control when he promoted it in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (# 16), July 25, 1968:

“...married people may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system **and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth** in a way which does not in the least offend the moral principles which We have just explained.”¹

Why is NFP wrong?

NFP is wrong because it's birth control; it's *against* conception. It's a refusal on the part of those who use it to be open to the children that God planned to send them. **It's no different in its purpose from artificial contraception**, and therefore it's a moral evil just like artificial contraception.

The Teaching of the Catholic Papal Magisterium

Pope Pius XI spoke from the Chair of Peter in his 1931 encyclical *Casti Connubii* on Christian marriage. His teaching shows that all forms of birth prevention are evil. We quote a long excerpt from his encyclical which sums up the issue.

Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (#'s 53-56), Dec. 31, 1930: “And now, Venerable Brethren, we shall explain in detail the evils opposed to each of the benefits of matrimony. First consideration is due to the offspring, which many have the boldness to call the disagreeable burden of matrimony and which they say is to be carefully avoided by married people not through virtuous continence (which Christian law permits in matrimony when both parties consent) but by frustrating the marriage act. Some justify

this criminal abuse on the ground that they are weary of children and wish to gratify their desires without their consequent burden. Others say that they cannot on the one hand remain continent nor on the other can they have children because of the difficulties whether on the part of the mother or on the part of the family circumstances.

“But no reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, **those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural powers and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.**

“Small wonder, therefore, if Holy Writ bears witness that the Divine Majesty regards with greatest detestation this horrible crime and at times has punished it with death. As St. Augustine notes, **‘Intercourse even with one’s legitimate wife is unlawful and wicked where the conception of offspring is prevented.’** Onan, the son of Judah, did this and the Lord killed him for it (Gen. 38:8-10).

“Since, therefore, openly departing from the uninterrupted Christian tradition some recently have judged it possible solemnly to declare another doctrine regarding this question, **the Catholic Church**, to whom God has entrusted the defense of the integrity and purity of morals, standing erect in the midst of the moral ruin which surrounds her, in order that she may preserve the chastity of the nuptial union from being defiled by this foul stain, **raises her voice** in token of her divine ambassadorship **and through Our mouth proclaims** anew: **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 offence against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin.”²**

One can see that Pope Pius XI condemns all forms of contraception as mortally sinful because they frustrate the marriage act. Does this condemn NFP? Yes it does, but the defenders of Natural Family Planning say “no.” They argue that in using Natural Family Planning to avoid conception they are not deliberately frustrating the marriage *act* or designedly depriving it of its natural *power* to procreate life, as is done with artificial contraceptives. They argue that NFP is “natural.”

Common sense should tell those who deeply consider this topic that these arguments are specious because NFP has as its entire purpose the avoidance of conception. However, the attempted justification for NFP – the claim that it doesn’t interfere with the marriage act *itself* and is therefore permissible – must be specifically refuted. This claim is specifically refuted by a careful look at the teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage and **ITS PRIMARY PURPOSE**. It is the teaching of the Catholic Church on the primary purpose of marriage (and the primary purpose of the marriage act) which condemns NFP.

Catholic dogma teaches us that the primary purpose of marriage (and the conjugal act) is the procreation and education of children.

Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (# 17), Dec. 31, 1930: **“The primary end of marriage is the procreation and the education of children.”³**

Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (# 54), Dec. 31, 1930:

“Since, therefore, **the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children**, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural powers and *purpose* sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.”⁴

Besides this primary purpose, there are also secondary purposes for marriage, such as mutual aid, the quieting of concupiscence, and the cultivating of mutual love. **But these secondary purposes must always remain subordinate to the primary purpose of marriage (the procreation and education of children).** This is the key point to remember in the discussion on NFP.

Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (# 59), Dec. 31, 1930: "For in matrimony as well as in the use of the matrimonial right there are also secondary ends, such as mutual aid, the cultivating of mutual love, and the quieting of concupiscence which husband and wife are not forbidden to consider **SO LONG AS THEY ARE SUBORDINATED TO THE PRIMARY END** and so long as the intrinsic nature of the act is preserved."⁵

Therefore, even though NFP doesn't directly interfere with the marriage *act itself*, as its defenders love to stress, it makes no difference. **NFP is wrong because practicing it subordinates the primary end (or purpose) of marriage and the marriage act (the procreation and education of children) to the secondary ends.**

NFP subordinates the primary end of marriage to other things by deliberately attempting to avoid children (i.e., to avoid the primary end) while having marital relations. NFP therefore inverts the order intended by God. It does the very thing that Pope Pius XI solemnly teaches may not lawfully be done. And this point *refutes* all of the arguments made by those who defend NFP; for all of the arguments made by those who defend NFP focus on the marriage act itself, while they ignore the fact that it makes no difference if a couple does not interfere with the act itself *if they subordinate or thwart the primary PURPOSE of marriage.*

To summarize: the only difference between artificial contraception and NFP is that artificial contraception frustrates the power of the marriage *act itself*, while NFP frustrates its primary purpose (by subordinating the procreation of children to other things).

God's Word

It's not a complicated matter to understand that using Natural Family Planning to avoid pregnancy is wrong. It's written on man's heart that such activity is wrong.

Genesis 30:1-2- "And Rachel seeing herself without children, envied her sister, and said to her husband: Give me children, otherwise I shall die. **And Jacob being angry with her, answered: Am I as God, who hath deprived thee of the fruit of thy womb?**"

We all know that God is the One who opens the womb, the One who killeth and maketh alive.

Genesis 30:22- "The Lord also remembering Rachel, heard her, **and opened her womb.**"

1 Kings 2:6- "The Lord killeth and maketh alive, he bringeth down to Hell, and bringeth back again."

So why would a woman who desires to fulfill the will of God make a systematic effort to avoid God sending her a new life? What excuse could such a person possibly make for going out of her way to calculate how to have marital relations without getting pregnant with the child God was going to send? Why would a woman (or a man) who believes that God opens the womb try to avoid His opening of the womb by a meticulous and organized effort, involving charts, cycles and thermometers? The answer is that those who engage in such behavior as NFP turn from God (which is the essence of sin) and refuse to be open to His will.

When a married couple goes out of their way to avoid children, by deliberately avoiding the fertile times and restricting the marriage act exclusively to infertile times, they are committing a sin against the natural law – they are sinning against the God whom they know sends life. NFP is, therefore, a sin against the natural law, since God is the author of life and NFP thwarts His designs.

People Know that NFP is a sin

Below are a few very interesting testimonies from people who have either used NFP or were taught NFP. Their comments have been taken from “the letters to the editor” section of a publication which carried an article on NFP.⁶ (Their names were given in the original letter.) Their letters demonstrate that the women who use NFP, as well as the men who tolerate or cooperate with it, are convicted of its sinfulness by the natural law written on their hearts. Those who use NFP know that they are thwarting the will of God and practicing contraception.

“Dear Editor... I was a non-religious divorced pagan before I met my husband who was, at the time, a minimal practicing Catholic. I became Catholic in 1993 and we were married in 1994. I had no idea at that time that Catholics were allowed to do anything to prevent a child. I had never even heard of NFP until the priest we were meeting with during the six months prior to our wedding handed me a packet of papers and basically said, ‘here, you’ll want to learn this.’ When I got home, I briefly thumbed through the papers. I saw calendars, stickers, and charts. To be honest, it was mind-boggling all the effort people would go through just so they could have intimacy without consequence. It was also shocking to me that this was being promoted before I even took the vows on my wedding day! I threw the packet away and have never looked back. I am thankful that I never learned NFP... I wonder which of my children wouldn’t be here had I chosen to keep those papers and learn NFP?”

“Dear Editor... I am a mother to seven children and can share my own experiences. NFP did NOT bring my marriage closer. I struggled with reconciling myself to the fact that scripture states a husband and wife should be submissive and not separate unless for prayer. We were avoiding pregnancy... plain and simple. There can be nothing spiritual about telling your spouse that you can’t participate in the marital embrace for fear of a child being conceived. Webster’s dictionary defines contraception as: ‘deliberate prevention of conception or impregnation.’ Systematically charting and watching out for those fertile days is the deliberate prevention of conception. I know friends who use it. I’ve talked to them in a very personal way. They do not want any more children. They are using NFP as birth control, which it is. And one friend has been using it for 11 years and ‘hasn’t had any accidents.’ ... I can say that St. Augustine was right on target when he wrote in *The Morals of the Manichees*: ‘Marriage, as the marriage tablets themselves proclaim, joins male and female for the procreation of children. Whoever says that to procreate children is a worse sin than to copulate thereby prohibits the purpose of marriage; and he makes the woman no more a wife than a harlot, who, when she has been given certain gifts, is joined to a man to satisfy his lust. If there is a wife, there is matrimony. But there is no matrimony where motherhood is prevented, for then there is no wife.’ ... My favorite comment recently was made by another author comparing NFP to a farmer who plants his corn in the dead of winter so as to avoid a plentiful harvest.”

“Dear Editor... Let me put the NFP debate simply: if it is your intention to avoid having children it really doesn’t matter what method you use. You’ve already committed the sin. If, however, you use contraception as your method of choice, you add to the first sin a second one. As to the oft-repeated mantra of ‘grave reasons,’ allow me to say this:

name one. Look deep into your heart and name one that is really, truly grave... We did the NFP bit for awhile... and have felt revulsion over it ever since. During that time we might have had at least two more children."

"To the Editor: NFP is one of the chief infiltrations of the new-age sex cult into the Church, along with sex-ed and immodest dress... As modern Catholics have been conditioned to embrace mutually contradictory ideas while defending them as consonant, they have been easily deceived by the notion that NFP, as commonly practiced, is somehow different from birth control. I have no training in moral theology, but even I know that the goal of an action determines its substance. When a couple engages in deliberately sterile relations, this is known as birth control, plain and simple."

Planned Parenthood and NFP of the Same Cloth

Have you noticed the similarities between Planned Parenthood (the world's largest abortion provider) and Natural Family Planning? Artificial contraceptives and abortifacients are found under store aisles marked "Family Planning." Like abortionists, family planners consider children as something undesirable, at least temporarily; whereas the true faithful have always considered them as an undeniable blessing from God Himself, planned by His providence from all eternity. "Behold, children are the inheritance of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward... Blessed is the man whose desire is filled with them; he shall not be confounded..." (Psalm 126:3,5).

In publications promoting NFP, the fertile period of the wife is sometimes classified as "not safe" and "dangerous," as though generating new life were considered a serious breach of national security and a little infant a treacherous criminal! This is truly abominable.

Could it be more clear that those who subscribe to this type of behavior and this method shut God and children out and replace them with their own selfish agenda?

Tobias 6:17 - "The holy youth Tobias approaches his bride Sara after three days of prayer, not for fleshly lust but only for the love of posterity. Having been instructed by the Archangel Saint Raphael that to engage in the marital act he must be moved rather for love of children than for lust. For they who in such manner receive matrimony, as to shut out God from themselves, and from their mind, and to give themselves to their lust, as the horse and mule, which have not understanding, over them the Devil hath power."

The word *matrimony* means "the office of motherhood." Those who use NFP attempt to avoid matrimony (the office of motherhood) and shut out God from themselves.

Saint Caesar of Arles: "As often as he knows his wife without a desire for children... without a doubt he commits sin."⁷

Errors Condemned by Pope Innocent XI: "9. **The act of marriage exercised for pleasure only is entirely free of all fault** and venial defect." -Condemned⁸

NFP has eternal and infinite consequences

The following facts may be the most incriminating to the practice of "Natural Family Planning."

If family planners had their way, there would have been no St. Bernadette of Lourdes, who was born from a jail flat; nor St. Therese of Lisieux, who came from a sickly mother who lost three children in a row; nor St. Ignatius Loyola, who was the thirteenth of thirteen children;⁹ **and most certainly not a St. Catherine of Siena, who was the twenty-fifth child in a family of twenty-five children!**¹⁰

Examples of saints who were the last of many children could probably be multiplied for pages. St. Catherine of Siena and the rest of the saints who would have been phased out of existence by NFP will rise in judgment against the NFP generation. Natural Family Planners would have been sure to inform St. Catherine's mother that there was no need having five children (let alone twenty-five!), and that she was wasting her time going through all those pregnancies.

Only in eternity shall we know the immortal souls who have been denied a chance at Heaven because of this selfish behavior. The only thing that can foil the will of the all-powerful God is the will of His puny creatures; for He will not force offspring on anyone, just as He will not violate anyone's free will. NFP is a crime of incalculable proportions. (Just contemplate for a second the thought: if your mom had decided not to have you.)

If family planners had their way, the appearances of Our Lady of Fatima would not have occurred, as she appeared to Lucia (the seventh of seven children), Francisco (the eighth of nine children) and Jacinta (the ninth of nine children). Family Planners, by their selfish thwarting of the will of God, **would have erased from human history the entire message of Fatima**, as well as the incredible miracle of the sun, the extraordinary lives of these three shepherd children, and all the graces of conversion obtained by their heroic sacrifices. How many saints, conversions and miracles have been erased by this abominable birth control practice? Only God knows.

A mother of many children, who was about to be a mother once more, came to Ars (the place where St. John Vianney resided) to seek courage from him. She said to him, "Oh, I am so advanced in years, Father!" St. John Vianney responded: "*Be comforted my child; if you only knew the women who will go to Hell because they did not bring into the world the children they should have given to it!*"

1 Timothy 2:15- "**Yet she shall be saved through child-bearing**; if she continue in faith, and love, and sanctification, with sobriety."

Scripture teaches that a woman can be saved through child-bearing (if she is Catholic and in the state of grace). But NFP advocates would have us believe that a woman can be saved through child-avoiding. Moreover, just as a woman who fulfills the will of God and maintains the state of grace in the state of matrimony is saved by her childbearing, so too are countless women going to be damned for not bearing the children that God wanted them to have.

"Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice and all things will be added unto you."
(Mt. 6:33)

Objections

Objection 1) Natural Family Planning is a justifiable practice of birth control because it does nothing to obstruct the natural power of procreation.

Response: We've already responded to this objection above. We won't repeat all of that here. We will simply summarize again that NFP is condemned because it subordinates the primary PURPOSE of marriage and the conjugal act to other things. This makes the fact that NFP does

nothing to obstruct the marriage act itself irrelevant, since the primary purpose is being frustrated.

Objection 2) Pope Pius XII taught that NFP is lawful for at least certain reasons. So you have no right to condemn it, as he was the pope.

Response: It is true that Pope Pius XII taught that Natural Family Planning is lawful for certain reasons in a series of fallible speeches in the 1950's. However, this does not justify NFP. Pius XII's speeches were fallible, and were therefore vulnerable to error.

In studying papal errors throughout history in preparation for its declaration of papal infallibility, the theologians at Vatican I found that over 40 popes held wrong theological views. In a notorious case of papal error, Pope John XXII held the false view that the just of the Old Testament don't receive the Beatific Vision until after the General Judgment. Pope Honorius I, a validly elected Roman Pontiff, encouraged the heresy of monotheletism (that Our Lord Jesus Christ only had one will), for which he was later condemned by the *Third Council of Constantinople*. But none of these errors were taught by popes from the Chair of St. Peter, just like Pius XII's speech to Italian midwives is not a declaration from the Chair of St. Peter.

One of the most notorious cases of papal error in Church history is the "Synod of the Corpse" of 897. This was where the dead body of Pope Formosus - who by all accounts was a holy and devoted pope - was condemned after his death by Pope Stephen VII for a number of supposed violations of canon law.¹¹ Pope Sergius III was also in favor of the judgment, while later Popes Theodore II and John IX opposed it. This should show us very clearly that **not every decision, speech, opinion or judgment of a pope is infallible**.

One can argue that Pius XII was one of the weakest popes in the history of the Church. (We are not including the Vatican II antipopes, as they are not popes). Pius XII allowed heresy and modernism to flourish; he modernized the holy week liturgy; he taught that theistic evolution could be held and taught by Catholic priests and theologians; and he allowed the denial of the dogma Outside the Church There is No Salvation to run rampant, just to name a few. He was a valid pope, but he was truly the bridge to the apostate Second Vatican Council and the antipopes who imposed it. Those who think that they're safe following something simply because it was endorsed by pre-Vatican II theologians or by Pope Pius XII in his fallible capacity are mistaken. Even though the explosion of the Great Apostasy occurred at Vatican II, its momentum by a departure from the Faith was well in motion prior to Vatican II, as is evidenced from many pre-Vatican II books which promoted condemned heresy and modernism. Most of the priests had already fallen into heresy in the 1950's, as is proven by the fact that almost all of them accepted and embraced the new religion of the Vatican II Church when it was imposed.

The bottom-line remains that it's an infallible teaching of the Catholic Church that the primary end of marriage (and the conjugal act) is the procreation and education of children. Natural Family Planning subordinates the primary end of marriage and the conjugal act to other things and is therefore gravely sinful.

Objection 3) I know that NFP is always wrong, except for certain reasons, and in those cases it is allowable.

Response: We will quote again Pope Pius XI to respond to this objection.

Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (# 54), Dec. 31, 1930:

“But no reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, **those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural powers and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.”¹²**

No reason, however grave it may be, can bring it about that something that is intrinsically evil can become good. NFP subordinates the primary purpose of the conjugal act (the procreation and education of children) to other things and is therefore forbidden.

And this brings us to another point. If NFP is not a sin – if it is simply “natural,” as they say – then why can’t married couples use NFP during the whole marriage and have zero children? If NFP isn’t a sin, then all women are perfectly free to use this method of birth control to phase out of existence all children so that not even one is born. However, basically all of the defenders of NFP would admit that it would be immoral and gravely sinful to use NFP to avoid all new life. But when they make this admission they are admitting that NFP is a sin; otherwise, let them confess that it can be used by all couples for any reason to avoid all children.

Objection 4) In *Casti Connubii* itself, Pope Pius XI taught that married couples could use the periods where the wife cannot become pregnant.

Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (# 59), Dec. 31, 1930: “Nor are those considered as acting against nature who in the married state use their right in the proper manner although on account of natural reasons either of time or of certain defects, new life cannot be brought forth. For in matrimony as well as in the use of the matrimonial right there are also secondary ends, such as mutual aid, the cultivating of mutual love, and the quieting of concupiscence which husband and wife are not forbidden to consider **SO LONG AS THEY ARE SUBORDINATED TO THE PRIMARY END** and so long as the intrinsic nature of the act is preserved.”¹³

Response: Yes, Pope Pius XI taught that married couples could use their marriage rights in the infertile periods of the wife (or when there is a defect of nature or age which prevents new life from being conceived). But he did not teach that they could designedly restrict the marriage act to the infertile periods to avoid a pregnancy, as in Natural Family Planning.

This is why, in the very passage quoted above, Pope Pius XI reiterates that all use of the marriage rights – including when new life cannot be brought forth due to time or nature – must keep the secondary ends of marriage subordinate to the primary end! This teaching is the deathblow to NFP, as NFP itself is the subordination of the primary end of marriage (the procreation and education of children) to other things. So, in summary, the passage above does not teach NFP, but merely enunciates the principle that married couples may use their marriage rights at any time. Further, in the same paragraph, the very paragraph that the defenders of NFP erroneously twist to justify their sinful birth control practice, Pope Pius XI condemns NFP by reiterating the teaching on the primary purpose of marriage, which NFP subordinates to other things.

Objection 5) Everyone admits that “Natural Family Planning” can be used to help a woman achieve a pregnancy. Therefore, the same method can be used to avoid pregnancy.

Response: If a couple is using Natural Family Planning to achieve a pregnancy, it is lawful because in this case they are doing their utmost to fulfill the primary end of marriage (the procreation and education of children). If a couple is using Natural Family Planning to avoid

pregnancy, it is unlawful because in this case they are doing their utmost to avoid the primary end of marriage (the procreation and education of children).

Objection 6) But my traditional priest instructed me in NFP.

Response: When the blind lead the blind, they both fall into the pit (Matthew 15:14). Couples who use NFP know that they are committing a sin. It's written on their hearts. They don't need a priest to tell them it's wrong. Yes, the priests who obstinately instruct people that NFP is okay and defend this birth control method are also guilty, but this doesn't take away the responsibility of the couples who follow their bad advice.

This is why we stress that those who are contributing money to "traditionalist" priests who promote or accept NFP must cease immediately if they don't want to share in their sin and follow them to Hell, as these priests are leading souls to Hell.

This includes the priests of the Society of St. Pius X, the Society of St. Pius V, the C.M.R.I. and almost all independent priests in this time of the Great Apostasy.

Conclusion

Couples who have used NFP, but who are resolved to change, should not despair. NFP is an evil, but God is merciful and will forgive those who are firmly resolved to change their life and confess their sin. Those who have used NFP need to be sorry for their sin and confess to a validly ordained priest that they have practiced birth control (for however long it may have been used). Both the wife and the husband who agreed with the use of NFP need to confess. They should then be open to all of the children that God wishes to bestow upon them – without concern or knowledge of charts, cycles, fertile or infertile, seeking first the kingdom of God and His justice, letting God plan their family.

Endnotes for Section 42:

¹ *The Papal Encyclicals*, by Claudia Carlen, Raleigh: The Pierian Press, Vol. 5, p. 227.

² *The Papal Encyclicals*, Vol. 3 (1903-1939), pp. 399-400.

³ *The Papal Encyclicals*, Vol. 3 (1903-1939), p. 394.

⁴ *The Papal Encyclicals*, Vol. 3 (1903-1939), p. 399.

⁵ *The Papal Encyclicals*, Vol. 3 (1903-1939), p. 394.

⁶ <http://www.seattlecatholic.com>

⁷ Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, 1970, Vol. 3:2233.

⁸ Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, B. Herder Book. Co., Thirtieth Edition, 1957, no. 1159.

⁹ John. J. Delaney, *Pocket Dictionary of Saints* (abridged edition), New York: Double Day, 1980, p. 251.

¹⁰ John. J. Delaney, *Pocket Dictionary of Saints* (abridged edition), 110.

¹¹ Warren H. Carroll, *A History of Christendom*, Vol. 2 (*The Building of Christendom*), Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1987, p. 387.

¹² *The Papal Encyclicals*, Vol. 3 (1903-1939), p. 399.

¹³ *The Papal Encyclicals*, Vol. 3 (1903-1939), p. 394.