



Address to the Working Group on ‘Scientific Bases of the Natural Regulation of Fertility and Associated Problems’

John Paul II declares that research has demonstrated that ‘natural methods of regulating fertility, of family planning, are trustworthy and effective’. Such methods help couples ‘to embrace the normative principles of their sexual activity’. The love of a man and a woman must be understood in all its aspects but ‘contemporary culture often regards sexuality in a reductive way’. The Pope calls on world leaders to promote research and education in the ‘area of natural methods of family planning’.

Your Eminences,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am grateful to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences for organising this study session on the topic of the ‘scientific bases of the natural regulation of fertility and associated problems’. I wish to thank Professor Nicola Cabibbo, the President of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, for his kind greeting. Your decision to address this subject is an appropriate follow-up to your earlier research on population and on global demographic trends. By inviting highly qualified experts to share the results of their research, the Academy is once more fulfilling the purpose for which it was established: to provide valuable scientific insights into themes of special concern to the Church and to society.

2. At the invitation of the Academy, you are directing your attention to the scientific and technical aspects of fertility-related matters. The Church is grateful for your work, for she ‘is the first to praise and commend the application of the human intellect to an activity in which man as a rational creature is so closely associated with his Creator’.¹ Your collective research will offer a better appreciation of the significant progress which has been made in the knowledge and understanding of the female fertility cycle. This knowledge helps couples in achieving as well as avoiding pregnancies. It should be of general interest that scientists have been able to demonstrate, by careful studies and with the assistance of many married couples, that *natural methods of regulating fertility, or family planning, are trustworthy and effective*, even in cases of very irregular ovarian cycles. The results of this research, made available to couples, can increase the options available to them and can therefore give husbands and wives the opportunity to make important decisions in a free and responsible manner, in an interpersonal dialogue which is respectful of the integrity of both partners and faithful to their religious convictions and cultural sensitivities. Such a

dialogue can only enrich and deepen the communion between them.

3. The Church is pleased to note the progress which has been made in the knowledge of human biology and of female fertility rhythms.² She considers these matters very important, since the sexual expression of love as a specifically human act *touches the very meaning of life and the dignity of the individuals involved*. Contemporary culture often regards sexuality in a reductive way, not in harmony with an integral vision of the human person. The love of a man and a woman must be understood in its fullest meaning, without dissociating the various aspects – spiritual, moral, physical, psychological – which comprise it. To ignore any one of these dimensions of love involves a serious risk to the unity of the person. The practice of the natural methods of family planning helps couples to embrace the normative principles of their sexual activity, which flow from the very structure of their persons and their relationship.

4. As a matter of fact, we can read in the body's reproductive system an indication of the design of the Creator. Knowledge of human sexuality and the reproductive system helps married couples discover the spousal dimension of the body and its place in God's design.³ Such a perspective provides an understanding of the *essential moral difference* between those methods which artificially interrupt a process which of itself is open to life and other methods – based on an ever deepening knowledge of the biological rhythms of the human body – which order sexuality inseparably to the communion of persons and to the gift of life. In fact, the conjugal act has its own total meaning; it engages the individual in such a way that the experience of communion and openness to life cannot be separated. When natural methods are adopted, the body is considered an expression of the person's profound nature; otherwise, the separation of the different aspects of human sexuality in a particular act leads to considering the body as an external object, which the subject uses in a way which denies an essential purpose of the act itself and therefore involves a denial of the essential values of the couple's interpersonal relationship. The practice of natural methods contributes to openness and greater sensitivity of each partner towards the other; it is also a training in the ways of interdependence and mutual concern, through respect for the other person's biological and psychological rhythms.

5. From this distinguished Assembly I would like to appeal to the world's leaders to make the necessary means available for research and education in the area of natural methods of family planning. Indeed, it is the duty of States and international organisations which recognise the principle of freedom of conscience to facilitate access to *methods which respect the ethical convictions of couples*. The future of man and of society is at stake in this all important area of human behaviour, a matter which also has a direct influence on social development. For the struggle against underdevelopment and the response to population questions connected with it have an ally, not a foe, in methods which strengthen respect for human dignity. It is the whole of society which will benefit greatly from attention to these methods.

6. I am grateful to all of you for your co-operation with the Holy See. Through you I must also

thank and encourage all those, including countless volunteers, who work with patience and special pedagogical skill to ensure that couples become familiar with natural methods of planning family size and learn how to apply them. I am also aware of the efforts being made to educate young people in their emotional life and their sexuality, as an essential preparation for marriage. This education often leads them to go against the current of contemporary opinion in matters of sex and human relationships. They need to understand clearly the profound reasons underlying their choice.

I entrust to the Lord your research which will allow important advances to be put before the international scientific community as a vital service to the integral development of individuals and couples. And I invoke Almighty God's abundant blessings upon you, your collaborators and the members of your families.

1 Cf. *Humanae Vitae*, n. 16.

2 Cf. *Humanae Vitae*, n. 35.

3 Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 31.