

“HUMANAE VITAE”

Encyclical Letter of His Holiness

POPE PAUL VI

ON THE REGULATION OF BIRTH

TO THE VENERABLE PATRIARCH, ARCHBISHOPS AND
BISHOPS AND OTHER LOCAL ORDINARIES
IN PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE
TO PRIESTS, THE FAITHFUL AND TO ALL MEN OF GOOD WILL.

VENERABLE BROTHERS AND BELOVED SONS

The transmission of life

1. The most serious duty of transmitting human life, for which married persons are the free and responsible collaborators of God the Creator, has always been a source of great joys to them, even if sometimes accompanied by not a few difficulties and by distress.

At all times the fulfilment of this duty has posed grave problems to the conscience of married persons, but, with the recent evolution of society, changes have taken place that give rise to new questions which the Church could not ignore, having to do with a matter which so closely touches upon the life and happiness of men.

I. NEW ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM AND COMPETENCY OF THE MAGISTERIUM

New formulation of the problem

2. The changes which have taken place are in fact noteworthy and of varied kinds. In the first place, there is the rapid demographic development. Fear is shown by many that world population is growing more rapidly than the available resources, with growing distress to many families and developing countries, so that the temptation for Authorities to counter this danger with radical measures is great. Moreover, working and lodging conditions, as well as increased exigencies both in the economic field and in that of education, often make the proper education of an elevated number of children difficult today. A change is also seen both in the manner of considering the person of women and her place in society, and in the value to be attributed to conjugal love in marriage, and also in the appreciation to be made of the meaning of conjugal acts in relation to that love.

Finally and above all, man has made stupendous progress in the domination and rational organization of the forces of nature, such that he tends to extend this domination to his own total being: to the body, to psychical life, to social life and even to the laws which regulate the transmission of life.

3. This new state of things gives rise to new questions. Granted the conditions of life today, and granted the meaning which conjugal relations have with respect to the harmony between husband and wife and to their mutual fidelity, would not a revision of the ethical norms in force up to now, seem to be advisable, especially when it is considered that they cannot be observed without sacrifices, sometimes heroic sacrifices?

And again: by extending to this field the application of the so-called "principle of totality", could it not be admitted that the intention of a less abundant but more rationalized fecundity might transform a materially sterilizing intervention into a licit and wise control of birth? Could it not be admitted, that is, that the finality of procreation pertains to the ensemble of conjugal life, rather than to its single acts? It is also asked whether, in view of the increased sense of responsibility

of modern man, the moment has not come for him to entrust to his reason and his will, rather than to the biological rhythms of his organism, the task of regulating birth.

Competency of the Magisterium

4. Such questions required from the teaching authority of the Church a new and deeper reflection upon the principles of the moral teaching on marriage: a teaching founded on the natural law, illuminated and enriched by divine Revelation.

No believer will wish to deny that the teaching authority of the Church is competent to interpret even the natural moral law. It is, in fact, indisputable, as Our Predecessors have many times declared,¹ that Jesus, when communicating to Peter and to the Apostles His divine authority and sending them to teach all nations His commandments,² constituted them as guardians and authentic interpreters of all the moral law, not only, that is, of the law of the gospel, but also of the natural fulfilment of which is equally necessary for salvation.³

Conformably to this mission of hers, the Church has always provided—and even more amply in recent times—a coherent teaching concerning both the nature of marriage and the correct use of conjugal rights and the duties of husband and wife.⁴

¹ Cf. Pius IX, Encyclical *Qui Pluribus*, 9, 1846; in *Pii IX P. M. Acta*, I, pp. 9-10; St. Pius X, Encyc. *Singulari Quadam*, Sept. 24, 1912; in AAS IV (1912), p. 658; Pius XI, Encyc. *Casti Connubii*, Dec. 31, 1930; in AAS XXII (1930), pp. 579-581; Pius XII, Allocution *Magnificate Dominum* to the Episcopate of the Catholic world, Nov. 2, 1954; in AAS XLVI (1954), pp. 671-672; John XXIII, Encyc. *Mater et Magistra*, May 15, 1961; in AAS LIII (1961), p. 457.

² Cf. Mt. 28:18-19.

³ Cf. Mt. 7:21.

⁴ Cf. *Catechismus Romanus Concilii Tridentini*, Part II, Ch. VIII; Leo XIII, Encyc. *Arcanum*, Feb. 10, 1880; in *Acta Leonis XIII*, II (1881), pp. 26-29; Pius XI, Encyc. *Divini Illius Magistri*, Dec. 31, 1929 in AAS XXII (1930), pp. 58-61; Encyc. *Casti Connubii*, in AAS XXII (1930), pp. 545-546; Pius XII, Alloc. to the Italian Medico-Biological Union of Saint Luke, Nov. 12, 1944 in *Discorsi et Radiomessagi*, VI, pp. 191-192; to the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives Oct. 29, 1951, in AAS XLIII (1951), pp. 857-

Special duties

5. The consciousness of that same mission induced Us to confirm and enlarge the Study Commission which Our Predecessor Pope John XXIII of happy memory had instituted in March, 1963. That Commission which included, besides several experts in the various pertinent disciplines, also married couples, had as its scope the gathering of opinions on the new question regarding conjugal life, and in particular on the regulation of births, and of furnishing opportune elements of information so that the Magisterium could give an adequate reply to the expectation not only of the faithful, but also of world opinion.⁵

The work of these experts, as well as the successive judgements and counsels spontaneously forwarded by or expressly requested from a good number of Our Brothers in the Episcopate, have permitted Us to measure more exactly all the aspects of this complex matter. Hence with all Our heart We express to each of them Our lively gratitude.

Reply of the Magisterium

6. The conclusions at which the Commission arrived could not, nevertheless, be considered by Us as definitive, nor dispense Us from a personal examination of this serious question; and this also because, within the Commission itself, no full concordance of judgements concerning the moral norms to be proposed had been reached, and above all because certain criteria of solutions had emerged which departed from the moral teaching on marriage proposed with constant firmness by the teaching authority of the Church.

859; to the Seventh Congress of the International Society of Haematology. Sept. 12, 1958, in AAS L (1958), pp. 734-735; John XXIII, *Encyc., Mater et Magistra*, in ASS LIII (1961), pp. 446-447; *Codex Iuris Canonici*, Canon 1067; Can. 1968, Sect. 1, Can. 1076 Sects. 1-2; Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, Nos. 47-52.

⁵ Cf. Paul VI, Allocution to the Sacred College, June 23, 1964, in AAS LVI (1964) p. 588; to the Commission for Study of Problems of Population, Family and Birth, March 27, 1965, in AAS LVII (1965), p. 388; to the National Congress of the Italian Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Oct. 29, 1966, in AAS LVIII (1966), p. 1168.

Therefore, having attentively sifted the documentation laid before Us, after mature reflection and assiduous prayers, We now intend, by virtue of the mandate entrusted to Us by Christ, to give Our reply to these grave questions.

II. DOCTRINAL PRINCIPLES

A total vision of man

7. The problem of birth, like every other problem regarding human life, is to be considered, beyond partial perspectives—whether of the biological or psychological, demographic or sociological orders—in the light of an integral vision of man and of his vocation, not only his natural and earthly but also his supernatural and eternal vocation. And since, in the attempt to justify artificial methods of birth control, many have appealed to the demands both of ‘conjugal love and of “responsible parenthood”, it is good to state very precisely the true concept of these two great realities of married life, referring principally to what was recently set forth in this regard, and in a highly authoritative form, by the Second Vatican Council in its Pastoral Constitution “*Gaudium et Spes*”.

Conjugal love

8. Conjugal love reveals its true nature and nobility when it is considered in its supreme origin, God, “Who is Love,” “the Father, from Whom every family in heaven and on earth is named”.⁷

Marriage is not, then, the effect of chance or the product of evolution of unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love. By means of the reciprocal personal gift of self, proper and exclusive to them, husband and wife tend towards the communion of their beings in view of mutual personal perfection, to collaborate with God in the generation and education of new lives.

⁶ Cf. I Jn. 4:8.

⁷ Cf. Eph. 3:15.

For baptized persons, moreover, marriage invests the dignity of a sacramental sign of grace inasmuch as it represents the union of Christ and of the Church.

Its characteristics

9. Under this light, there clearly appear the characteristic marks and demands of conjugal love, and it is of supreme importance to have an exact idea of these.

This love is first of all fully **human**, that is to say, of the senses and of the spirit at the same time. It is not, then, a simple transport of instinct and sentiment, but also, and principally, an act of the free will, intended to endure and to grow by means of the joys and sorrows of daily life, in such a way that husband and wife become one only heart and one only soul, and together attain their human perfection.

Then, this love is **total**, that is to say, it is a very special form of personal friendship, in which husband and wife generously share everything, without undue reservations or selfish calculations. Whoever truly loves his marriage partner loves not only for what he receives, but for the partner's self, rejoicing that he can enrich his partner with the gift of himself.

Again, this love is **faithful** and exclusive until death. Thus in fact do bride and groom conceive it to be on the day when they freely and in full awareness assume the duty of the marriage bond. A fidelity, this, which can sometimes be difficult, but is always possible, always noble and meritorious as no one can deny. The example of so many married persons down through the centuries shows, not only that fidelity is according to the nature of marriage, but also that it is a source of profound and lasting happiness.

And finally, this love is **fecund**, for it is not exhausted by the communion between husband and wife, but is destined to continue, raising up new lives. "Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents."⁸

⁸ Cf. II Vat. Council, Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 50.

Responsible parenthood

10. Hence conjugal love requires in husband and wife an awareness of their mission of "responsible parenthood," which today is rightly much insisted upon, and which also must be exactly understood. Consequently it is to be considered under different aspects which are legitimate and connected with one another.

In relation to the biological processes, responsible parenthood means the knowledge and respect of their functions; human intellect discovers in the power of giving life biological laws which are part of the human person.⁹

In relation to the tendencies of instinct or passion, responsible parenthood means that necessary dominion which reason and will must exercise over them.

In relation to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised, either by the deliberate and generous decision to raise a numerous family, or by the decision, made for grace motives and with due respect for the moral law, to avoid for the time being or even for an indeterminate period, a new birth.

Responsible parenthood also and above all implies a more profound relationship to the objective moral order established by God, of which a right conscience is the faithful interpreter. The responsible exercise of parenthood implies, therefore, that husband and wife recognize fully their own duties towards God, towards themselves, towards the family and towards society, in a correct hierarchy of values.

In the task of transmitting life, therefore, they are not free to proceed completely at will, as if they could determine in a wholly autonomous way the honest path to follow; but they must conform their activity to the creative intention of God, expressed in the very nature of marriage and of its acts, and manifested by the constant teaching of the Church.¹⁰

⁹ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. 94, Art. 2.

¹⁰ Cf. Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, Nos. 50, 51.

Respect for the nature and purposes of the marriage act

11. These acts, by which husband and wife are united in chaste intimacy, and by means of which human life is transmitted, are, as the Council recalled, "noble and worthy,"¹¹ and they do not cease to be lawful if, for causes independent of the will of husband and wife, they are foreseen to be infecund, since they always remain ordained towards expressing and consolidating their union. In fact, as experience bears witness, not every conjugal act is followed by a new life. God has wisely disposed natural laws and rhythms of fecundity which of themselves cause a separation in the succession in births. Nonetheless the Church, calling men back to the observance of the norms of the natural law, as interpreted by her constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marriage act (*quolibet matrimonii usus*) must remain open to the transmission of life.¹²

Two inseparable aspects: Union and procreation

12. That teaching, often set forth by the Magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning. Indeed, by its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, capacitates them for the generation of new lives, according to laws inscribed in the very being of man and of woman. By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fulness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination towards man's most high calling to parenthood. We believe that the men of our day are particularly capable of seizing the deeply reasonable and human character of this fundamental principle.

Faithfulness to God's design

13. It is in fact justly observed that a conjugal act imposed upon one's partner without regard for his or her condition and lawful desires

¹¹ *Ibid.*, No. 49.

¹² Cf. Pius XI, *Encyc. Casti Connubii*, in AAS XXII (1930), p. 560; Pius XII, in AAS XLIII (1951), p. 843.

is not a true act of love, and therefore denies an exigency of right moral order in the relationships between husband and wife. Hence, one who reflects well must also recognize that a reciprocal act of love, which jeopardizes, the disponibility to transmit life which God the Creator, according to particular laws, inserted therein, is in contradiction with the design constitutive of marriage, and with the will of the Author of life. To use this divine gift destroying, even if only partially, its meaning and its purpose is to contradict the nature both of man and of woman and of their most intimate relationship, and therefore it is to contradict also the plan of God and His will. On the other hand, to make use of the gift of conjugal love while respecting the laws of the generative process means to acknowledge oneself not to be the arbiter of the sources of human life, but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator. In fact, just as man does not have unlimited dominion over his body in general, so also, with particular reason, he has no such dominion over his generative faculties as such, because of their intrinsic ordination towards raising up life, of which God is the principle. "Human life is sacred," Pope John XXIII recalled: "from its very inception it reveals the creating hand of God."¹³

Illicit ways of regulating birth

14. In conformity with these landmarks in the human and Christian vision of marriage, We must once again declare that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun, and, above all, directly willed and procured abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as licit means of regulating birth.¹⁴

Equally to be excluded, as the teaching authority of the Church has frequently declared, is direct sterilization, whether perpetual or tem-

¹³ Cf. John XXIII, *Encyc. Mater et Magistra*, in AAS LIII (1961), p. 477.

¹⁴ Cf. *Catechismus Romanus Concilii Tridentini*, Part. II, ch. VIII; Pius XI, *Encyc. Casti Connubii*, in AAS XXII (1930), pp. 562-564; Pius XII, *Discorsi e Radiomessagi*, VI (1944), pp. 191-192; AAS XLIII (1951), pp. 842-843; pp. 857-859; John XXIII, *Encyc. Pacem in Terris*, Apr. 11, 1963, in AAS LV (1963), pp. 259-260; *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 51.

porary, whether of the man or of the woman.¹⁵ Similarly excluded is every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible.¹⁶

To justify conjugal acts made intentionally infecund, one cannot invoke as valid reasons the lesser evil, or the fact that such acts would constitute a whole together with the fecund acts already performed or to follow later, and hence would share in one and the same moral goodness. In truth, if it is sometimes licit to tolerate a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater evil or to promote a greater good,¹⁷ it is not licit, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil so that good may follow therefrom;¹⁸ that is, to make into the object of a positive act of the will something which is intrinsically disorder, and hence unworthy of the human person, even when the intention is to safeguard or promote individual, family or social well-being. Consequently it is an error to think that a conjugal act which is deliberately made infecund and so is intrinsically dishonest could be made honest and right by the ensemble of a fecund conjugal life.

Licitness of therapeutic means

15. The Church, on the contrary, does not at all consider illicit the use of those therapeutic means truly necessary to cure diseases of the organism, even if an impediment to procreation, which may be foreseen, should result therefrom, provided such impediment is not, for whatever motive, directly willed.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cf. Pius XI, *Encyc. Casti Connubii*, in AAS XXII (1930), p. 565; Decree of the Holy Office, Feb. 22, 1940, in AAS L (1958), pp. 734-735.

¹⁶ Cf. *Catechismus Romanus Concilii Tridentini*, Part II, Ch. VIII; Pius XI, *Encyc. Casti Connubii*, in AAS XXII (1930), pp. 559-561; Pius XII, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 843; AAS L (1958), pp. 734-735; John XXIII, *Encyc. Mater et Magistra*, in AAS LIII (1961), p. 447.

¹⁷ Cf. Pius XII, Alloc. to the National Congress of the Union of Catholic Jurists, Dec. 6, 1953, in AAS XLV (1953), pp. 798-799.

¹⁸ Cg. Rom., 3, 8.

¹⁹ Cf. Pius XII, Alloc. to Congress of the Italian Association of Urology, Oct. 8, 1953, in AAS XLV (1953), pp. 674-675; AAS L (1958), pp. 734-735.

Licitness of recourse to infecund periods

16. To this teaching of the Church on conjugal morals, the objection is made today, as We observed earlier (No. 3), that it is the prerogative of the human intellect to dominate the energies offered by irrational nature and to orientate them towards an end conformable to the good of man. Now, some may ask: In the present case, is it not reasonable in many circumstances to have recourse to artificial birth control if, thereby, we secure the harmony and peace of the family, and better conditions for the education of the children already born? To this question it is necessary to reply with clarity: The Church is the first to praise and recommend the intervention of intelligence in a function which so closely associates the rational creature with his Creator; but she affirms that this must be done with respect for the order established by God.

If, then, there are serious motives to space out births, which derive from the physical or psychological conditions of husband and wife, or from external conditions, the Church teaches that it is then licit to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions, for the use of marriage in the infecund periods only, and in this way to regulate birth without offending the moral principles which have been recalled earlier.²⁰

The Church is coherent with herself when she considers recourse to the infecund periods to be licit, while at the same time condemning as being always illicit, the use of means directly contrary to fecundation, even if such use is inspired by reasons which may appear honest and serious. In reality, there are essential differences between the two cases: in the former, the married couple make legitimate use of a natural disposition; in the latter, they impede the development of natural processes. It is true that, in the one and the other case, the married couple are concordant in the positive will of avoiding children for plausible reasons, seeking the certainty that offspring will not arrive; but it is also true that only in the former case are they able to renounce the use of marriage in the fecund periods when, for just motives, procrea-

²⁰ Cf. Pius XII, AAS XLIII (1951), p. 846.

tion is not desirable, while making use of it during infecund periods to manifest their affection and to safeguard their mutual fidelity. By so doing, they give proof of a truly and integrally honest love.

Grave consequences of methods of artificial birth control

17. Upright men can even better convince themselves of the solid grounds on which the teaching of the Church in this field is based, if they care to reflect upon the consequences of methods of artificial birth control. Let them consider, first of all, how wide and easy a road would thus be opened up towards conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality. Not much experience is needed in order to know human weakness, and to understand that men—especially the young, who are so vulnerable on this point—have need of encouragement to be faithful to the moral law, so that they must not be offered some easy means of eluding its observance. It is also to be feared that the man, growing used to the employment of anti-conceptive practices, may finally lose respect for the woman and no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.

Let it be considered also that a dangerous weapon would thus be placed in the hands of those public Authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies. Who could blame a Government for applying to the solution of the problems of the community those means acknowledged to be licit for married couple in the solution of a family problem? Who will stop rulers from favouring, from even imposing upon their peoples, if they were to consider it necessary, the method of contraception which they judge to be most efficacious? In such a way men, wishing to avoid individual, family, or social difficulties encountered in the observance of the divine law, would reach the point of placing at the mercy of the intervention of public Authorities the most personal and most reserved sector of conjugal intimacy.

Consequently, if the mission of generating life is not to be exposed to the arbitrary will of men, one must necessarily recognize insurmount-

able limits to the possibility of man's domination over his own body and its functions; limits which no man, whether a private individual or one invested with authority, may licitly surpass. And such limits cannot be determined otherwise than by the respect due to the integrity of the human organism and its functions, according to the principles recalled earlier, and also according to the correct understanding of the "principle of totality" illustrated by Our Predecessor Pope Pius XII.²¹

The Church guarantor of true human values

18. It can be foreseen that this teaching will perhaps not be easily received by all: too numerous are those voices—amplified by the modern means of propaganda—which are contrary to the voice of the Church. To tell the truth, the Church is not surprised to be made, like her divine Founder, a "sign of contradiction";²² yet she does not because of this cease to proclaim with humble firmness the entire moral law, both natural and evangelical. Of such laws the Church was not the author, nor consequently can she be their arbiter; she is only their depositary and their interpreter, without ever being able to declare to be licit that which is not so by reason of its intimate and unchangeable opposition to the true good of man.

In defending conjugal morals in their integral wholeness, the Church knows that she contributes towards the establishment of a truly human civilization; she engages man not to abdicate from his own responsibility in order to rely on technical means; by that very fact she defends the dignity of man and wife. Faithful to both the teaching and the example of the Saviour, she show herself to be the sincere and disinterested friend of men, whom she wishes to help, even during their earthly sojourn, "to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men."²³

²¹ Cf. AAS XLV (1953), pp. 674-675; AAS XLVIII (1956), pp. 461-462.

²² Cf. Lk, 2, 34.

²³ Cf. Paul VI, *Encyc. Populorum Progressio*, March 26, 1967, No. 21.

III. PASTORAL DIRECTIVES

The Church Mater et Magistra

19. Our words would not be an adequate expression of the thought and solicitude of the Church, Mother and Teacher of all peoples, if, after having recalled men to the observance and respect of the divine law regarding matrimony, We did not strengthen them in the path of honest regulation of birth, even amid the difficult conditions which to-day afflict families and people. The Church, in fact, cannot have a different conduct towards men than that of the Redeemer: she knows their weaknesses, has compassion on the crowd, receives sinners; but she cannot renounce the teaching of the law which is, in reality, that law proper to a human life restored to its original truth and conducted by the Spirit of God.²⁴ Though We are thinking also of all men of good will, We now address Ourselves particularly to Our sons, from whom We expect a prompter and more generous adherence.

Possibility of observing the divine law

20. The teaching of the Church on the regulation of birth, which promulgates the divine law, will easily appear to many to be difficult or even impossible of actuation. And indeed, like all great beneficent realities, it demands serious engagement and much effort, individual, family and social effort. More than that, it would not be practicable without the help of God, Who upholds and strengthens the good will of men. Yet, to anyone who reflects well, it cannot but be clear that such efforts ennoble man and are beneficial to the human community.

Mastery of self

21. The honest practice of regulation of birth demands first of all that husband and wife acquire and possess solid convictions concerning the true values of life and of the family, and that they tend towards securing perfect self-mastery. To dominate instinct by means of one's reason and free will undoubtedly requires ascetical practices, so that the affective manifestations of conjugal life may observe the correct or-

²⁴ Cf. Rom., 8.

der, in particular with regard to the observance of periodic continence. Yet this discipline which is proper to the purity of married couples, far from harming conjugal love, rather confers on it a higher human value. It demands continual effort yet, thanks to its beneficent influence, husband and wife fully develop their personalities, being enriched with spiritual values. Such discipline bestows upon family life fruits of serenity and peace, and facilitates the solution of other problems; it favours attention for one's partner, helps both parties to drive out selfishness, the enemy of true love; and deepens their sense of responsibility. By its means, parents acquire the capacity of having a deeper and more efficacious influence in the education of their offspring; little children and youths grow up with a just appraisal of human values, and in the serene and harmonious development of their spiritual and sensitive faculties.

Creating atmosphere favourable to chastity

22. On this occasion, We wish to draw the attention of educators, and of all who perform duties of responsibility in regard to the common good of human society, to the need of creating an atmosphere favourable to education in chastity, that is, to the triumph of healthy liberty over licence by means of respect for the moral order.

Everything in the modern media of social communications which leads to sense excitation and unbridled customs, as well as every form of pornography and licentious performances, must arouse the frank and unanimous reaction of all those who are solicitous for the progress of civilization and the defence of the supreme good of the human spirit. Vainly would one seek to justify such depravation with the pretext of artistic or scientific exigencies,²⁵ or to deduce an argument from the freedom allowed in this sector by the public Authorities.

Appeal to public Authorities

23. To rulers, who are those principally responsible for the common good, and who can do so much to safeguard moral customs, We

²⁵ Cf. II Vatican Council, Decree *Inter Mirifica* on the media of Social Communication, Nos. 6-7.

say: Do not allow the morality of your peoples to be degraded; do not permit that by legal means practices contrary to the natural and divine law be introduced into that fundamental cell, the family. Quite other is the way in which public Authorities can and must contribute to the solution of the demographic problem: namely, the way of a provident policy for the family, of a wise education of peoples in respect of the moral law and the liberty of citizens.

We are well aware of the serious difficulties experienced by public Authorities in this regard, especially in the developing countries. To their legitimate preoccupations We devoted Our Encyclical Letter "*Populorum Progressio*". But, with Our Predecessor Pope John XXIII, We repeat: No solution to these difficulties is acceptable "which does violence to man's essential dignity" and is based only "on an utterly materialistic conception of man himself and of his life. The only possible solution to this question is one which envisages the social and economic progress both of individuals and of the whole of human society, and which respects and promotes true human values."²⁶ Neither can one, without grave injustice, consider divine Providence to be responsible for what depends, instead, on a lack of wisdom in government, on an insufficient sense of social justice, on selfish monopolization, or again on blameworthy indolence in confronting the efforts and the sacrifices necessary to ensure the raising of living standards of a people and of all its sons.²⁷

May all responsible public Authorities—as some are already doing so laudably—generously revive their efforts. And may mutual aid between all the members of the great human family never cease to grow: this is an almost limitless field which thus opens up to the activity of the great international organizations.

To men of science

24. We wish now to express Our encouragement to men of science, who "can considerably advance the welfare of marriage and the family, along with peace of conscience, if by pooling their efforts they labour

²⁶ Cf. *Encyc. Mater et Magistra*, in AAS LIII (1961), p. 447.

²⁷ Cf. *Encyc. Populorum Progressio*, Nos. 48-55.

to explain more thoroughly the various conditions favoring a proper regulation of births."²⁸ It is particularly desirable that, according to the wish already expressed by Pope Pius XII, medical science succeed in providing a sufficiently secure basis for a regulation of birth, founded on the observance of natural rhythms.²⁹ In this way, scientists and especially Catholic scientists will contribute to demonstrate in actual fact that, as the Church teaches, "a true contradiction cannot exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to the fostering of authentic conjugal love".³⁰

To Christian husband and wives

25. And now Our words more directly address Our own children, particularly those whom God calls to serve Him in marriage. The Church, while teaching imprescriptible demands of the divine law, announces the tidings of salvation, and by means of the Sacraments opens up the paths of grace, which makes man a new creature, capable of corresponding with love and true freedom to the design of his Creator and Savior, and of finding the yoke of Christ to be sweet.³¹

Christian married couple, then, docile to her voice, must remember that their Christian vocation, which began at baptism, is further specified and reinforced by the Sacrament of Matrimony. By it husband and wife are strengthened and as it were consecrated for the faithful accomplishment of their proper duties, for the carrying out of their proper vocation even to perfection, and the Christian witness which is proper to them before the whole world.³² To them the Lord entrusts the task of making visible to men the holiness and sweetness of the law which unites the mutual love of husband and wife with their cooperation with the love of God the Author of human life.

²⁸ Cf. Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 52.

²⁹ Cf. AAS XLIII (1951), p. 859.

³⁰ Cf. Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 51.

³¹ Cf. *Mt.* 11, 30.

³² Cf. Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, No. No. 48; II Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, No. 35.

We do not at all intend to hide the sometimes serious difficulties inherent in the life of Christian married persons; for them as for everyone else, "the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life".³³ But the hope of that life must illuminate their way, as with courage they strive to live with wisdom, justice and piety in this present time,³⁴ knowing that the figure of this world passes away.³⁵

Let married couples, then, face up to the efforts needed, supported by the faith and hope which "do not disappoint. . . because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us";³⁶ let them implore divine assistance by persevering prayer; above all, let them draw from the source of grace and charity in the Eucharist. And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is poured forth in the Sacrament of Penance. In this way they will be enabled to achieve the fulness of conjugal life described by the Apostle: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. . . Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church. . . This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."³⁷

Apostolate in homes

26. Among the fruits which ripen forth from a generous effort of fidelity to the divine law, one of the most precious is that married couples themselves not infrequently feel the desire to communicate their experience to others. Thus there comes to be included in the vast pattern of the vocation of the laity a new and most noteworthy form of the apostolate of like to like: it is married couples themselves who become apostles and guides to other married couples. This is assuredly,

³³ Mt. 7, 14, cf. Hebr., 12, 11.

³⁴ Cf. Tit. 2, 12.

³⁵ Cf. I Cor., 7, 31.

³⁶ Cf. Rom., 5, 5.

³⁷ Eph., 5, 25, 28-29, 32-33.

among so many forms of apostolate one of those which seem most opportune today.³⁸

To doctors and medical personnel

27. We hold those physicians and medical personnel in the highest esteem who, in the exercise of their profession, value above every human interest the superior demands of their Christian vocation. Let them persevere, therefore, in promoting on every occasion the discovery of solutions inspired by faith and right reason, let them strive to arouse this conviction and this respect in their associates. Let them also consider as their proper professional duty the task of acquiring all the knowledge needed in this delicate sector, so as to be able to give to those married persons who consult them wise counsel and healthy direction, such as they have a right to expect.

To Priests

28. Beloved priest sons, by vocation you are the counsellors and spiritual guides of individual persons and of families. We now turn to you with confidence. Your first task—especially in the case of those who teach moral theology—is to expound the Church's teaching on marriage without ambiguity. Be the first to give, in the exercise of your ministry, the example of loyal internal and external obedience to the teaching authority of the Church. That obedience, as you know well, obliges not only because of the reasons adduced, but rather because of the light of the Holy Spirit, which is given in a particular way to the Pastors of the Church in order that they may illustrate the truth.³⁹ You know, too, that it is of the utmost importance, for peace of consciences and for the unity of the Christian people, that in the field of morals as well as in that of dogma, all should attend to the Magisterium of the Church, and all should speak the same language. Hence, with all Our heart We renew to you the heartfelt plea of the great Apostle Paul: "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of Our Lord

³⁸ Cf. Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, Nos. 35 and 41; Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, Nos. 48-49, II Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, No. 11.

³⁹ Cf. Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, No. 25.

Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement."⁴⁰

29. To diminish in no way the saving teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls. But this must ever be accompanied by patience and goodness, such as the Lord Himself gave example of in dealing with men. Having come not to condemn but to save,⁴¹ He was indeed intransigent with evil, but merciful towards individuals.

In their difficulties, may married couples always find, in the words and in the heart of a priest, the echo of the voice and the love of the Redeemer.

To Bishops

Beloved and Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, with whom We most intimately share the solicitude of the spiritual good of the People of God, at the conclusion of this Encyclical Our reverent and affectionate thoughts turn to you. To all of you We extend an urgent invitation. At the head of the priests, your collaborators, and of your faithful, work ardently and incessantly for the safeguarding and the holiness of marriage, so that it may always be lived in its entire human and Christian fullness. Consider this mission as one of your most urgent responsibilities at the present time. As you know, it implies concerted pastoral action in all the fields of human activity, economic, cultural and social; for, in fact, only a simultaneous improvement in these various sectors will make it possible to render the life of parents and of children within their families not only tolerable, but easier and more joyous, to render the living together in human society more fraternal and peaceful, in faithfulness to God's design for the world.

⁴⁰ Cf. I Cor., 1, 10.

⁴¹ Cf. Jn., 3, 17.

FINAL APPEAL

31. Venerable Brothers, most beloved sons, and all men of good will, great indeed is the work of education, of progress and of love to which We call you, upon the foundation of the Church's teaching, of which the Successor of Peter is, together with His Brothers in the Episcopate, the depositary and interpreter. Truly a great work, as We are deeply convinced, both for the world and for the Church, since man cannot find true happiness—towards which he aspires with all his being—other than in respect of the laws written by God in his very nature, laws which he must observe with intelligence and love. Upon this work, and upon all of you, and especially upon married couples, We invoke the abundant graces of the God of holiness and mercy, and in pledge thereof We impart to you all Our Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Rome, from Saint Peter's, this twenty-fifth day of July, Feast of Saint James the Apostle, in the year nineteen hundred and sixty-eight, the sixth of Our Pontificate.

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