



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO PARTICIPANTS OF THE CONFERENCE ON
"THE NATURAL REGULATION OF FERTILITY:
THE AUTHENTIC ALTERNATIVE"**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 11 December 1992*

*Your Eminence,
Excellencies,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. I am happy to welcome you, *experts from different parts of the world*, gathered under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Family *to study the latest developments in the question of the natural methods of regulating birth*. Together, you represent a very substantial expertise in the fields of research, of teaching and promoting fertility based upon responsible procreation and periodic continence.

The theme of your meeting, "The Natural Regulation of Fertility: The Authentic Alternative", indicates not just that you propose an alternative to contraception, abortion and sterilization, but also that you promote a true "humanization" of God's wonderful gift of procreation. Your proposal is anchored in an eminently holistic anthropology, the philosophical and theological foundations of which you are closely examining. Your discussions aim to harmonize the rigour of scientific discourse with the ethical demands of conjugal love. The authentic alternative of which your Conference speaks is *profoundly rooted in the truth about the human person*, and for this reason it is the object of the Church's keen interest and attention.

2. In the exercise of their mission to transmit life, married couples are deeply affected by social and economic circumstances. Sometimes, even when they are clearly open to life, couples find themselves obliged to distance births, not for any selfish reason but out of an objective sense of

responsibility. Conditions of poverty, or serious health problems, can cause a couple to be unprepared for the gift of new life. The fact that in certain cases women find it necessary to work outside the home brings a change in the perception of a woman's role in society and in the time and attention dedicated to family-life. In particular, certain family policies on the part of legislators do not facilitate the procreative and educational duties of parents. The Church therefore recognizes that there can be objective reasons for limiting or spacing births, but she insists, in accordance with "[Humanae Vitae](#)", that couples must have "serious motives" in order for it to be licit to renounce the use of marriage during the fertile days while making use of it during the infertile periods to express their love and safeguard their mutual fidelity (Paul VI, [Humanae Vitae](#), 16).

3. The Church, which has a duty to teach God's plan for the transmission of life, does not fail to stand by couples at a time when they must decide about what means are to be used to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities. The Church's pastoral care seeks to support couples and to help them by offering correct solutions, so that they can act in ways that conform to the dignity of matrimony and married love.

It is important to publicize the fact that *the methods which the Church finds moral and acceptable are today receiving the support of ever new scientific confirmations*. Recent years have been rich in scientific research, with significant results for a more precise knowledge of the rhythms of female fertility. Your Conference proposes to show in a concrete and factual way 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" (Paul VI, [Humanae Vitae](#), 24). I am pleased to know that as a result of these days of study you intend to make updated information available to Episcopal Conferences, universities and other interested institutions.

In this regard I wish to encourage the Church's pastors and other Catholics – doctors, marriage counsellors, teachers and married couples themselves – to promote "a broader, more decisive and more systematic effort to make the natural methods of regulating fertility known, respected and applied" (John Paul II, [Familiaris Consortio](#), 35). This is an area in which it is also possible to develop widespread interconfessional collaboration with all those who have at heart respect for life and human nature. Such collaboration can extend also to those who, although they do not share the faith and moral vision of Christians, nevertheless support the human values involved in the Church's proposal.

4. As indicated, your Conference's interest goes beyond the scientific aspects of the natural methods of regulating fertility, *to the way of living which is their necessary complement*. Experience shows that there is a close connection between the practice of the natural regulation of fertility and a lifestyle based on spouses' respect for each other and for the ethical demands of human sexuality. As I wrote in "[Familiaris Consortio](#)": "Theological reflection is able to perceive

and is called to study further *the difference, both anthropological and moral*, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle: it is a difference which is much wider and deeper than is usually thought, one which involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality" (*Ibid.*, 12). Artificial contraception often expresses a utilitarian approach to human sexuality which easily leads to dissociating its physical aspects from the full context of married love as commitment, mutual fidelity, responsibility and openness to the mystery of life. On the other hand the way of living which follows from the exercise of periodic continence leads the couple to deepen their knowledge of each other and achieve a harmony of body, mind and spirit which strengthens and encourages them on their journey together through life. It is marked by a constant dialogue and enriched by the tenderness and affection which constitute the heart of human sexuality. "In this way", as "[Familiaris Consortio](#)" points out, "sexuality is respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension, and is never 'used' as an 'object' that, by breaking the personal unity of soul and body, strikes at God's creation itself at the level of the deepest interaction of nature and person" (*Ibid.*, 12).

Because of the generous contribution of scientists, educators and married couples, one can speak of a turning-point in the defence and promotion of the dignity of conjugal life. There is a growing awareness of the true nature of married love, which is capable of bringing about an authentic liberation from so many abuses of power against women and the family both in industrialized countries and, to an even greater degree, in the developing ones. The results of scientific studies, the experience gained in teaching programmes in dioceses in different parts of the world, in associations and movements, and especially the testimony of couples themselves, show the validity, the advantages and the ethical value of methods based upon periodic continence. These methods, with their corresponding way of living, free couples from *the cultural, economic and political conditioning imposed by programmes of family planning*. They liberate the person, above all women, from recourse to pharmaceutical or other forms of interference in the natural processes connected with the transmission of life. They have proved to be practicable not only for elite groups but for couples everywhere, including the poorest and least economically developed peoples.

5. I wish to assure you of the importance of your specific contribution to the welfare of marriage and the family, and to encourage you in your work. Your Conference offers a concrete response to a call I made in the Apostolic Exhortation "[Familiaris Consortio](#)": "With regard to the question of lawful birth regulation, the ecclesial community at the present time must take on the task of instilling conviction and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way" (*Ibid.*, 15). I thank you for having accepted the invitation of the Pontifical Council for the Family to take part in this meeting. Upon your scientific and educational work, intensified by your commitment, I invoke the Lord's blessings. May he always be close to you and your families.

