



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL  
CONGRESSES ON MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND FERTILITY**

*Friday, 8 June 1984*

*Dear Friends in Christ,*

1. It gives me a great joy to extend a cordial greeting today to both groups present at this audience. I welcome the participants in the International Congress on the Philosophy and the Theology of Responsible Procreation, organized by the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Marriage and the Family, and I also welcome those taking part in the Second International Congress on Responsible Procreation, organized by the Centre for Study and Research on the Natural Regulation of Fertility of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. I am likewise deeply pleased that you have come here together today, to give to the world a united witness to the importance of the matter that you are studying. Your combined efforts, shared discoveries and mutual collaboration in the service of truth and the well-being of humanity render honour to your persons and to your Christian lives. The Church is *extremely grateful* for what you are doing.

2. During these days of your Congress you have set up a dialogue between science, ethics and theology on a subject of decisive importance: *responsible procreation*. This dialogue answers an urgent need of our time, one that is recognized by scientists themselves: the need for scientific knowledge and its applications to be ruled from within by ethics. This "rule by ethics" does not of course in any way detract from the epistemological independence of scientific knowledge. Rather, it assists science in fulfilling its most profound vocation of service to the human person. All knowledge of *truth* - including scientific truth - is a *good* of the human person and for the whole of humanity. But, as you know, truth known through science can be *used* by human freedom for purposes that are opposed to man's good - the good that *ethics* knows. When, in a civilization, science becomes separated from ethics, man becomes continually exposed to grave risks. Love for the human person comes from a vision of man's truth, dignity and incomparable preciousness.

This truth and dignity are *eternal*, for the person is called to the beatific vision of God himself.

3. You scientists here present have concentrated your research upon a precise point: *knowledge of the fertile and infertile periods* in the woman's cycle, in order to discover diagnostic methods of discerning them with certainty.

What I have just said finds a particularly important application here. For this knowledge and the methods connected with it can also be *used* for purposes which are morally illicit. It is on this point that the meeting with ethics and theology must take place. By reason of your training and background you are in a position to make a very special contribution in this field.

Philosophical and theological ethics takes up *scientific knowledge* in such a way that this latter *becomes the path* whereby the freedom of the human person achieves responsible procreation. Only in this way do married couples, possessing the necessary knowledge, accomplish a "harmonization" of all the dimensions of their humanity, and safeguard the *whole* truth of married love. You are aware that each individual - scientist, philosopher or theologian - according to his or her own competence, is directed towards the same objective: the moral value of responsible procreation, and each complements the others, in a precise hierarchy.

The experience which you are having during these present days must continue. The teaching of *natural methods* is extremely vital for the human and Christian well-being of so many couples, and hence it must never be something purely technical. It must be rooted in true science and in a complete view of the human person.

4. In your Congresses you have rightly given ample time to anthropological reflection, both philosophical and theological. For in the end all the matters which you have discussed and will discuss entirely come back to this one question: *who is man?* - man in the unity of his personal being, in the truth of his relationship with God, in the goodness of the married relationship. When the answer to this question is obscured, the ethics of marriage is deprived of its basis. On the other hand, the full truth of the Creation and Redemption is a light of incomparable brightness that places the ethics of marriage in proper perspective.

Your work is therefore in the service of the human person, in a civilization that has often replaced the criterion of what is good with the criterion of what is useful. Strive to pursue it in great unity among yourselves, with courage, for the truth and the good are *stronger* than error and evil.

5. I wish to call special attention to *the pastoral implications* of your studies of responsible procreation and your promotion of the natural methods of family planning. The theological study is basic because "the concrete pedagogy of the Church must always remain linked to her doctrine and never separated from it" (Cf. Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 35). Moreover, this study leads to a clearer understanding that natural family planning is *not an end in itself* but is one

of the many dimensions of the Church's pastoral concern for married couples. The theological reflection is also a great benefit for the many dedicated married couples who give their time and energy generously, and often at the cost of personal sacrifice, to teaching programmes in the natural methods. For these couples are not engaged in a private activity, but their efforts, joined with those of the Church's pastors, are a *part of the Church's pastoral responsibility* to instil conviction and offer practical help to all married couples so that they may live their parenthood in a truly Christian and responsible manner (Cf. *Ibid.*). The promotion and teaching of the natural methods is, then, a truly pastoral concern, one that involves cooperation on the part of priests and religious, specialists and married couples, all working in cooperation with the Bishop of the local Church and receiving support and assistance from him.

In your own work with married couples, I urge you always to maintain a *special sensitivity* to their needs, their fidelity to the Church, and the sacrifices they so willingly make in proclaiming the Lord's message in and through their conjugal love and family life. The Church does not claim that responsible parenthood is easy, but *the grace of the sacrament of marriage* gives Christian couples a readiness and a capacity to live out their commitments with fidelity and joy. At the same time, the use of the natural methods gives a couple an openness to life, which is truly a splendid gift of God's goodness. It also helps them deepen their conjugal communication and draw closer to one another in their union - a closeness that lasts throughout their lives.

6. We must also be convinced that it is providential that *various natural family planning methods* exist so as to meet the needs of different couples. The Church does not give exclusive approval to any one natural method, but urges that all be made available and be respected. The ultimate reason for any natural method is not simply its biological effectiveness or reliability, but its consistency with a *Christian view of sexuality* as expressive of conjugal love. For sexuality reflects the innermost being of the human person as such, and is realized in a truly human way only if it is *an integral part of the love* by which a man and woman commit themselves *totally* to one another *until death* (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11).

In this pastoral effort, then, it is important that the various natural family planning groups should work together and share their research and studies so as to manifest a unity of purpose and commitment. In this way the Church is better able to present to the world the values of the natural methods, and reduce the strong emphasis on contraception, sterilization and abortion that we often encounter in the world. At the heart of this work in natural family planning must be a Christian view of the human person and the conviction that *married couples can really attain*, through God's grace and commitment to the natural methods, *a deeper and stronger conjugal unity*. This unity flows from and is enhanced by the dialogue, shared responsibility, mutual respect and self-control which are achieved in their practice of natural family planning.

Once again I thank you for all that you are doing in this field of Natural Family Planning, and in the whole area of promoting general attitudes that in turn influence the education of the young in

human love. *The well-being of the family and society* is intimately linked to your efforts and to your success.

I commend you all to Mary the Mother of the Incarnate Word, asking her to assist you in your support of life and in your service to true love.

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