

# Address to Midwives Given by His Holiness Pope Pius XII

29 October 1951

When one thinks of this admirable collaboration of the parents, of nature and of God, from which is born a new human being in the image and likeness of God, how can the precious contribution which you give to such a work be not appreciated? The heroic mother of the Machabees admonished her children: "I know not how you were formed in my womb, for I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life, neither did I frame the limbs of every one of you. But the Creator of the world that formed the nativity of men . . ."

Therefore, he who approaches this cradle of life's origin and exercises his action in one way or another must know the order which the Creator wishes maintained and the laws which govern it. For here it is not a case of purely physical or biological laws which blind forces and irrational agents obey, but of laws whose execution and effects are entrusted to the voluntary and free cooperation of man.

This order, fixed by the supreme intelligence, is directed to the purpose willed by the Creator. It embraces the exterior work of man and the internal assent of his free will; it implies action and dutiful omission. Nature places at man's disposal the concatenation of the causes from which will rise a new human life, it is for man to release its loving force, for nature to develop its course and lead it to its completion. When man has completed his part and placed in action the marvelous evolution of life, his duty is to respect its progress in a religious manner, a duty which forbids him to arrest nature's work or halt its natural development.

In such a way nature's part and man's part are distinctly determined. Your professional formation and experience place you in a position to know the action of nature and that of man, no less than the rules and the laws to which both are subject; your conscience, illuminated by reason and faith, under the guidance of the Authority established by God, teaches you how far lawful action extends, and when, instead, there is strictly imposed the obligation of omission.

## The Inviolability of human life

You, more than others, can appreciate and realize what human life is in itself, and what it is worth in the eyes of sane reason, before your moral conscience, before civil society, before the Church and, above all, what it is worth in the eyes of God. God created all earthly things for man; and man himself, as regards his being and his essence, has been created for God and not for any other creature, even if, as regards his actions, he has obligations towards the community as well. The child is "man," even if he be not yet born, in the same degree and by the same title as his mother.

Besides, every human being, even the child in the womb, has the right to life directly from God and not from his parents, not from any society or human authority. Therefore, there is no man, no human authority, no science, no "indication" at all—whether it be medical, eugenic, social, economic, or moral—that may offer or give a valid judicial title for a direct deliberate disposal of an innocent human life, that is, a disposal which aims at its destruction, whether as an end in itself or as a means to achieve the end, perhaps in no way at all illicit. Thus, for example, to save the life of the mother is a very noble act; but the direct killing of the child as a means to such an end is illicit. The direct destruction of so-called "useless lives," already born or still in the womb, practiced extensively a few years ago, can in no wise be justified. Therefore, when this practice was initiated, the Church expressly declared that it was

against the natural law and the divine positive law, and consequently that it was unlawful to kill, even by order of the public authorities, those who were innocent, even if on account of some physical or mental defect, they were useless to the State and a burden upon it. The life of an innocent person is sacrosanct, and any direct attempt or aggression against it is a violation of one of the fundamental laws without which secure human society is impossible. We have no need to teach you in detail the meaning and the gravity, in your profession, of this fundamental law. But never forget this: there rises above every human law and above every "indication" the faultless law of God.

The apostolate of your profession imposes on you the duty of passing on to others the knowledge, esteem and respect for human life that you foster in your heart by reason of your Christian convictions. You must, when called upon, be prepared to defend resolutely, and when possible, protect the helpless and hidden life of the child, basing yourselves on the divine precept: Non occides: do not kill. Such a defensive function is sometimes presented as most necessary and urgent. It is not, however, the nobler and more important part of your mission; this in fact is not merely negative, but above all constructive, and tends to promote, edify and strengthen.

## Welcoming the newly born

Infuse into the spirit and heart of the mother and father the esteem, desire, joy, and the loving welcome of the newly born right from its first cry. The child, formed in the mother's womb, is a gift of God, Who entrusts its care to the parents. With what delicacy and charm does the Sacred Scripture show the gracious crown of children united around the father's table! Children are the recompense of the just, as sterility is very often the punishment for the sinner. Harken to the divine word expressed with the insuperable poetry of the Psalm: "Your wife, as a fruitful vine within your house, your children as olive shoots round about your table. Behold, thus is that man blessed, who fears the Lord!", while of the wicked it is written: "May his posterity be given over to destruction; may their name be blotted out in the next generation".

Immediately after birth, be quick to place the child in the father's arms—as the ancient Romans were wont to do—but with a spirit incomparably more elevated. For the Romans, it was the affirmation of the paternity and the authority which derived from it; here it is grateful homage to the Creator, the invocation of divine blessings, the promise to fulfill with devout affection the office which God has committed him. If the Lord praises and rewards the faithful servant for having yielded him five talents, what praise, what reward will He reserve for the father, who has guarded and raised for Him a human life entrusted to him, greater than all the gold and silver of the world?

Your apostolate, however, is directed above all to the mother. Undoubtedly nature's voice speaks in her and places in her heart the desire, joy, courage, love and will to care for the child; but to overcome the suggestions of fearfulness in all its forms, that voice must be strengthened and take on, so to say, a supernatural accent. It is your duty to cause the young mother to enjoy, less by your words than by your whole manner of acting, the greatness, beauty and nobility of that life which begins, is formed and lives in her womb, that child which she bears in her arms and suckles at her breast; to make shine in her eyes and heart the great gift of God's love for her and her child. Sacred Scripture makes us understand with many examples the echo of suppliant prayers and then the songs of grateful happiness of many mothers who, after having longingly and tearfully implored the grace of motherhood, were finally answered.

Even the pains which, after original sin, a mother has to suffer to give birth to her child only make her draw tighter the bond which unites them: the more the pain has cost her, so much the more is her love for her child. He who formed mothers' hearts, expressed this thought with moving and profound

simplicity: "A woman about to give birth has sorrow, because her hour has come. But when she has brought forth the child, she no longer remembers the anguish for her joy that a man is born into the world." Through the pen of the Apostle, St. Paul, the Holy Ghost also points out the greatness and joy of motherhood: God gives the child to the mother, but, together with the gift, He makes her cooperate effectively at the opening of the flower, of which He has deposited the germ in her womb, and this cooperation becomes a way which leads her to her eternal salvation: "Yet women will be saved by child bearing".

This perfect accord of reason and faith gives you the guarantee that you are within the real truth and that you may continue your apostolate of respect and love for incipient life with unconditioned security. If you succeed in carrying out your apostolate at the cradle where rests the newly born child, it will not be too difficult for you to obtain what your professional conscience in harmony with the laws of God and of nature, obliges you to prescribe for the welfare of mother and child.

On the other hand, it is not necessary for Us to show you who are well experienced, how much this apostolate of respect and love for the new life is necessary today. Unfortunately, cases are not rare in which it is sufficient only to hint at the fact that children are a "blessing" to provoke contradiction and even derision. More often in word and thought the idea of the great "burden" of children is predominant. Inasmuch as this mentality is opposed to God's plan and to Scripture, so is it also contrary to sane reason and the sentiments of nature! If there are conditions and circumstances in which parents without violating God's law can avoid the "blessing" of children, nevertheless these unavoidable and exceptional cases do not authorize anyone to pervert ideas, to despise values and to treat with contempt the mother who had the courage and honor to give life.

## Supernatural life

If what We have said up to now concerns the protection and care of natural life, much more so must it concern the supernatural life, which the newly born receives with Baptism. In the present economy there is no other way to communicate that life to the child who has not attained the use of reason. Above all, the state of grace is absolutely necessary at the moment of death without it salvation and supernatural happiness—the beatific vision of God—are impossible. An act of love is sufficient for the adult to obtain sanctifying grace and to supply the lack of baptism; to the still unborn or newly born this way is not open. Therefore, if it is considered that charity to our fellowman obliges us to assist him in the case of necessity, then this obligation is so much the more important and urgent as the good to be obtained or the evil to be avoided is the greater, and in the measure that the needy person is incapable of helping or saving himself with his own powers; and so it is easy to understand the great importance of providing for the baptism of the child deprived of complete reason who finds himself in grave danger or at death's threshold.

Undoubtedly this duty binds the parents in the first place, but in case of necessity, when there is no time to lose or it is not possible to call a priest, the sublime office of conferring baptism is yours.

(Loveliness of this act of spiritual mercy.)

## The mother's duties

At the moment she understood the Angel's message the Virgin Mary replied: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Be it done unto me according to thy word." A "fiat," a burning "yes" to the call to motherhood! A virginal maternity, incomparably superior to any other; but a real maternity, in the true and proper

sense of the word. Therefore, when reciting the Angelus, after having recalled to mind Mary's acceptance, the faithful immediately reply: "And the Word was made flesh."

One of the fundamental demands of the true moral order is that to the use of the marriage rights there corresponds the sincere internal acceptance of the function and duties of motherhood. With this condition the woman walks in the path traced out by the Creator towards the goal which He has assigned His creature; He makes her, by the exercise of this function, partaker of His goodness, wisdom and omnipotence, according to the Angel's message: "Concipies in utero et paries—you will conceive and bear forth a child".

If such then is the biological foundation of your professional activity, the urgent object of your apostolate will be: to maintain, reawake and stimulate the sense and love of the function of motherhood.

When husband and wife value and appreciate the honor of producing a new life, whose coming they await with holy impatience, your part is a very easy one: it is easy enough to cultivate in them this interior sentiment the readiness to welcome and cherish that nascent life follows spontaneously. This is unfortunately not always the case; often the child is not wanted; worse still, it is dreaded. How can there be a ready response to the call of duty in such conditions? Your apostolate must in this case be exercised both efficiently and efficaciously: first of all, negatively, by refusing any immoral cooperation secondly, positively, by turning your delicate care to the task of removing those preconceived ideas, various fears or faint excuses, to removing as far as possible the obstacles, even if external, which may make the acceptance of motherhood painful.

If recourse is had to you for advice and help to facilitate the birth of new life, to protect it and set it on its way towards its full development, you can unhesitatingly lend your help; but in how many cases are you, instead, called upon to prevent the procreation and preservation of this life, regardless of the precepts of the moral order? To accede to such requests would be to debase your knowledge and your skill by becoming accomplices in an immoral action; it would be the perversion of your apostolate. This requires a calm but unequivocal "no" that prevents the transgression of God's law and of the dictates of your conscience. Hence your profession obliges you to a clear knowledge of this divine law, so that it may be observed without excess or defect.

## The conjugal act

Our Predecessor, Pius XI, of happy memory, in his Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, of December 31, 1930, once again solemnly proclaimed the fundamental law of the conjugal act and conjugal relations: that every attempt of either husband or wife in the performance of the conjugal act or in the development of its natural consequences which aims at depriving it of its inherent force and hinders the procreation of new life is immoral; and that no "indication" or need can convert an act which is intrinsically immoral into a moral and lawful one.

This precept is in full force today, as it was in the past, and so it will be in the future also, and always, because it is not a simple human whim, but the expression of a natural and divine law.

Let Our words be a sure rule for all those cases which require of your profession and your apostolate a clear and firm decision.

## Sterilization

It would be more than a mere lack of readiness in the service of life if an attack made by man were to concern not only a single act but should affect the organism itself to deprive it, by means of sterilization, of the faculty of procreating a new life. Here, too, you have a clear rule in the Church's teaching to guide your behavior both interiorly and exteriorly. Direct sterilization— that is, whose aim tends as a means or as an end at making procreation impossible—is a grave violation of the moral law and therefore unlawful. Not even public authority has any right, under the pretext of any "indication" whatsoever, to permit it, and less still to prescribe it or to have it used to the detriment of innocent human beings.

This principle is already proclaimed in the above mentioned Encyclical of Pius XI on marriage. Thus when ten years or so ago sterilization came to be more widely applied, the Holy See saw the necessity of expressly and publicly declaring that direct sterilization, either perpetual or temporary, in either the male or the female, is unlawful according to natural law, from which, as you well know, not even the Church has the power to dispense.

As far as you can, oppose, in your apostolate, these perverse tendencies and do not give them your cooperation.

## Birth control

Today, besides, another grave problem has arisen, namely, if and how far the obligation of being ready for the service of maternity is reconcilable with the ever more general recourse to the periods of natural sterility the so-called "agenesic" periods in woman, which seems a clear expression of a will contrary to that precept.

You are expected to be well informed, from the medical point of view, in regard to this new theory and the progress which may still be made on this subject, and it is also expected that your advice and assistance shall not be based upon mere popular publications, but upon objective science and on the authoritative judgment of conscientious specialists in medicine and biology. It is your function, not the priest's, to instruct the married couple through private consultation or serious publications on the biological and technical aspect of the theory, without however allowing yourselves to be drawn into an unjust and unbecoming propaganda. But in this field also your apostolate demands of you, as women and as Christians, that you know and defend the moral law, to which the application of the theory is subordinated. In this the Church is competent.

It is necessary first of all to consider two hypotheses. If the application of that theory implies that husband and wife may use their matrimonial right even during the days of natural sterility no objection can be made. In this case they do not hinder or jeopardize in any way the consummation of the natural act and its ulterior natural consequences. It is exactly in this that the application of the theory, of which we are speaking, differs essentially from the abuse already mentioned, which consists in the perversion of the act itself. If, instead, husband and wife go further, that is, limiting the conjugal act exclusively to those periods, then their conduct must be examined more closely.

Here again we are faced with two hypotheses. If, one of the parties contracted marriage with the intention of limiting the matrimonial right itself to the periods of sterility, and not only its use, in such a manner that during the other days the other party would not even have the right to ask for the debt, than this would imply an essential defect in the marriage consent, which would result in the marriage

being invalid, because the right deriving from the marriage contract is a permanent, uninterrupted and continuous right of husband and wife with respect to each other.

However if the limitation of the act to the periods of natural sterility does not refer to the right itself but only to the use of the right, the validity of the marriage does not come up for discussion. Nonetheless, the moral lawfulness of such conduct of husband and wife should be affirmed or denied according as their intention to observe constantly those periods is or is not based on sufficiently morally sure motives. The mere fact that husband and wife do not offend the nature of the act and are even ready to accept and bring up the child, who, notwithstanding their precautions, might be born, would not be itself sufficient to guarantee the rectitude of their intention and the unobjectionable morality of their motives.

The reason is that marriage obliges the partners to a state of life, which even as it confers certain rights so it also imposes the accomplishment of a positive work concerning the state itself. In such a case, the general principle may be applied that a positive action may be omitted if grave motives, independent of the good will of those who are obliged to perform it, show that its performance is inopportune, or prove that it may not be claimed with equal right by the petitioner—in this case, mankind.

The matrimonial contract, which confers on the married couple the right to satisfy the inclination of nature, constitutes them in a state of life, namely, the matrimonial state. Now, on married couples, who make use of the specific act of their state, nature and the Creator impose the function of providing for the preservation of mankind. This is the characteristic service which gives rise to the peculiar value of their state, the *bonum proles*. The individual and society, the people and the State, the Church itself, depend for their existence, in the order established by God, on fruitful marriages. Therefore, to embrace the matrimonial state, to use continually the faculty proper to such a state and lawful only therein, and, at the same time, to avoid its primary duty without a grave reason, would be a sin against the very nature of married life.

Serious motives, such as those which not rarely arise from medical, eugenic, economic and social so-called "indications," may exempt husband and wife from the obligatory, positive debt for a long period or even for the entire period of matrimonial life. From this it follows that the observance of the natural sterile periods may be lawful, from the moral viewpoint: and it is lawful in the conditions mentioned. If, however, according to a reasonable and equitable judgment, there are no such grave reasons either personal or deriving from exterior circumstances, the will to avoid the fecundity of their union, while continuing to satisfy to the full their sensuality, can only be the result of a false appreciation of life and of motives foreign to sound ethical principles.

## The heroism of continence

Perhaps you will now press the point, however, observing that in the exercise of your profession you find yourselves sometimes faced with delicate cases, in which, that is, there cannot be a demand that the risk of maternity be run, a risk which in certain cases must be absolutely avoided, and in which as well the observance of the agenesic periods either does not give sufficient security, or must be rejected for other reasons. Now, you ask, how can one still speak of an apostolate in the service of maternity?

If, in your sure and experienced judgment, the circumstances require an absolute "no," that is to say, the exclusion of motherhood, it would be a mistake and a wrong to impose or advise a "yes." Here it is a question of basic facts and therefore not a theological but a medical question; and thus it is in your competence. However, in such cases, the married couple does not desire a medical answer, of necessity

a negative one, but seeks an approval of a "technique" of conjugal activity which will not give rise to maternity. And so you are again called to exercise your apostolate inasmuch as you leave no doubt whatsoever that even in these extreme cases every preventive practice and every direct attack upon the life and the development of the seed is, in conscience, forbidden and excluded, and that there is only one way open, namely, to abstain from every complete performance of the natural faculty. Your apostolate in this matter requires that you have a clear and certain judgment and a calm firmness.

It will be objected that such an abstention is impossible, that such a heroism is asking too much. You will hear this objection raised; you will read it everywhere. Even those who should be in a position to judge very differently, either by reason of their duties or qualifications, are ever ready to bring forward the following argument: "No one is obliged to do what is impossible, and it may be presumed that no reasonable legislator can will his law to oblige to the point of impossibility. But for husbands and wives long periods of abstention are impossible. Therefore they are not obliged to abstain; divine law cannot have this meaning."

In such a manner, from partially true premises, one arrives at a false conclusion. To convince oneself of this it suffices to invert the terms of the argument: "God does not oblige anyone to do what is impossible. But God obliges husband and wife to abstinence if their union cannot be completed according to the laws of nature. Therefore in this case abstinence is possible." To confirm this argument, there can be brought forward the doctrine of the Council of Trent, which, in the chapter on the observance necessary and possible of referring to a passage of St. Augustine, teaches: "God does not command the impossible but while He commands, He warns you to do what you can and to ask for the grace for what you cannot do and He helps you so that you may be able".

Do not be disturbed, therefore, in the practice of your profession and apostolate, by this great talk of impossibility. Do not be disturbed in your internal judgment nor in your external conduct. Never lend yourselves to anything which is contrary to the law of God and to your Christian conscience! It would be a wrong towards men and women of our age to judge them incapable of continuous heroism. Nowadays, for many a reason,—perhaps constrained by dire necessity or even at times oppressed by injustice—heroism is exercised to a degree and to an extent that in the past would have been thought impossible. Why, then, if circumstances truly demand it, should this heroism stop at the limits prescribed by the passions and the inclinations of nature? It is clear: he who does not want to master himself is not able to do so, and he who wishes to master himself relying only upon his own powers, without sincerely and perseveringly seeking divine help, will be miserably deceived.

Here is what concerns your apostolate for winning married people over to a service of motherhood, not in the sense of an utter servitude under the promptings of nature, but to the exercise of the rights and duties of married life, governed by the principles of reason and faith.

The final aspect of your apostolate concerns the defense of both the right order of values and of the dignity of the human being.

## The order of values

"Personal values" and the need to respect such are a theme which, over the last twenty years or so, has been considered more and more by writers. In many of their works, even the specifically sexual act has its place assigned, that of serving the "person" of the married couple. The proper and most profound sense of the exercise of conjugal rights would consist in this, that the union of bodies is the expression and the realization of personal and affective union.

Articles, chapters, entire books, conferences, especially dealing with the "technique" of love, are composed to spread these ideas, to illustrate them with advice to the newly married as a guide in matrimony, in order that they may not neglect, through stupidity or a false sense of shame or unfounded scruples, that which God, Who also created natural inclinations, offers them. If from their complete reciprocal gift of husband and wife there results a new life, it is a result which remains outside, or, at the most, on the border of "personal values"; a result which is not denied, but neither is it desired as the center of marital relations.

According to these theories, your dedication for the welfare of the still hidden life in the womb of the mother, anti your assisting its happy birth, would only have but a minor and secondary importance.

Now, if this relative evaluation were merely to place the emphasis on the personal values of husband and wife rather than on that of the offspring, it would be possible, strictly speaking, to put such a problem aside. But, however, it is a matter of a grave inversion of the order of values and of the ends imposed by the Creator Himself. We find Ourselves faced with the propagation of a number of ideas and sentiments directly opposed to the clarity, profundity, and seriousness of Christian thought. Here, once again, the need for your apostolate. It may happen that you receive the confidences of the mother and wife and are questioned on the more secret desires and intimacies of married life. How, then, will you be able, aware of your mission, to give weight to truth and right order in the appreciation and action of the married couple, if you yourselves are not furnished with the strength of character needed to uphold what you know to be true and just?

## The primary end of marriage

Now, the truth is that matrimony, as an institution of nature, in virtue of the Creator's will, has not as a primary and intimate end the personal perfection of the married couple but the procreation and upbringing of a new life. The other ends, inasmuch as they are intended by nature, are not equally primary, much less superior to the primary end, but are essentially subordinated to it. This is true of every marriage, even if no offspring result, just as of every eye it can be said that it is destined and formed to see, even if, in abnormal cases arising from special internal or external conditions, it will never be possible to achieve visual perception.

It was precisely to end the uncertainties and deviations which threatened to diffuse errors regarding the scale of values of the purposes of matrimony and of their reciprocal relations, that a few years ago (March 10, 1944), We Ourselves drew up a declaration on the order of those ends, pointing out what the very internal structure of the natural disposition reveals. We showed what has been handed down by Christian tradition, what the Supreme Pontiffs have repeatedly taught, and what was then in due measure promulgated by the Code of Canon Law. Not long afterwards, to correct opposing opinions, the Holy See, by a public decree, proclaimed that it could not admit the opinion of some recent authors who denied that the primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of the offspring, or teach that the secondary ends are not essentially subordinated to the primary end, but are on an equal footing and independent of it.

Would this lead, perhaps, to Our denying or diminishing what is good and just in personal values resulting from matrimony and its realization? Certainly not, because the Creator has designed that for the procreation of a new life human beings made of flesh and blood, gifted with soul and heart, shall be called upon as men and not as animals deprived of reason to be the authors of their posterity. It is for



this end that the Lord desires the union of husband and wife. Indeed, the Holy Scripture says of God that He created man to His image and He created him male and female, and willed—as is repeatedly affirmed in Holy Writ—that "a man shall leave mother and father, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh".

All this is therefore true and desired by God. But, on the other hand, it must not be divorced completely from the primary function of matrimony—the procreation of offspring. Not only the common work of external life, but even all personal enrichment—spiritual and intellectual—all that in married love as such is most spiritual and profound, has been placed by the will of the Creator and of nature at the service of posterity. The perfect married life, of its very nature, also signifies the total devotion of parents to the well-being of their children, and married love in its power and tenderness is itself a condition of the sincerest care of the offspring and the guarantee of its realization.

To reduce the common life of husband and wife and the conjugal act to a mere organic function for the transmission of seed would be but to convert the domestic hearth, the family sanctuary, into a biological laboratory. Therefore, in Our allocution of September 29, 1949, to the International Congress of Catholic Doctors, We expressly excluded artificial insemination in marriage. The conjugal act, in its natural structure, is a personal action, a simultaneous and immediate cooperation of husband and wife, which by the very nature of the agents and the propriety of the act, is the expression of the reciprocal gift, which, according to Holy Writ, effects the union "in one flesh".

That is much more than the union of two genes, which can be effected even by artificial means, that is, without the natural action of husband and wife. The conjugal act, ordained and desired by nature, is a personal cooperation, to which husband and wife, when contracting marriage, exchange the right.

Therefore, when this act in its natural form is from the beginning perpetually impossible, the object of the matrimonial contract is essentially vitiated. This is what we said on that occasion: "Let it not be forgotten: only the procreation of a new life according to the will and the design of the Creator carries with it in a stupendous degree of perfection the intended ends. It is at the same time in conformity with the spiritual and bodily nature and the dignity of the married couple, in conformity with the happy and normal development of the child".

Advise the fiancée or the young married woman who comes to seek your advice about the values of matrimonial life that these personal values, both in the sphere of the body and the senses and in the sphere of the spirit, are truly genuine, but that the Creator has placed them not in the first, but in the second degree of the scale of values.

## Free renunciation to fatherhood

To these considerations must be added another which tends to be forgotten. All these secondary values of the procreative sphere and activity are included in the ambit of the specific function of husband and wife, which is to be authors and educators of a new life. A high and noble duty! Yet one which does not pertain to the essence of a complete human being, because, if the natural generative tendency does not come to its realization, there is no diminution of the human person, in any way or degree. The renunciation of this realization is not—especially if made for more sublime purposes—a mutilation of personal and spiritual values. Of such free renunciation for the love of God's kingdom the Lord has said: "Non omnes capiunt verbum istud, sed quibus datum est—Not all can accept this teaching; but to those to whom it has been given".

To exalt beyond measure, as it is often done today, the generative function, even in the just and moral form of married life, is therefore not only an error and an aberration; it also bears with itself the danger of intellectual and affective error, capable of preventing and stifling good and lofty sentiments, especially in youth which is still without experience and ignorant of life's delusions. For what normal man, healthy in body and soul, would like to belong to the number of those deficient in character and spirit?

May your apostolate enlighten the minds and inculcate in them this just order of values, there where you exercise your profession, so that men may conform to it in their judgments and conduct!

## Human dignity in the conjugal act

This explanation of Ours on the functions of your professional apostolate would be incomplete, if We did not add further a few more words about the defense of human dignity in the use of the procreative faculty.

The same Creator, Who in His bounty and wisdom willed to make use of the work of man and woman, by uniting them in matrimony, for the preservation and propagation of the human race, has also decreed that in this function the parties should experience pleasure and happiness of body and spirit. Husband and wife, therefore, by seeking and enjoying this pleasure do no wrong whatever. They accept what the Creator has destined for them.

Nevertheless, here also, husband and wife must know how to keep themselves within the limits of a just moderation. As with the pleasure of food and drink so with the sexual they must not abandon themselves without restraint to the impulses of the senses. The right rule is this: the use of the natural procreative disposition is morally lawful in matrimony only, in the service of and in accordance with the ends of marriage itself. Hence it follows that only in marriage with the observing of this rule is the desire and fruition of this pleasure and of this satisfaction lawful. For the pleasure is subordinate to the law of the action whence it derives, and not vice versa—the action to the law of pleasure. And this law, so very reasonable, concerns not only the substance but also the circumstances of the action, so that, even when the substance of the act remains morally safe, it is possible to sin in the way it is performed.

The transgression of this law is as old as original sin. But in our times there is the risk that one may lose sight of the fundamental principle itself. At present, in fact, it is usual to support in words and in writing (and this by Catholics in certain circles) the necessary autonomy, the proper end, and the proper value of sexuality and of its realization, independently of the purpose of procreating a new life. There is a tendency to subject to a new examination and to a new norm the very order established by God and not to admit any other restraint to the way of satisfying the instinct than by considering the essence of the instinctive act. In addition there would be substituted a license to serve blindly and without restraint the whims and instincts of nature in the place of the moral obligations to dominate passions; and this sooner or later cannot but turn out to be a danger to morals, conscience and human dignity.

If nature had aimed exclusively, or at least in the first place, at a reciprocal gift and possession of the married couple in joy and delight, and if it had ordered that act only to make happy in the highest possible degree their personal experience, and not to stimulate them to the service of life, then the Creator would have adopted another plan in forming and constituting the natural act. Now, instead, all

this is subordinated and ordered to that unique, great law of the "generatio et educatio prolix," namely the accomplishment of the primary end of matrimony as the origin and source of life.

Unfortunately, unceasing waves of hedonism invade the world and threaten to submerge in the swelling tide of thoughts, desires and acts the whole marital life, not without serious dangers and grave prejudice to the primary duty of husband and wife.

This anti-Christian hedonism too often is not ashamed to elevate itself to a doctrine, inculcating the ardent desire to make always more intense the pleasure in the preparation and in the performance of the conjugal union, as if in matrimonial relations the whole moral law were reduced to the normal performance of the act itself, and as if all the rest, in whatever way it is done, were to be justified by the expression of mutual affection, sanctified by the Sacrament of Matrimony, worthy of praise and reward before God and conscience. There is no thought at all of the dignity of man and of the Christian—a dignity—which restrains the excess of sensuality.

No; the gravity and sanctity of the Christian moral law do not admit an unchecked satisfaction of the sexual instinct tending only to pleasure and enjoyment; they do not permit rational man to let himself be mastered to such an extent, neither as regards the substance nor the circumstances of the act.

There are some who would allege that happiness in marriage is in direct proportion to the reciprocal enjoyment in conjugal relations. It is not so: indeed, happiness in marriage is in direct proportion to the mutual respect of the partners, even in their intimate relations; not that they regard as immoral and refuse what nature offers and what the Creator has given, but because this respect, and the mutual esteem which it produces, is one of the strongest elements of a pure love, and for this reason all the more tender.

In the performance of your profession, do your utmost to repel the attack of this refined hedonism void of spiritual values and thus unworthy of Christian married couples. Show how nature has given, truly, the instinctive desire for pleasure and sanctions it in the lawful marriage, not as an end in itself, but rather for the service of life. Banish from your heart that cult of pleasure, and do your best to prevent the spreading of a literature which considers as its duty the description in full of the intimacies of married life under the pretext of instructing, guiding and reassuring. In general, common sense, natural instinct and a brief instruction on the clear and simple maxims of Christian moral law, are sufficient to give peace to the tender conscience of married people. If, in certain circumstances, a fiancée or a young married woman were in need of further enlightenment on some particular point, it is your duty to give them tactfully an explanation in conformity with natural law and with a healthy Christian conscience.

This teaching of Ours has nothing to do with Manichaeism and Jansenism, as some would have people believe in order to justify themselves. It is only a defense of the honor of Christian matrimony and of the personal dignity of the married couple.