Morals, sex and Church's position

I feel that Mr Loeffier’s letter missed the point altogether, or is it perhaps a case of “questioning everything and arguing about words (1 Tim. 6,4)

The Catholic Church is not opposed to sex education. In the Declaration on Christian Education, (1) the Second Vatican Council asserted that "as they [children and young people] grow older they should receive *positive* and *prudent* education in matters relating to sex".

Likewise, the Church does not oppose the regulation of births:

"Those are considered to exercise responsible parenthood who prudently and generously decide to have a large family, or who, for serious reasons and with due respect to the [natural] moral law, choose to have no more children for the time being or even for an undetermined period *(Human* *Vitae,* 10, para 4)".

Why then the controversy?

Arguments arise as to how to achieve these goals. This is a particularly delicate point given the wide difference between the hedonist's world-view and the Christian's world-view.

Hedonism is a doctrine which equates good with pleasure and comfort, human love with sexual pleasure. Indeed, as Mr Loeffler puts it: "The lambs live amongst flocks of lustful sheep". Since time immemorial, some people have made eroticism a lucrative business.

Mr Loeffler, and indeed even some Catholics, may say that the argument is not about the rights and wrongs of family planning (ie of principles) the methods (means).

They may condescend further and argue that, granted, there is a noteworthy discrepancy between the Christian's and the hedonist's ideal worlds. But, they would continue, is it worth our while to spend time talking about goals and principles while our immediate concern is means?

What do rights and wrongs of regulations of birth matter when the "population bomb" is about to explode? Isn't it more reasonable to pool our efforts to overcome the present civil order of things - Aids, unemployment, famine, poverty, discomfort - even though we do not agree on what the ideal right order of things ought to be?

Not only elementary logic but also historical past experience demands that we clarify our aims before letting loose a process (eg a policy on education or on population) whose final result will make us exclaim: "But that is not what I wanted, it isn't, it isn't!" An analysis of the mean can tell us a lot about the nature of the ends, for in a certain sense the means already contain the end. The proceedings already herald the results. To preach, to kill, to stir up, to force, to pray, etc., are not natural methods. In teaching the methods of regulating births, therefore, it is not a question of propagating specific techniques, but of bringing about understanding of human sexuality within the Divine Plan. In contraception, the spouses take it upon themselves the right to be the arbiters of life.

In effect, no human endeavour is value-free. The value is specified both by the goodness of the deed performed and the intention of the doer. Whereas the former element always depends on one's world view, the latter is a measure of how sincere one is.

It is in the light of the above that the Bishops expressed their views. The other arguments, of a socio-economic nature, are incidental.

A calm re-reading of their advertisement, with eyes unblended by prejudice, shows that.

Fr Paul Mimbi.

Nairobi