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"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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Marital Love and Fidelity

Far from being a "lifestyle" or an "exercise in self-control," the **systematic** use of "natural methods" of birth control, unjustifiable as they are by reasons proportionate to the duty of procreation which they intend to avoid, actually constitute a highway to hell "for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat" (Mt. 7:13).

This is also quite logical,

for whoever does not strive for self-control will not even be able to control himself later on, and whoever believes that he can dominate his evil tendencies by relying solely upon his own puny strength without sincerely seeking divine help with perseverance, will surely and inevitably remain deceived. (Pope Pius XII, *Address to Midwives*, Oct. 29, 1951)

But how are we to seek and obtain divine help if we go against God's will? Thus do we come to understand that the "lifestyle" and "exercise of self-control" are, in reality, nothing but a presumptuous self-delusion and, in the end, sheer hypocrisy meant to cover up a very wretched reality. The priests who still listen to penitents in confession are quite aware of this fact.

Just to what point we can delude ourselves through the systematic and unjustified recourse to "natural methods" of birth control can best be depicted by Ivan Gobry in his book, *Amour conjugal et fécondité* [*Conjugal Love and Fecundity*],¹ one of the best works on this question which we have been able to obtain. We deem it useful to provide our readers with a few extracts from this text:

"Since the proponents of the above-mentioned 'natural methods' have sought to pose the problem on the level of asceticism, hard facts will provide the answer on that same plane. Which calls for the greater self-sacrifice ?-Merely avoiding carnal relations, or else carrying a child over a period of nine months, then feeding and nursing it, worrying and crying over it and not knowing rest and freedom over a stretch of several years?

"But such a comparison remains still too theoretical. For those spouses who have chosen to do God's will in having a large family, reality is something quite different. For them, continence has become the rule since pregnancies, nursings, and periods of fatigue all constitute factors favoring chronic abstinence much more serious than the fear of begetting a child. The profound happiness stemming from the spouses' mutual collaboration in the service of such pure and delicate beings confers a new meaning to their chastity. The husband faithfully standing by his wife weighed down by hard work and ennobled through her generosity, experiences for her a saintly, even a godly respect for his wife which can scarcely be understood by a man whose partner rejects motherhood as a source of shame and disgrace.

"Malthusian spouses make use of periodical continence in order to avoid their God-given responsibilities, while faithful couples practice continence as a result of having cooperated in God's plan of bringing new souls into the world for heaven's sake. How grotesque indeed is that caricature often presented to young idealistic couples of two 'sensual' spouses who have several children 'through lack of moderation.'"²

"...Such necessary continence for couples raising a large family does not cause them serious problems. Quite on the contrary, the "continence" of those other couples who busy themselves in avoiding having children, simply continues poisoning their daily lives. Constantly attracted to one another and all the more since they are not busy, and therefore less prone to fatigue [through concern for their children], they find themselves forever torn between desire and reason, between risk and prudence. Their sole possibility of escaping such a dangerous state for their chastity and mental stability lies in two equally fearsome solutions: mutual indifference or having recourse to contraception.

"Mutual indifference leads to an enervating exasperation. Nor can it be understood that such would constitute a more righteous course, since it cheats the spouses of that which they owe one to the other in all justice. Carnal separation will soon beget the separation of the couple's affections. Each goes about his own business which takes up all of his attention, making them forget the wonder of their first love. But beware of those temptations lurking outside of the family hearth. The body, always inclined to its passions and having been temporarily neutralized through trickery and not through deep virtue, will take its inevitable revenge at the first or some other occasion, and that love which was divinely destined for procreation will soon be swallowed up in base treachery.

"Contraceptive methods, on the other hand, allow the married couple to come together in carnal knowledge at the risk and cost, however, of true tenderness and serenity. What they do allow, in fact, is responsibility-free sensual gratification with nothing in return, without responsibility or commitment. They even fly in the face of a **possible** commitment or responsibility. If the unity of the spouses has not previously been attained through prior sacrifice, their unity will then be founded on the moving sands of fear and negations which will soon be understood as a kind of complicity in evil, rather than a union based on true love. Since, unfortunately (for the Malthusians), those periods wherein the wife is the most attracted to her husband also correspond to her cycles of fertility - all of which corresponds exactly with the life-producing aims of nature - those days of abstention will then be times of increasing tension and of unusually strange resistance, while those sterile periods, considered as an opportunity to be seized as it arises, will demand the most sexual encounters possible. These will be provoked at the expense of the true rushes of affection he feels for her and will be exploited at the expense of gentleness and consideration.

"It must also be noted that the Malthusians, being of those who, in order to excuse their refusal to excuse their refusal to have those children wanted by God, pretend that the spouses' mutual tender affections constitute the first goal of marriage, here again are found to be contradicting themselves. That which they are obtaining in fact is not only a spiritual lessening as a result of their selfishness, but also a decrease of that freshness of their affection and spontaneity of their love for one another.

"They will then resort to yet new "remedies," those refined methods which will let them give themselves to one another in the wife's fertile periods without, however, completing the act of procreation, known as *onanism* [i.e., interruption, after Onan; cf. Gen. 38:9]. Over and above that, the systematic practice of such methods constitutes much more directly the cult of a freestyle kind of sexual self-gratification, and such an abuse of the natural act (if it can still be regarded as such) constantly exposes the couple to two well-established risks: **1)** that of falling short of the expected sensual pleasure and, **2)** that of bringing new life into the world. And since the flesh has not finally received its full part which would have been the complete act, both spouses, who have tried to obtain the most satisfactory result possible find themselves, after their sensual encounter, more dissatisfied and frustrated than ever.

"All that needs to be done now is to take issue with the morality involved in such cases. For those whose top priority in life amounts to simply enjoying themselves by systematically and always satisfying their lower instincts, God's laws will soon become an intolerable burden. So long as they can fool themselves into various detours and devious interpretations, they will still retain a modicum of respect for the commandments. But a day will inevitably come when God's laws will be seen as a nuisance and much too bothersome. Then it will be unmistakably clear that such compromise has become simply unbearable. All that there is left is the choice of living in sin or that of total self-renunciation. Alas! such persons have never been in the habit of exercising self-control as have those good parents who, for the sake of their children, generously accept all manner of fatigue and personal sacrifices. On the other hand, sin has invaded and poisoned the Malthusians' very existence. After a few experiences of this type, if the couple does not accept the great moral awakening wanted by God, such people find themselves settling, once and for all, into a permanent life of sin. Two attitudes will result from such a situation: **1)** either admitting or acknowledging defeat in bitterness and disgust for themselves and for the sacraments or else **2)** simply denying sin altogether as they accuse moralists of ignorance and of an appalling form of torture."³

"It is all very 'nice' to pretend that mutual 'indifference' as well as contraceptive methods (even though 'natural') amount to some sort of positive 'asceticism.' However, if they stem from selfishness, they are based on a sinful mentality. It is not too surprising that they lead to serious sin. In both cases, it is manifest that such 'continence' is not a virtue, and prudence is not to be found in such asceticism.

"The advocates of conjugal happiness through Malthusian means [i.e., self-gratification as the primary goal in marriage *-Ed.*] certainly have a very limited experience of family life. Normally, the spouses' happiness is increased with the arrival of each new child in the family. To those worried and constantly tempted couples who torture their conscience, consult books, and storm confessionals, we simply say: 'Have children and all such problems will soon fade away.' Other problems may arise, but, at least, these will not prove to be useless. Such will be problems of ordinary life. Moreover, they will not be found in the shade of shame but in the life of their duty generously accomplished."⁴

"Here we see to what point conjugal chastity, religious chastity as well as priestly chastity are all part of and share in the same virtue. It consists in the complete surrender or self-denial of one's body which was made to serve God's will and not made for self-gratification or rest here below."⁵

And, may we add, it seems just as clear that anyone who forgets all about his duties of state is simply fashioning himself a much heavier cross, while risking - God forbid - his eternal salvation.

Memento

From the book, *Problems in Conjugal Life*, of Fr. J. Visser, C.SS.R., we read:

The chief characteristic of the systematic use of periodical continence lies in its twofold finality - one positive and one negative. In truth, it is not, as its name would lead us to believe, a purely negative affair, simply abstaining from conjugal acts during specific times. Such a system, precisely, implies a positive right of use of conjugal rights together with the sensual pleasures inherent therein, as well as the fulfillment of the secondary ends of coitus (including especially the experience and expression of mutual marital love), with, at the same time, the negative will of avoiding procreation. And it is precisely this union of two contradictory ends which gives rise to those problems as to its value....

The fundamental principle upon which we are to find the solution to such a moral problem lies in the spouses' positive duty of cooperating, through their regularly repeated conjugal unions, in the procreation of new life. This principle is often neglected and put in doubt and indeed even roundly denied....Human sexuality was instituted by the Creator primarily and fundamentally for a purpose going far beyond the couple's gratification, that is to say, for procreation or the begetting of new life....Following this fundamental goal we have, of course, other secondary ends or purposes concerning the manner in which the procreative act is carried out. Now, the very fact of taking advantage of sexual relations solely for the sake of their secondary purposes through a positive act of the couple's will, while simultaneously effectively excluding their primary and fundamental purpose, constitutes an unreasonable refusal of that order laid down by God Himself.

1. Paris: Nouvelles editions latines, 1969.

2. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

3. Ibid., pp. 45-47.

4. Ibid., p. 48.

5. Ibid., p. 49.

J. Visser, C.SS.R., "Periodical Continence" in *Problemi di vita coniugale* [Problems in Conjugal Life], (Rome: Sales) 1955.

Translated from *Courrier de Rome* (Jan. 1998) exclusively for Angelus Press. Edited slightly by Fr. Kenneth Novak. The book from which this installment was excerpted, *Amour conjugal et fécondité* [*Conjugal Love and Fidelity*] by Ivan Gobry. (Available from: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1 rue Palatine, 75006 Paris. Tel. [33] (1) 43 45 77 42.

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