



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS

POPE JOHN PAUL II

TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND STUDY

ON THE NATURAL REGULATION OF FERTILITY *To Professor Anna Cappella*

Director of the Centre for Research and Study

*on the Natural Regulation of Fertility*¹. I learned with great pleasure that this centre has organized a national convention to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Encyclical *Humanae vitae* of my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI. Dear Professor, I would first of all like to greet you, together with the directors, researchers and staff of the praiseworthy institution under your direction, and to express my esteem for and appreciation of the great contribution it has made in recent years to safeguarding and promoting human life at its earliest stage. My greeting is also extended to those attending the convention and to those giving papers during this congress: I hope that everyone will benefit from a closer study of the Church's teaching on the 'truth' of the act of love in which spouses become sharers in God's creative action.² The truth of this act stems from its being an expression of the spouses' reciprocal personal giving, a giving that can only be total since the person is one and indivisible. In the act that expresses their love, spouses are called to make a reciprocal gift of themselves to each other in the totality of their person: nothing that is part of their being can be excluded from this gift. This is the reason for the intrinsic unlawfulness of contraception: it introduces a substantial limitation into this reciprocal giving, breaking that "inseparable connection" between the two meanings of the conjugal act, the unitive and the procreative, which, as Pope Paul VI pointed out, are written by God himself into the nature of the human being (n. 12). Continuing in this vein, the great Pontiff rightly emphasized the "essential difference" between contraception and the use of natural methods in exercising "responsible procreation". It is an anthropological difference because, in the final analysis, it involves two irreconcilable concepts of the person and of human sexuality (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, n. 32). It is not uncommon, in current thinking, for the natural methods of fertility regulation to be separated from their proper ethical dimension and to be considered in their merely functional aspect. It is not surprising then that people no longer perceive the profound difference between these and the artificial methods. As a result they go so far as to speak of them as if they were another form of contraception. But this is certainly not the way they should be viewed or applied. On the contrary, it is only in the logic of the reciprocal gift between man and woman that the natural regulation of fertility can be correctly understood and authentically lived as the proper expression of a *real and mutual communion of love and life*. It is worth repeating here that "the person can never be considered as a means to an end; above all never a means of 'pleasure'. The person is and must be nothing other than the end of every act. Only then does the action correspond to the true dignity of the person" (cf. *Letter to Families*, n. 12).³ The Church is aware of the various difficulties married couples can encounter, especially in the present social context, not only in following but also in the very understanding of the moral norm that concerns them. Like a Mother, the Church draws close to couples

in difficulty to help them; but she does so by reminding them that the way to finding a solution to their problems must come through full respect for the truth of their love. "It is an outstanding manifestation of charity towards souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ", Paul VI admonished (*Humanae vitae*, n. 29). The Church makes available to spouses the means of grace which Christ offers in Redemption, and invites them to have recourse to them with ever renewed confidence. She exhorts them in particular to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is poured out in their hearts through the efficacy of their distinctive sacrament: this grace is the source of the interior energy they need to fulfil the many duties of their state, starting with that of being consistent with the truth of conjugal love. At the same time, the Church urgently requests the commitment of scientists, doctors, health-care personnel and pastoral workers to make available to married couples all those aids which prove an effective support for helping them fully to live their vocation (cf. *Humanae vitae*, 23-27). It is from this standpoint that we view the valuable work which is the concern of centres like the one you, Professor, have encouraged and continue to support with praiseworthy effort. As I note with appreciation the centre's activity of increasing public awareness by organizing conferences, seminars, conventions and courses at both national and international levels, I would like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of the study and research which are part of the institution's purpose, as appears from its very name. Indeed, it is necessary on the one hand to be committed in the medical field to disseminating knowledge of the scientific basis for the natural methods of fertility regulation, and on the other, to promoting study and research on the nature of the biochemical and biophysical events that accompany and indicate periods of fertility, leading to an easier and more reliable exercise of responsible parenthood.⁴ I hope that the professional contributions of the scholars taking part in this national convention will prove useful for the research being done in this field. Increasingly advanced scientific knowledge, along with respect for the moral values advocated by the Church, will not fail to make an effective contribution to advancing the idea of love as an unconditional and total gift of the person, and of fertility as a treasure to be gratefully received from the hands of the Creator. As I invoke the constant protection of Mary, Mother of Fair Love, and of St Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer, on those taking part in the convention and on all who come into contact with this centre, I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing you requested as a pledge of my ever mindful affection. *From the Vatican, 27 February 1998.* **IOANNES**

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