

Vatican newspaper says Melinda Gates 'off the mark' on contraception

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Melinda Gates, wife of Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, speaks at the London Summit on Family Planning on July 11 in central London. (CNS/Reuters/Suzanne Plunkett)

VATICAN CITY -- Under the headline "birth control and disinformation," the Vatican newspaper took to task Melinda Gates, wife of the Microsoft founder, who announced in early July that the couple's foundation would give \$560 million during the next eight years to increase women's access to artificial contraception.

Written by Giulia Galeotti, a frequent contributor on abortion and other life issues, the article on the front page of the July 29 edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* said Gates is free to make charitable donations to whomever she wants, but not to spread incorrect information.

In an interview July 10 with *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, Gates identified herself as a practicing Catholic who "struggled" with the idea of publicly opposing church teaching to promote a project aimed at giving 120 million women in developing countries access to contraceptives by 2020.

Gates said she felt compelled to act to "keep women alive. I believe in not letting women die, I believe in not letting babies die."

In the Vatican newspaper piece, Galeotti wrote, "The American philanthropist is off the mark," the victim of "bad information and persistent stereotypes on this theme. To still believe that by opposing the use of condoms, the Catholic Church leaves women and children to die because of misogynist intransigence is a baseless and shoddy reading" of reality.

Gates told *The Guardian* that the Catholic church allows natural family planning, but "for our foundation, well, we promote modern tools because these have the most impact." At the same time the church can and should continue to teach women how to space births naturally, she said. "Let a woman choose what it is she would like to use."

Galeotti said the comment reflected the widespread, but mistaken notion of the ineffectiveness of natural family

planning methods that involve teaching couples to recognize the natural signs of a woman's fertility and act accordingly.

The "smile of condescension" and descriptions of NFP as unscientific or primitive probably are not completely accidental, Galeotti wrote.

No one is getting rich off NFP methods that "do not cost anything, do not damage a woman's health and are considered 98 percent effective," she said.

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