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Paddy Jim Baggot

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Management of Teenage Pregnancy: A Catholic Approach

by

Paddy Jim Baggot, M.D.

The author is a certified fertility awareness medical consultant.

Teenage pregnancy is a common problem. From a Catholic perspective, it could be the most important problem in obstetrics. It is one of the most common causes of fetal loss. The standard approach is possibly abortion, certainly contraception afterwards. Abortion and contraception are meant to remedy the “damage” the pregnancy does to the young girl’s life, and prevent another “disaster.” How should we manage teen-age pregnancy from a Catholic perspective?

If contraception and abortion were really good for teenage women, then what the Catholic Church recommends (no abortion, no contraception) could be harmful to them. It seems absurd that the Church would make recommendations for women that would be harmful to them. Would God or the Church exploit women?

God and the Church guide us to live lives that are better for us. Somewhere in the Church’s teaching is God’s solution. How do we get from what the Church recommends (contraception is a serious sin, as is abortion) to a coherent plan which heals a disrupted life?

It should be axiomatic that a pregnancy is always a profound, immeasurable blessing from God. That fact should be part of the solution. This blessing should shower many benefits on a couple, even if they are 14 and 15. Obviously, such a couple should have waited till marriage at a more mature age. They would be the first to say so. On the other hand, nothing could have enhanced their spirituality, and many other aspects of their lives, as much as the baby. They would be the first to say this as well. The baby is a messenger from God, who calls them to become saints (parents).

The problem is not the baby but the lack of chastity. Teenage pregnancy is about a breakdown of chastity. Contraception is antagonistic to chastity. Contraception throws kerosene on the fire of sexual irresponsibility. It is no wonder that teenagers on contraception continue to get pregnant.

Many of these pregnancies are hidden because the couples resort to abortion. Contraception promotes abortion because at the time of sexual intercourse, the couple is closed to a new potential life. Abortion causes more damage than it prevents. Abortion is lethal to the baby. It is harmful to the mother's happiness and reproductive health.

Natural family planning must be the solution, not contraception. When a couple has sexual intercourse in natural family planning, they are accepting a new life from the outset. When they are not ready for pregnancy, they abstain. Couples who use natural family planning have a very low abortion rate.

Natural family planning is a method of chastity. Natural family planning outside of marriage requires complete abstinence. Through abstinence, natural family planning prevents teenage pregnancy, promotes chastity, and prevents abortion.

The mother should be supported in carrying the pregnancy to term. The pregnancy is an organizing and energizing force around which her life can be rebuilt. Natural family planning and breast-feeding should be encouraged, beginning long before delivery. The woman provides a heroic example of virtue not only to her classmates, but also to herself, and even to her child. By following the teaching of the Church, we find God's solution. It is so beautiful, we never would have thought of it ourselves.
