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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PIUS XII
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE II WORLD CONGRESS
OF FERTILITY AND STERILITY***

Saturday, 19 May 1956

You have expressed to us, gentlemen, the desire to come and pay your respects to us on the occasion of the Second World Congress on Fertility and Sterility, which you are celebrating in Naples. We respond diligently to your wish and we express the very particular pleasure we experience in receiving a huge group of researchers and professionals from so many different countries. You are preparing to study a difficult and delicate subject, because it concerns one of the principal functions of the human body and because the results of your work can have consequences of great significance for the lives of many people and for the evolution of societies.

Involuntary marital sterility, which you intend to remedy, obstructs attention to the main purpose of marriage and causes in couples a profound malaise, often veiled by an instinctive modesty, but a malaise dangerous to the stability of the marriage itself. That is why, in view of the impotence of modern medicine to successfully treat cases of this kind, in 1951 you formed this International Fertility Association, whose First Congress, held in New York in 1953, proposed on its agenda three main resolutions: to promote by all possible means the study and research concerning fertility; to promote and establish this specialty among doctors, so that a sufficient number of them can effectively help infertile couples; Insist on the establishment of fertility clinics, services and centres in hospitals, under the direction of competent staff.

Like the previous Congress, this Congress responds to the desire to develop the knowledge possessed to the maximum, to take root among doctors in all parts of the world, and also to determine a coordination of work on certain points, where the convergence of efforts will make it possible to obtain more significant results. You will hear a large number of papers examining the endocrine and metabolic factors of fertility and infertility, their occupational and toxic factors, new methods of diagnosing and treating male and female infertility, the diagnosis of ovulation and spermatogenesis and the treatment of their disorders, sterility surgery. A series of reports will also consider the experimental research carried out in this field and the problems related to one of the main functions of man. This set of studies brilliantly demonstrates the interest that this Congress arouses and the way in which, from all sides, eminent specialists have wanted to contribute to the common effort.

It is not for Us to pronounce a judgment on the properly technical aspects of your work; Instead, we would like to deal briefly with certain moral implications of the questions that you address from the scientific point of view.

Your previous Congress pointed out in its final motion that involuntary conjugal sterility poses an economic and social problem of great importance, that it contributes to the decline in the fertility rate of populations and can therefore influence the life and destiny of peoples. Often there is an attempt to reduce the problem to this point of view, which is more visible, more easily controllable. It is then argued that it is necessary to promote the birth rate to ensure the vitality of a nation and its expansion in all domains. It is true that a high birth rate manifests the creative energies of a people or a family; it highlights the courage of men in the face of life, its risks and its difficulties; it signals their will to build and progress. One is right to reveal that the physical impossibility of exercising fatherhood and motherhood easily becomes a reason for discouragement, for withdrawing into oneself. Life, which ardently desires to prolong itself, to surpass itself, is considered, as it were, wingless, and many homes, unfortunately, succumb to this test.

We would like to recall here a consideration that you yourselves have highlighted. It is quite true that if your zeal in pursuing research on marital sterility and the means of overcoming it has a scientific aspect worthy of attention, it also entails high spiritual and ethical values that must be taken into account. We will point them out later. It is profoundly human that spouses see and find in their child the true and plenary expression of their mutual love and self-giving. It is not difficult to understand why the unfulfilled desire for fatherhood or motherhood is felt as a painful sacrifice for the parents, who are animated by noble and holy feelings. Moreover, the involuntary sterility of marriage can become a serious danger to the union and the very stability of the family.

But this social aspect certainly hides a more intimate and more serious reality. Marriage, in fact, unites two persons in a community of destiny, in their journey towards the realization of an ideal, which implies not the fullness of earthly happiness, but the conquest of spiritual values of a transcendental order, which Christian revelation, in particular, proposes in all its greatness. The spouses pursue this ideal in common, devoting themselves to the attainment of the primary purpose of marriage: the generation and education of children.

Several times we have already thought it necessary to recall how the particular intentions of the spouses, their common life, their personal perfection, can only be conceived as subordinated to the end that surpasses all these things: fatherhood and motherhood. "Not only the common work of the external life," we said in an address to midwives on October 28, 1951, "but all personal enrichment, all intellectual and spiritual enrichment, even that which is most spiritual and profound in conjugal love as such, has been placed by the will of Nature and the Creator at the service of the descendants." Such is the constant teaching of the Church; It has rejected any conception of marriage, which threatens to turn it into itself, to make it a selfish search for affective and psychic satisfactions in the exclusive interest of the spouses.

But the Church has also discarded the opposite attitude, which seeks to separate biological activity from the personal relationship of the spouses in generation. The child is the fruit of the conjugal union, when it is fully manifested, through the exercise of the organic functions, of the sensitive emotions that are linked to it, of the spiritual and disinterested love that animates it; it is in the unity of this human act that the biological conditions of generation are to be situated. It is never permissible to separate these various aspects, to the point of positively excluding either the procreative intention and the conjugal relationship. The relationship that unites the father and mother with their child is rooted in the organic fact, and even more so in the deliberate act of the spouses, by which they give themselves to each other, a will of self-giving that develops and finds its true completion in the being that they place in the world. On the other hand, only this self-consecration, generous in its beginning and arduous in its realization, through the conscious acceptance of the responsibilities that it entails, can guarantee that the work of the education of

children will be promoted with all the care, energy and patience that it demands. It can therefore be said that human fertility, in addition to the physical aspect, has essential moral aspects that must also be considered when treating the problem from a medical point of view.

It is evident that the scientist and the physician, when they approach a problem of their specialty, have the right to concentrate their attention on the properly scientific elements and to solve it only on the basis of these data. But when one enters the path of practical applications in man, it is impossible not to take into account the repercussions that the proposed methods will have on the person and his destiny. The greatness of the human act consists precisely in going beyond the very moment in which it is performed in order to compromise the whole orientation of a life, to bring about the taking of a position in front of the absolute. This, which is already true with regard to daily activity, is much more true with regard to an act that commits, with the reciprocal love of the spouses, their future and that of their descendants.

We therefore believe that it is of the utmost importance for you, gentlemen, not to neglect this prospect when you consider the methods of artificial fertilization. The means by which a life tends to be produced takes on an essential human significance, inseparable from the end pursued and susceptible, if it is not in conformity with the reality of things and the laws inscribed in the nature of beings, of causing serious harm to this very end.

On this point too, we have been asked to give some guidelines. With regard to attempts at artificial human fertilization "in vitro", it is sufficient for us to observe that it is necessary to reject them as immoral and absolutely illicit. On the various questions of morality that arise in connection with artificial fertilization, in the ordinary sense of the word, or "artificial insemination," We have already expressed Our thoughts in a speech addressed to physicians on September 29, 1949 ; We therefore refer for details to what We said then, and We will limit ourselves here to repeating the judgment we concluded in conclusion: "As regards artificial fertilization, there is not only reason to be extremely reserved, but it is necessary to rule it out absolutely. This does not necessarily mean that the use of certain artificial means, intended only to facilitate the natural act or to bring to an end the natural act normally performed, is necessarily prohibited." But since it is a fact that the use of artificial fertilization is becoming more and more widespread, and in order to correct some erroneous opinions that are spreading on the subject we have discussed, We add here the following:

Artificial fertilization exceeds the limits of the right that the spouses have acquired by the marriage contract, namely: the right to fully exercise their natural sexual capacity in the natural realization of the marriage act. The contract in question does not confer on them the right to artificial fertilization, because such a right is in no way expressed in the right to the natural conjugal act and cannot be deduced from it. Even less can it be derived from the right to the "child", the primary "end" of marriage. The marriage contract does not give this right, because it does not have as its object the "child", but the "natural acts" that are capable of engendering a new life and destined for it. Artificial fertilization, therefore, must be said to violate the natural law and to be contrary to law and morals.

«Alia nunc occurrit quaestio, ad quam pertractandam magis addecet latinam linguam adhibere.

Quemadmodum rationalis animus noster artificiali inseminationi adversatur, ita eadem ethica ratio, a qua agendi norma sumenda est, pariter vetat, quominus humanum semen, peritorum examini subiciendum, masturbationis ope procuretur.

Hanc agendi rationem attigimus Nostra quoque allocutione coram Urologiae doctoribus coetum participantibus, die VIII mensis Octobris anno MDCCCCLIII prolata, in qua haec habuimus, verba: «Por lo demás, el Santo Oficio ha decidido ya el 2 de agosto de 1939 (AAS 31 [1929] p. 490) que una

"masturbatio directe procurata ut obtineatur sperma" no es lícita; y ello, cualquiera que sea la finalidad del examen(AAS 45 [1953] p. 678). Cum vero Nobis allatum sit, pravam huiusmodi consuetudinem pluribus in locis invalescere, opportunum ducimus nunc etiam, quae tunc monuimus, commemorare atque iterum inculcare.

Si actus huiusmodi ad explendam libidinem ponantur, eos vel ipse naturalis hominis sensus sua sponte respuit, ac multo magis mentis iudicium, quotiescumque rem mature recteque considerat. Iidem actus tamen tunc quoque respuendi sunt, cum graves rationes eos a culpa eximere videntur, uti sunt: remedia iis praestanda qui nimia nervorum intentione vel abnormibus animi spasmodis laborant; medicis peragenda, ope microscopii, spermatis inspectio, quod venerei vel alius generis morbi bacteriis infectum sit; diversarum partium examen, ex quibus semen ordinarie constat, ut vitalium spermatis elementorum praesentia, numerus, quantitas, forma, vis, habitus aliaque id genus dignoscuntur.

Eiusmodi procuratio humani seminis, per masturbationem effecta, ad nihil aliud directe spectat, nisi ad naturalem in homine generandi facultatem plene exercendam; quod quidem plenum exercitium, extra conjugalem copulam peractum, secundum fert directum et indebite usurpatum eiusdem facultatis usum. In hoc eiusmodi indebito facultatis usu proprie sita est intrinseca regulae morum violatio. Haudquaquam enim homo ius ullum exercendi facultatem sexualem iam inde habet, quod facultatem eandem a natura recepit. Homini nempe (secus ac in ceteris animantibus rationis experibus contingit) ius et potestas utendi atque exercendi eandem facultatem tantummodo in nuptiis valide initis tribuitur, atque in iure matrimoniali continetur, quod ipsis nuptiis traditur et acceptatur. Inde elucet hominem, ob solam hanc causam quod facultatem sexualem a natura recepit, non habere nisi potentiam et ius ad matrimonium ineundum. Hoc ius tamen, ad objectum et ambitum quod attinet, naturae lege, non hominum voluntate describitur; vi huius legis naturae, homini non competit ius et potestas ad plenum facultatis sexualis exercitium, directe intentum nisi cum conjugalem copulam exercet ad normam a natura ipsa imperatam atque definitam. Extra hunc naturalem actum, ne in ipso quidem matrimonio ius datur ad sexuali hac facultate plene fruendum. Hi sunt limites, quibus ius, de quo diximus, eiusque exercitium a natura circumscribuntur. Ex eo quod plenum sexualis facultatis exercitium hoc absoluto copulae conjugalis limite circumscribitur, eadem facultas intrinsece apta efficitur ad plenum matrimonii naturalem finem assequendum (qui non modo est generatio, sed etiam proles educatio), atque eius exercitium cum dicto fine colligatur. Quae cum ita sint, masturbatio omnino est extra memoratam pleni facultatis sexualis exercitii naturalem habilitatem, ideoque etiam extra eius colligationem cum fine a natura ordinato; quamobrem eadem omni iuris titulo caret atque naturae et ethices legibus contraria est, etiamsi inservire intendat utilitati per se iustae nec improbandae.

Quae hactenus dicta sunt de intrinseca malitia cuiuslibet pleni usus potentiae generandi extra naturalem conjugalem copulam, valent eodem modo cum agitur de matrimonio iunctis vel de matrimonio solutis, sive plenum exercitium apparatus genitalis fit a viro sive a muliere, sive ab utroque parte simul agente; sive fit tactibus manualibus sive conjugalis copulae interruptione; haec enim semper est actus naturae contrarius atque intrinsece malus»[3].

If fertility responds to certain needs of the organism and satisfies powerful instincts, it then compromises, as we have said, the sociological and moral plan. The work of education still surpasses, in its content and its consequences, the work of generation. The profound exchanges that take place between parents and children, with all the seriousness, delicacy, self-forgetfulness that this requires, immediately oblige parents to go beyond the state of affective possession in order to think about the personal destiny of those entrusted to them. Most commonly, when children reach adulthood, they leave their families, move away to respond to the needs of life or to the calls of a higher vocation. The thought of this normal detachment,

however costly it may be to them, should help parents to rise to a nobler conception of their mission, to a purer mission of the meaning of their efforts. On pain of a failure, at least partial, families are called to integrate themselves into society, to widen the circle of affections and interests, to orient their members towards broader horizons in order to tend not only to themselves, but also to the tasks of social service.

The Catholic Church, the depository of the divine plan, teaches the superior fruitfulness of lives entirely consecrated to God and neighbour. For them, the complete renunciation of the family allows them a totally disinterested spiritual action, stemming not from any fear of life and its problems, but from the perception of the true destinies of man, created in the image of God, in search of a universal love that no carnal concern can limit. Such is the most sublime and the most enviable fecundity that man can desire: that which transcends the biological plane to enter fully into that of the spirit.

We did not want, gentlemen, to conclude this speech without referring to these perspectives. Some may seem too far removed from the objectives you are currently occupying with. But this is not the case. For they alone allow you to place your work in the place and value that we have just considered. What you desire is not only to increase the number of men, but to raise the moral level of humanity, its beneficent forces, its will to grow physically and spiritually. You want to give a new shine to the affection of so many spouses who are saddened by a deserted home; far from cutting off their full joy, you aspire to put all your knowledge at their service so that those wonderful resources that God has placed in the hearts of mothers and fathers to help them rise to Him may be awakened in them; and not only them, but the whole family.

Imbued with this responsibility, you will continue with increasing ardor, We dare to hope for it, your scientific work and the practical achievements that you propose. Invoking upon yourselves, upon your families and upon all those who are dear to you the most abundant divine favours, we wholeheartedly give you Our Apostolic Blessing.

** AAS 48 (1956) 467-474.*

[1] AAS 43 (1951) 835 ss.

[2] AAS 41 (1949) 557-561.

[3] Another question now arises, for which it is more appropriate to use the Latin language (His Holiness spoke in Latin, below the translation offered by the Pontifical Academy Pro Vita).

In the same way that our reason opposes artificial insemination, for the same ethical reason, to which the rules of action are subject, it prohibits that human semen destined for the examination of experts be obtained by masturbatory maneuvers.

We also referred to this norm of action in Our address to the physicians participating in the Urology meeting on October 8, 1953, in which we said: "On the other hand, the Holy Office has already decided on August 2, 1929 (Acta Ap. Sedis, vol. XXI, a. 1929, p. 490, II) that "a masturbation directly provoked to obtain sperm" is not licit, whatever the object of the examination". Since We have been told that this depraved custom is gaining momentum in many places, we think it expedient now to remember and emphasize what We have noticed.

If acts of this nature, which satisfy concupiscence, are used, human common sense rejects them of itself, much more the judgment of the mind, as soon as it considers the matter maturely and rightly. The same acts must therefore be rejected also when serious reasons are interposed that seem to exempt them from malice; how to remedy those who suffer greatly with abnormal spasms of mind or nerves; to perform microscopic examination of semen infected by venereal germs or other types of disease; for the examination of the various parts of which semen ordinarily consists, to diagnose the presence, number, quantity, shape, activity, and other similar characteristics of the vital elements of the sperm.

In this way, the obtaining of human semen by masturbation is of no direct interest other than the full exercise of man's natural faculty of generation; the full exercise of which outside of conjugal copulation implies in itself the direct and unduly usurped use of the same faculty. In this improper use of the faculty is the intrinsic violation of moral rules. In no way does man have any right to exercise the sexual function except that he has received from nature that same faculty. That is to say, to man (contrary to what happens with other animate beings deprived of reason) has been assigned the right and power to use and exercise that same faculty only in validly celebrated marriage, and it is contained in the matrimonial law that in the same nuptials are entrusted and accepted. From this arises for man, for the sole reason that he received from nature the sexual faculty, that he has no other right and power than that destined for marriage.

By nature, this right, as far as the object and scope to which it refers, is not subject to the will of men, and by the force of this law of nature, the right and power of the full exercise of the sexual faculty, directly sought, does not belong to man, except in so far as he exercises conjugal copulation in accordance with the norm imposed and defined by nature itself. Apart from this natural act, not even in marriage is it given to him to fully dispose of this sexual faculty. These are limits to which this right of which we have spoken and its exercise are circumscribed by nature. From the fact that the full exercise of the faculty of conjugal copulation is circumscribed by this absolute limit, the same faculty intrinsically apt to achieve the natural end of marriage (which is certainly not the generation but the education of the offspring) follows from the fact that the full exercise of the faculty of conjugal copulation is circumscribed.

This being so, masturbation is absolutely outside the aforementioned natural aptitude for the exercise of the sexual faculty, and separated from that link with the end ordained by nature; so that it lacks any title of legitimacy and is contrary to ethical laws, even when it is understood to be used for a useful end, just in itself and not blameworthy.

What has been said so far about the intrinsic malice of the full use of the generative power outside of natural conjugal copulation, applies in the same way when it is a question of those united in marriage or of those unbound by marriage, whether when the full exercise of the genital apparatus is carried out by the man or by the woman. or on the other hand also acting, or that carried out by manual touches or by interruption of conjugal copulation; These acts are therefore always contrary to nature and intrinsically evil.

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https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/es/speeches/1956/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19560519_fertilita.html
(Google used to translate from Spanish).