

FR. LOUIS HOHMAN

The Open Window



Q. Many Catholic women take the pill and think it is okay. Other Catholics don't because they believe the Church teaches that it is a form of contraception and a mortal sin. Is taking the pill a mortal sin or not? If the Church doesn't state what a mortal sin is, who can?

A. With all due respect, you seem to be at least subconsciously "up tight" about being under a restriction while the other guy goes scot free. Like a lot of people, you have, I believe, confused civil law with moral law. Under civil law we expect that all persons who disobey a given law will be given equal punishment for the disobedience, as long as they can be judged to have positively broken the law.

But in situations involving moral law, God is the judge and He alone. God alone can know the situation and the dispositions of the person who acted against the external law. He alone can know whether the person acted in good conscience or bad, whether he had sufficient knowledge and freedom.

Therefore the best I can do for you is this: For a long time Popes have forbidden contraception. Lately Pope Paul VI wrote an encyclical, "Humanae Vitae," which repeated the prohibition against contraception. In fairness we must note that the encyclical is neither irreversible nor infallible. If we were to say it was the final word, we might well have to eat our words later and a large scandal would attend the "change" in the Church's doctrine. I don't think I have the right to say it's the final word if the Pope himself did not deem it advisable to do so, and he didn't.

Now this is the kind of a law you have to deal with and your conscience must make the judgment of how it affects you. Then it is between you and God. What your neighbor does is not yours or mine to judge.

Or I might print in capitals: CONTRACEPTION IS A MORTAL SIN. (Some people will read only this line in the column.) Would that make you feel better?

Or would you have decided that far more than the Pope, I am fallible — capable of being in error — and that in your case you have no choice but to use contraception? In the latter case, should I say that you have gone against my dictum and are in the state of mortal sin?

The Church will always be the custodian of morals but she is bound to give moral guidance in the exact degree of certainty she possesses. Some interpreters of Paul VI's encyclical will give a simple answer: No contraception. Others will say there is more to it than that. If you feel the definite, simple answer is the required one, then you will refrain from any form of contraception. It would be a mortal sin to use it.



Children's Theater

Practicing for Mercy High School's Children's Theater production of the fairy tale musical *The Feather Duster* are (l-r.) Mary Theresa Conte, Mary Jo Porreca, Elaine Maier, Kathy Witner, and Julie Fitzpatrick. The play, based on tales by Hans Christian Anderson, will be presented Jan. 20-21 at 2 p.m.

Educator to Speak On Learning Disabilities

Dr. Hildred Rawson, a learning disabilities educator from the University of Toronto, Canada, will speak at the Nazareth College Arts Center on Wednesday, Jan. 10.

Dr. Rawson's two-part presentation will consist of a 4:30 p.m. discussion of theories behind reading and learning disabilities in preparation for a 7:30

p.m. demonstration with learning-disabled children. The demonstration will be followed by a question period. Both sessions are open to the public, and a dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m. for the first 200 registrants.

Dr. Rawson is director of the Reading Clinic at Ontario Institute of Educational Studies.

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