



si si no no

"But let your speech be, 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no'; and whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37)"

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The Magisterium Spurned

(An excerpt from Pope Pius XII's Address to Midwives, Oct. 29, 1951)

Nowadays, another grave problem presents itself, that is, whether, and to what extent, the obligation of being ready for the service of maternity is reconcilable with a constantly spreading recourse to the natural periods of sterility (the so-called "agenesic" periods in woman), which seems to be clear expression of a will contrary to that precept....[T]he lawfulness of such conduct on the part of a husband and wife should be admitted or denied, according as the intention constantly to observe those periods is or is not based on sufficient and reliable moral motives. The mere fact that the partners do not vitiate the nature of the act and are also ready to accept and to bring up the child that, notwithstanding their precautions, might be born, would not of itself be sufficient to guarantee the uprightness of their intention and the unquestionable morality of their motives.

The reason is that marriage imposes a state of life which, while it confers certain rights, likewise enjoins the accomplishment of a positive task concerning that state. This being so, the general principle may be applied that a positive service may be omitted if grave motives, beyond the control of the good will of those who are under the obligation to perform it, show that its performance is inadvisable and prove that the petitioner (in this case mankind) cannot equitably claim it.

The marriage contract, which confers on husband and wife the right to satisfy the natural inclination, sets them in a specific state of life, the matrimonial status. Now, on husbands and wives, who make use of it through the specific act of their status, nature and the Creator impose the function of providing for the preservation of the human race. That is the characteristic service which gives to their status its peculiar value, the *bonum prolis* – *the good of posterity*. The individual and society, the people and the State, the Church itself, depend for their existence, in the order established by God, on prolific marriages. Hence, to embrace the matrimonial state, to make use continually of the faculty peculiar to it and licit only therein, and, on the other hand, to avoid its primary duty, always and deliberately, without a serious motive, would be to sin against the very meaning of married life.

Serious motives, such as those not seldom appearing in medical, eugenic, and social so-called "indications," may exempt some from the positive, obligatory act for a long time and even, if necessary, for the whole duration of marriage. It follows from this that observance of the sterile periods may be licit from the moral standpoint; and in the conditions mentioned it is so indeed. If, however, according to a reasonably and equitably formed judgment, there are no such serious reasons, personal or deriving from external circumstances, the will habitually to avoid the fecundity of their union, though continuing fully to satisfy their sensuality, may only derive from false evaluation of life and from motives not harmonizing with sound ethical canons.

[-From, *The Pope Speaks: The Teachings of Pope Pius XII*, (YN, Pantheon Books, Inc., 1957) pp.119-121.]



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