

## **Q: Why does the Catholic Church teach that artificial contraception is wrong?**

**(NOTE: Parents, this article is NOT intended for children)**

With all the controversy swirling around the Obama contraception issue, this is a perfect time to address this subject. While the most powerful answers to this question come from the Church's teachings that are broadly based on the Natural Law (the design God Himself has made for the human race), these have been addressed exceptionally well by Pope John Paul II and others. So within this context, I will focus on answering this question specifically from Sacred Scripture and the Early Church.

Perhaps the best Scriptural evidence comes from **Genesis 38**. In Jewish Old Testament law, if your brother dies, you must take your brother's wife as your own and have children by his name (see **Dt 25:5-10**). In **Gen 38**, Onan refuses to do this. He goes to his brother's wife, Tamar, but "spills" his seed. This sin is so serious, that the resulting punishment is death.

Now some argue that Onan was killed because he broke the "Levirate" law of **Dt 25:5-10** -refusing to raise up offspring under his brother's name. But a careful reading of the passages concerned reveals that the punishment for such an action was public humiliation at the hands of the wife, but certainly not death.

No, it is clear that his punishment results from his act of contraception: for "spilling his seed". This has been the constant Christian understanding of this passage from the time of Jesus right up until twentieth century. In fact, very early on, "Onanism" became the common Christian term given to any form of unnatural contraceptive behavior.

Additionally, in the New Testament, the prohibitions against "pharmakeia" (Greek) found in **Gal 5:19**, **Rev 9:21** and **21:8** most likely refer to chemical forms of birth control. The context of all 3 passages is the condemnation of sexual immorality, and 2 of them condemn murder as well. In New Testament times, the word, "pharmakeia", commonly

referred to contraceptive or abortive preparations, but English translations of it rarely convey this sense.

On that note, many don't realize that several commonly used contraceptives, like the Pill, IUD's and others, can actually induce early term abortions! This is stunning to some, but if you doubt this, read the box! This is reason in itself not to use them, in addition to the arguments from Natural Law that the Church gives.

Could you imagine if Pope Pius VI had permitted artificial contraception in the encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, instead of condemning it [and at the time, the Pill was very much at the center of the controversy, but it's abortive potential was as yet, unknown]? He would unknowingly have condoned a form of abortion! This is why the Church always reflects first on God's law, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to define general principles (e.g. is contraception permissible), and then addresses specific related issues (e.g. is it permissible to use the Pill).

It is also noteworthy that modern methods of NFP (natural family planning) like the Billings Method, Symptothermal Method, and others – approved by the Church when used with a proper intention (and this means remaining open to life, considering all children a blessing from God, never using artificial means of contraception, and spacing children based on a conscientious, prayerful openness to God's will, using NFP to lessen the chance of conception only if there are valid, moral reasons to) – are the safest, most effective methods of spacing children available today. They are between 97 and 100 percent effective in preventing pregnancy (far more effective than the pill!), are highly effective in helping achieve pregnancy, have no associated health risks –and they're free!

But what about the Early Church? What did it believe on this issue? It has constantly and unambiguously taught against any form of artificial contraception, right from the time of the Apostles to the current day. No Pope has ever taught differently. In fact, **every** major Christian denomination up until 1930 condemned artificial contraception as a **grave moral evil!** But in 1930, the Anglican Church (at the Lambeth Conference) became the first Protestant denomination to allow

contraception in limited cases. And shortly thereafter, every other Christian denomination followed as well.

How can something be a grave moral evil for 1900 years and then suddenly be permissible? Only the Catholic Church defends this teaching now (and some Eastern Orthodox), and because of this, it is often criticized for not “getting with the modern times” and permitting contraception. But the Church has absolutely no authority to change the teachings of Jesus, only to proclaim them, despite opposition. Moral truths cannot be voted on. Christianity is not a democracy when it comes to God’s truths, but a holy kingship.

But here is the shocker. All the major Reformers vehemently denounced contraception, and were stronger in their condemnations than even some Catholics, comparing it to sodomy and even the murder of unborn persons! For example, in his commentary on Onan and **Genesis 38**, **Martin Luther** writes: *This is a most disgraceful sin... a Sodomitic sin... Surely... **the order of nature established by God in procreation should be followed...** Onan... spilled his seed... and provoked God to such fierce wrath that he destroyed him immediately”.*

Similarly, **John Calvin** would write: *“**Deliberately to withdraw from coitus in order that semen may fall on the ground is doubly monstrous. This is... to kill, before he was born, the hoped-for offspring... Onan, as it were, by a violent abortion... filthily cast upon the ground, the offspring of his brother.**”* Also commenting on Gen 38, **John Wesley** would echo these sentiments as well: *“Those sins that dishonor the body are very displeasing to God and the evidence of vile affections. Observe, the thing which he (Onan) did displeased the Lord -- And it is to be feared, thousands, especially of single persons, by this very thing, still displease the Lord, and **destroy their own souls.**”* Strong words.

But let me conclude with one final, stunning statistic. In North America, the divorce rate averages around 50 percent. But for those couples practicing NFP, studies show that their divorce rate is between 0 and 3 percent!!! Amazing! I think the Church is on to something... Maybe the world could learn a thing or two from these couples. Could I suggest that perhaps God is pouring His graces out into those marriages that are

keeping His Divine Law, just as He promised He would in the Sacrament of Marriage?

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