

## RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD: MORAL AND PASTORAL ASPECTS

There is at the present time at the theological level a growing and significant awareness of the meaning and implications of family planning or, as we like to call it, responsible parenthood. The basic problem is not a terribly new one; in point of fact, from the time that man first walked out onto the stage of history we find abundant evidence of efforts to limit family size and control population by all kinds of means. Up to now, however, responsible parenthood, at least in the sense that we now understand it, has been an underdeveloped concept in the area of conjugal morality. With one or two exceptions, none of the standard manuals of moral theology which most of us studied at one time or another and which are still widely used today in our seminaries, even mentions the subject. Away back at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century we find Sanchez<sup>1</sup> and Ledesma<sup>2</sup> suggesting that a harried wife who was burdened with more children than she could handle or reasonably raise could, on that basis and for that reason, refuse her husband sexual intercourse. But this germinal idea of responsible parenthood (if that is what it was) was never developed further in theological writings, due in part, I suspect, to the fact that Saint Alphonsus cites both of these with evident disapproval.<sup>3</sup>

We all know, of course, about the Reverend Mr. Malthus, the curate of Albury, who, as far back as a hundred and fifty years ago, advanced his demographic socio-economic theory with its notion of deliberate fertility control by prudent restraint. While Malthusianism, as his doctrine came to be called, enjoyed, in theory at least, a rather incredible success for a time, one can prudently doubt whether it did much to check population growth on any kind of an existential level for the simple reason that people were no more ready then than

<sup>1</sup> T. Sanchez, S.J. quoted by S. Alphonsus, *Theologia Moralis*, Editio Nova cura et studio Leonardi Gaude, C.Ss.R. (Roma: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1905-1912) Vol. IV, tract vi, de Matr., par. 941.

<sup>2</sup> P. de Ledesma, O.P. quoted by S. Alphonsus, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

they are now to give up their personal rights to sexual intercourse for socio-economic reasons of a general kind.

The neo-Malthusianists added a new note to Malthusianism, and that was the idea of contraception as a means of family planning. But even then there was no wholesale acceptance of neo-Malthusian propaganda for family planning on that basis because it was a time when contraception was universally rejected as immoral by Catholic and Protestant alike. It was only at a much later date when non-Catholics changed their beliefs about contraception that the planned parenthood movement really got off the ground. Non-Catholics began to talk about, campaign for and do something about planned parenthood at the time they accepted contraception as a moral means of controlling pregnancies; it was only when planning became compatible with regular and frequent sexual intercourse that it became generally acceptable.

The late entrance of the subject of responsible parenthood into the Catholic theological arena and the growing significance of it at the present time is, without doubt, due to many reasons. The basic one for the delay, it seems to me, is that there was very little use of talking about family planning when, for most of the people concerned, there was no way of planning. The discovery of the sterile period as a workable way for many couples to control pregnancies opened up the way for an intelligent, meaningful and acceptable discussion of responsibility in producing offspring. In the beginning, the encouragement given to rhythm, as it was called, was limited indeed and the support of most theologians was lukewarm at best. Considerable advance has been made medically and theologically between the *caute insinuare*<sup>4</sup> of 1880 and the address of Pius XII to the obstetrical nurses in 1951.<sup>5</sup> With these gradual advances, the area of personal decision-making in family planning was progressively broadened and the way was opened up for an in-depth discussion of responsibility and planning in the field of human reproduction. As it is, the theology of responsible parenthood seems to be

<sup>4</sup> *S. Paen.* 16 *iun.* 1880; for the pastoral evolution of periodic continence, cf. J. Lynch, S.J., "Changing Pastoral Emphasis on the Practice of Periodic Continence," *Proceedings Catholic Theological Society of America*, 1963, pp. 107-115.

<sup>5</sup> *AAS* (1951), 844-846.

running about ten years, more or less, behind the theology of periodic continence.

There are several other factors, too, that have given an impetus and thrust to the responsible parenthood theology. Demographic considerations under the dreadful name of population explosion are now part of the grass roots dialogue. New emphasis on the duality of the primary purpose of marriage, as well as the new dimension given to the personalist value of sex in marriage, is not without its influence. Even the man-in-the-street discussions about the pill, whatever their medical or theological value, have brought pregnancy and fertility control into the common awareness to the extent that the whole problem is becoming a near crisis on the pastoral and confessional level.

When it is said that the concept of responsible parenthood has seen an upsurge of interest in theological circles in the past few years, it is not the same as saying that the idea was unknown to parents of other days or that they were therefore necessarily irresponsible or non-responsible. I believe that it is an observable fact that not so long ago, at a time when Catholic and Protestant alike would have nothing to do with contraception, a good many families did not reach statistical predictions as to the number of pregnancies and births. Aside from the fact that statistics are not always right and the additional fact that a certain percentage of marriages are sterile or produce children only with considerable difficulty, the observable fertility control of the past was in many instances the result of conscious and prudential control of the sexual instinct by married couples; by whatever name it was called, it was responsible parenthood in action. While for many people long periods of abstinence will always be a Hobson's choice and no one would think of recommending it as the ordinary means of exercising responsible parenthood, it cannot be ruled out as impossible in every circumstance. Anyone who has exercised the *cura animarum* has met up with married couples, both young and old, in whose marriages abstinence from sexual intercourse has become necessary for one reason or another and who are effectively achieving and accomplishing just that. Unfortunately there is a secularist miasma in the air today which has infected many people so that they believe that adults

simply must have sexual intercourse; it is such an imperative that sexual abstinence within marriage is considered an impossibility. From my own reading and from discussions I have heard, I suspect that some of our own theologians have been contaminated by this poison to some degree, and I believe that they do a great disservice to our religion and to our people by peddling that kind of stuff in the market place.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past few years, when the concept of family planning was emerging, there has been a variety of terms used to express the idea. Many of them are loaded terms and so colored by their origins or associations that they can no longer be purged of their prejudices. There are such expressions as "neo-Malthusianism," "planned parenthood," "birth control," "family limitation," "family planning," "child spacing," "responsible motherhood," "responsible parenthood." *Neo-Malthusianism*—which is a term not often used now for reasons which must be obvious—and *planned parenthood* are inextricably bound up with contraception and, in practice, with active propaganda in favor of contraception. *Birth control* has somewhat the same coloration with perhaps a little less emphasis on the positive propaganda angle, although I am not sure of that; *family limitation* gets one involved to some extent in numbers, and usually small numbers at that, and there are also mild undertones of contraception. *Family planning*, which is an expression used by some Catholic writers because it implies no judgement or condemnation is,<sup>7</sup> it seems to me, not a tight enough term because planning can be, and often is, selfish and irresponsible. *Child spacing* is not extensive enough and does not cover the whole area of responsible reproduction. It is possible to continue spacing children even beyond the point of family saturation. *Responsible motherhood* is not appealing because it says nothing about the father and seems to take the mutuality out of the decision to be or not to be. I prefer to use the term "responsible parenthood" because it not only implies no judgement or condemnation but also adds the note of responsibility which is a very important theological

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Address to the Midwives, *op. cit.*, 847; cf. also R. Odenwald, M.D., "Too Many Children?," *The Sign* 41 (March 1962) p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Dr. C. J. Trimbos, *Healthy Attitudes Toward Love and Sex*, translated by E. Fitzgerald (New York: Kenedy, 1964). Trimbos prefers the term "birth regulation."

concept in the area of child-bearing. In point of fact, the expression is the one most used in Catholic theological and popular writings today and it is appearing more and more in the Protestant vocabulary. Those who object to the term "responsible parenthood" on the ground that it might be misunderstood offer no better alternative.<sup>8</sup> I can only express the hope that the term does not, in the course of time, become corrupted; it is a common enough phenomenon today, even in theological writings, that words are changing their meanings and in some cases becoming quite meaningless. When I think of the term "responsible parenthood," I cannot forget that I have also heard people talking about "responsible fornication," "responsible adultery" and even "responsible homosexuality." Somehow or other these expressions seem to do violence to the word "responsible."

What is "responsible parenthood?" There was a time not too long ago when theologians reveled in definitions and distinctions and seemed to take an intense delight and satisfaction in them. This is not so today; whether it is for better or for worse, who can say? The fact is, however, that there is a considerable vagueness in some of our modern theological writings because of this lack of clear definition which I suspect sometimes comes from a lack of clarity of concept. I frankly admit that I do not know what a person means when he says that responsible parenthood depends on the way a couple relate to the Paschal Mystery. Responsible parenthood is a popular expression often used but rarely defined; in all that has been written of late about responsible parenthood there are few clear cut definitions of what is meant by the term. Recently one author defined responsible parenthood as ". . . wanting to have as many children as a married couple can bring into the world, raise, and educate in a human and Christian way."<sup>9</sup> In an offering on responsible parenthood by Father Bernard Häring which appeared in one of our journals of opinion about a year ago, I failed to find what I would consider a clear definition,<sup>10</sup> although Father Häring is quoted in an English journal as saying that responsible parenthood means ". . . that the

<sup>8</sup> Cf. letter of Msgr. G. Kelly in *America*, Vol. 107 (June 9, 1962), p. 364.

<sup>9</sup> F. F. Cardagna, S.J., "Contraception, the Pill, and Responsible Parenthood," *Theological Studies* Vol. 25 (Dec. 1964) 631.

<sup>10</sup> "Responsible Parenthood," *Commonweal*, Vol. LXXX, No. 11 (June 5, 1964) 323-328.

Catholic couple want as many children as they can reasonably educate and as many as God will allow them."<sup>11</sup> In the *Catholic Herald* from England, Father Häring wrote, "Responsible parenthood means that married people *want* (emphasis in original) children—as many of them as they can bring into the world, bring up and educate, taking account of the actual measure of their God-given capacities for doing so."<sup>12</sup> Finally, a definition or, rather, a description of responsible parenthood was reported editorially in the London *Tablet*. It reads:

The general teaching of theologians today is that husband and wife have a duty of responsible parenthood, that they may not irresponsibly bring into the world more children than they can adequately support and care for. There is here a general consensus to be found among all parties to the controversy, that married couples should not so much limit as plan their family, that they should not have more babies than they can hope to look after, that babies should not succeed each other so rapidly as to undermine the mother's health and lead to the neglect of the elder children.<sup>13</sup>

The similarity and the likeness of the first two definitions needs no comment. I must admit, however, that these two definitions do not satisfy me. As short as they may be, they seem to say too much. If I understand them correctly, they seem to say that a married couple, in order to merit the title of responsible parents, must want to have and, indeed must have, as many children as possible. I find a quantitative emphasis which I think should not be there. There used to be, and still is in some minds, an erroneous but popular belief that Catholic couples were obliged to produce as many children as physically and biologically possible; while these definitions do not say precisely that, they come very close to saying it. They are suggesting that, in order to be responsible parents, a couple must have as many children as possible provided other conditions are fulfilled. I do not believe that to be true. If a husband and wife, for

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *The Pill and Birth Regulation* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964) p. 152.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>13</sup> May 16, 1964, quoted by J. Cavanagh, M.D., *The Popes, the Pill, and People* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1965) p. 19.

example, already have five or six children and it appears that they could have one or two or even five or six more and bring them up in a human and Christian way, if they do not do so can they be called irresponsible or even non-responsible? I think not. It has been said that in this case irresponsibility is not synonymous with sin; a couple having six children when they could have ten are not guilty of sin but "are falling short of the Christian ideal."<sup>14</sup> Even if this be true—and I have my doubts about it—I do not see how a person who falls short of an ideal or does not fulfill a counsel or perform a work of supererogation can be branded as irresponsible or non-responsible.

I cannot enter into other people's minds, but I suspect that both these definitions were formulated in this way to point up as nicely as possible that responsible parenthood has nothing whatsoever in common with the contraceptive mentality which is so widespread today, nor is it the same as planned parenthood in its generally accepted sense, nor is it in any way connected with what Father Häring likes to call anti-babyism. With this I agree. But I also believe that parents can, within the bounds of Christian morality and Christian love and life, decide against future pregnancies after they have produced a reasonable number of children even though they could have more. I think that generous fecundity is closely connected with, and can even be equated with, responsible parenthood; but there can be a limit to generosity, at which point one can stop, without running the risk of being called ungenerous for not going farther.

Before offering a definition of responsible parenthood, I would like to say something about the contraceptive mentality or, more accurately, about those who are practicing contraception. It is not uncommon in Catholic writings to imply that contraception always has undertones of self-indulgence, egoism, selfishness, neglect of eternal values, lack of sacrifice, conjugal fraud, pagan thinking, shamelessness of a truly appalling kind. For many non-Catholics who are practicing contraception, this is simply not true. While our own ideas of sexual or marital morality are quite different from theirs, we will get nowhere in our dialogue by attacking their motives and

<sup>14</sup> Cardegna, *art. cit.*, 632.

painting everyone with the same broad brush. While we cannot agree that contraception is moral, we must respect those who see it differently from the way we do and with the highest of motives practice contraception out of honest conviction.

To get back to responsible parenthood, I would like to suggest as a tentative definition the following: responsible parenthood means that parents, while practicing a reasonably generous fecundity, do not bring into the world more children than they can raise and educate in a human and Christian way.

Our disagreement with the previous definitions revolves around the problem of the obligation to procreate and the extent of that obligation as well as around the question of whether or not the large family is the ideal family so that it could be said that those who could have more children than they actually have are irresponsible or are, at least, falling short of the Christian ideal. Prior to the now famous address to the midwives or obstetrical nurses, little or anything definite had been said about the obligation of married couples to procreate. As a matter of fact, virtuous continence in marriage, especially for supernatural motives, has always been in our tradition and found praiseworthy.<sup>15</sup> Pius XII in his treatment of periodic continence leaves little doubt about the ordinary obligation to procreate when he demands grave reasons for the use of the rhythm method of family limitation. There is still considerable debate today on the question of whether or not the obligation to procreate comes from the state of marriage itself or the use of marriage, and we can only wish that Pius had given this question fuller and clearer treatment. Whether the obligation comes from legal or social justice, that is, from a relationship to the common good, whether it comes from the virtue of piety or even from the virtue of chastity as some have suggested, or whether it comes from a combination of all three, there is still the question of quantitative limits. I think that the obligation to procreate, if I read Pius XII correctly, is in some way connected with the needs of society, even if not exclusively so. If this be so, then demographic factors at a particular time would have to be considered in evaluating the extent and limits of the obligation.

<sup>15</sup> *Casti Connubii*, AAS, 22 (1930), 559.

It has been said often enough that the large family is the ideal family, the implication usually being that it is the God-centered family. I am beginning to wonder if that simple affirmation is enough to establish this truth beyond all doubt. Is it true, for example, that large families are necessarily or even generally characterized by a harmonious and communicative family life in which togetherness and love are automatically guaranteed? Both Pope Pius XII and Pope John XXIII are frequently quoted in praise of large families, but we must not forget the context of the allocutions from which most of the quotations are taken: Pope Pius was speaking to the Association of Large Families of Rome and of Italy; Pope John was addressing or congratulating the Lombardy Association of Large Families.<sup>16</sup>

We theologians must not and cannot be advocates of needless sterility, but we can legitimately ask ourselves whether or not the large family is the ideal family in this our day. There was a time in the past when the large family, at least conceptually, was the ideal family, although the motives which prompted large families were in some instances far from ideal. Today the world has changed considerably from what it was in the past; our whole posture is different and the climate of opinion has changed. These changes are not necessarily bad or to be condemned as mere secularism run amuck. To mention just a few things: the infant mortality rate has fallen to such a low point, especially in advanced areas of civilization, that population growth has become a real problem; the position of women in society has changed considerably from what it was a few generations ago; there are radical changes in the social and economic structure; the demands of upbringing and education of children are much greater than they were years ago, and more is demanded of parents per child. The picture of the large family as the ideal family is beginning to fade and is gradually growing dimmer and dimmer. Whether or not we must, therefore, give up the ideal may be debated, but we must face the fact that most peo-

<sup>16</sup> Cf. address of Pius XII to the Association of Large Families of Rome and Italy, Jan. 20, 1958. Translation in *The Pope Speaks*, IV, 4 (Spring 1958). Cf. talk of Pope John XXIII to the Lombardy Association of Large Families, translation in *The Pope Speaks*, VI, 1 (Winter, 1959-1960), 55.

ple no longer look on it as an ideal and we will get nowhere by shouting from the roof tops that it indeed is. This is not to be understood in the sense that we are opposed to the large family or that those who, by sacrifice and willingness to bear difficulties, go beyond the minimum demand are not to be commended and praised; all we are saying is that the large family, in the sense in which we understood it in the past, is not possible for the majority of parents today and we wonder if an ideal which is impossible of attainment for most people should still be held up and stressed as an ideal in the same way that it formerly was.

The basic demand for responsibility in procreating or for family planning comes from man's rational nature. For a married couple not to do any planning or to act unrationally or irresponsibly in what is probably their most important function in life would be to neglect their highest faculty and their duty as human rational beings. When married people leave procreation entirely to uncontrolled instincts, they are not living as rational creatures should live. Personal responsibility for everything we do is not only a right that belongs to a man but is also his duty; it is by reason and free will and not by mere animal instincts that we serve God. Parenthood is probably the most responsible task that a human being can undertake and, therefore, it goes without saying that it cannot be left to mere instinctive urge and whim. This, one would think, should be a self-evident truth, beyond debate and argument.

The goal of married couples, in fulfilling their vocation to procreate, should be to do the will of God based on the teachings of their religion and their own conscience. How will these persons find out what the will of God is for them in their particular situation? What factors are to be considered in arriving at a decision whether to have another child or not? First of all, they must ask the question in a context of faith, hope and surrender to God. To ask the question without reference to God or without considering eternal values would be a strange way to attempt to do God's will which is the ultimate in Christian responsibility. The question must be asked, and the decision made, in a climate of love; not only love of God, but love of husband for wife and wife for husband, the love of children already born and those who may be born as a result of

their decision; nor can they exclude even love of neighbor, for no Christian couple exercising their vocation to procreate another human being can stand alone in splendid isolation.

The virtues they will have to exercise time and again in asking and answering the question are supernatural wisdom and prudence, and for these they will have to pray. The question is not the kind of a question that can be answered once for all, because it will keep coming up again and again until the years of childbearing are over. There are indeed situations in which the answer may be a strong and irrevocable no, but one would think that this is not the usual case. There are many human factors that have to be considered with wisdom and prudence and these often will be the decisive factors, especially when the answer is in the negative. It may sometimes happen that the negative answer may be clearer or more imperative than the positive one. It is like the discernment of a vocation to the religious life or to the priesthood; it is difficult, at times, to try and determine whether or not a young man or woman may have a call to such a life, but it is sometimes very easy to be sure that one does not. Some of the material factors in helping to determine the vocation to procreate are the health of the mother and the father as well as the health of children already born; eugenic, economic and social situations are all guideposts on the road to responsible parenthood.

The final decision can be made by no one but the parents themselves. It is a task of deep significance for both of them as well as for their children, those already born or to be born. They can best assess their own situation and their capabilities and make their decision guided by fundamental moral principles and their consciences. The decision to be made has nothing to do with numbers in an absolute sense. Responsible parenthood for some couples may mean two children, for others it may mean five, eight, ten or even more, and it is the parents themselves who know best whether one more would be too many.

How far do, or can, demographical considerations enter into the decision of responsible parenthood? Everyone today has heard of the population explosion, and while a good deal of what we hear and read about may not all be true, it would be foolish not to face up to the fact that it is a very real problem, and an urgent one at

that. To pretend that it doesn't exist, or that if it does it will go away by itself if we ignore it, is not very realistic and is quite irresponsible.

Actually, I do not believe that the population problem, as real as it may be, has a significant motivational influence on ordinary couples who are faced with a decision of whether or not to have another child. I am reminded of the argument against contraception found in some of our moral theology manuals. Contraception is wrong, so the argument goes, because if everyone were free to practice contraception without moral fault, it could, at some unknown and apparently unknowable time, result in the wiping out of humankind. Whatever value this argument *ex consequentiis* may have conceptually in determining the morality of an act, I suspect that very few people were ever kept from practicing birth control because they feared the ultimate demise of humankind. It is something like this with the population explosion. While married couples may be concerned with a population explosion within their own families, they consider another pregnancy a private affair and their own business and, at the time of decision, are not greatly moved by what is happening in Calcutta or Rio. I believe this is true even if they happen to be living in Calcutta or Rio.

Be this as it may, I believe that demographic considerations enter into the evaluation of responsible parenthood. The Christian cannot completely withdraw and isolate himself from these problems. Just as population needs in the past had some bearing on the obligation to propagate, so today population pressures could be in some situations an indication not to propagate in order to prevent a too rapid increase in general population. While this may remain as a general principle, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to derive a moral obligation not to propagate in a particular case. I do not believe that at the present time, especially in our own country, that any couple would be obliged to limit its family for demographic reasons. There is another point to be made, too, and that is that the decision to have another baby is such an intimate and personal decision, involving family life, the love of husband and wife, and so many specific and personal values, that it may very well always take priority over general demographic con-

siderations. The demands of the *bonum commune* are often very vague, and we must not take away the certain rights of individuals in order to further the uncertain demands of the common good.

Does the population problem as it exists today excuse from the general obligation to propagate which belongs to marriage or the use of marriage?<sup>17</sup> I think not, but I would be slow to condemn a couple who, after a reasonable number of offspring, decided to limit their family for demographic reasons. As I have already indicated, I think that there are few people who are that socially conscious or that deeply concerned with the common good; it would indeed be a very esoteric virtue, but if there are such persons, I believe that demographic factors could be included among the social reasons mentioned by Pius XII which would excuse from the obligation to procreate.

All this talk today about responsible parenthood must seem a bit senseless, like blowing in the wind, to those who feel that they have no way to exercise responsibility effectively, either because it would require very long periods of abstinence or because rhythm does not work for them or, even if it does, the psychic costs are too much to pay. Reference has already been made to abstinence in marriage. I wish only to add the additional thought here that abstinence in marriage is by no means the same thing as the abstinence required of the unmarried or the celibate. It is not living as brother and sister, as the saying goes. Unfortunately, with regard to rhythm, there has been a very bad press; we seem to hear only from those people for whom rhythm has not worked or who find it, as they say, a most unnatural way of marital love. We must hear more from those who are using rhythm successfully to control family growth. I believe that many more Catholic couples than are actually doing so could use rhythm successfully and at not too great a cost. Rhythm is more reliable than many people believe. An incredible amount of false or faulty information and incorrect data on how to use rhythm is passed around by word of mouth and in such circumstances it is not surprising to find frequent failures. We

<sup>17</sup> J. Ford, S.J.—G. Kelly, S.J., *Contemporary Moral Theology II: Marriage Problems* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1963), 458.

need education on the use of rhythm, and this education may very well begin with those whose task and duty is to help and teach others, namely, our Catholic doctors. Not many years ago, I used to counsel couples who were interested in using rhythm to consult with a Catholic doctor. My advice had no particular denominational significance nor was I discriminating in any way against other doctors; I was just naive enough to think that Catholic physicians as a whole, being possibly more familiar with the spiritual issues involved, would be up on the scientific and medical data surrounding the use of rhythm. It did not take me long to change my mind on that score; I found out that many doctors, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, knew very little about rhythm. Only recently I spoke with a woman and suggested that she look into the possibilities of using rhythm as an aid to responsible parenthood. She told me that her doctor, a Catholic, told her that the only thing rhythm was good for was dancing. This cavalier treatment of the rhythm method, as it is called, is not helping us at all, and it must be counteracted by proper education starting on the professional level. Perhaps some of this could be done by putting into the hands of doctors books by other doctors, books that were written to teach the teachers and help the helpers. I am thinking particularly of such books as those written by Doctor John Marshall<sup>18</sup> of England and Doctor I. E. Georg<sup>19</sup> of Austria. I am not suggesting that anyone try to brain-wash our doctors about rhythm or that theologians attempt to teach medicine to doctors. That would indeed be disastrous. I am only asking that rhythm, as a method of family planning, be given a fair shift.

On the pastoral level, emphasis must be placed on the primacy of love in married life and how love not only demands but is quickened and intensified by sacrifice. On the point of rhythm and restraint, I would like to quote Doctor Trimbois of Holland:

. . . the use of infertile period is primarily a question of restraint . . . it is a restraint, albeit, for a high and valuable purpose: mutual love, care for children, health, and so on.

. . . But then comes the main argument: love according to

<sup>18</sup> *The Infertile Period* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963).

<sup>19</sup> *The Truth About Rhythm* (New York: Kenedy, 1962).

the calendar kills all naturalness and spontaneity, and no healthy man can expect to tolerate that. Really? But, in fact—and this is just the point—periodic restraint is not love by calculation: it is restraint, voluntary restraint. . . . One of the best ways of combating the routine which leads to superficiality is precisely restraint. It means not indulging again and again under the urge of an impulse or as the result of a deadening habit. Isn't it far more likely that, exercised in its proper place, restraint will encourage the freshness and delight of sexual union rather than the opposite?

If periodic restraint is understood and practiced not just as a form of restraint as such, but for good reasons, then the couple concerned will not love according to the calendar but in voluntary restraint. . . . To put it differently, periodic restraint is not the same as periodic sexual intercourse. Periodic restraint is, of course, primarily restraint. Whoever comes to the practice of periodic restraint from this angle will find that a great number of the objections to rhythm have been obviated.

. . . The idea that restraint, exercised from time to time, can do the average man more good than harm in a conclusion at which one arrives very readily if one has known many married couples who have chosen this way in their difficult search for an acceptable form of birth regulation. It is always the attitude of mind, the psychological or spiritual attitude which determines the value and the significance of all important human activities. And in the matter of birth regulation, an outstandingly important sphere of human activity, it is the psychological and spiritual attitude, the personal attitude, the joint willingness to accept, that determines the value of the method chosen. Seen from this angle, the use of the infertile period, regarded as periodic restraint, becomes one of the most sensible methods of birth regulation we know so far.<sup>20</sup>

On the pastoral level, again, young couples should be instructed about responsible parenthood. We must get away from the attitude of that certain pastor who allegedly told a young couple after he married them that, 'If you don't have a baby within the first year, I'll know you're living in sin.' Of course, preparation for pastoral instruction must begin in the seminary. Apropos of the question of

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.*, 160-162.

instruction in responsible parenthood are the words of Pope John XXIII in the Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*:

It is of the greatest importance that the younger generation be brought up with an adequate cultural and religious formation. Parents have the duty and the right to see to this formation and to equip the young with a profound sense of *responsibility* in all life's deeds, *including those connected with setting up a family and the conception and education of children*. These children ought to be taught not only an abiding trust in Divine Providence, but also a resolute willingness to undergo inevitable fatigue and sacrifices in the fulfillment of a mission so noble and often so arduous as is the co-operation with God in the transmission of human life and the education of offspring.<sup>21</sup> (Emphasis added.)

The moral and practical questions which responsible parenthood pose are no longer theoretical or purely academic, what with scientific research opening up new vistas and the likely possibility of rhythm becoming a reliable method of birth regulation for all, and even the further possibility of other new moral methods supplanting or complementing rhythm. We can freely discuss the problems and theology of responsible parenthood at this time even though morally legitimate means of controlling pregnancies may not be available to everyone for a variety of reasons. I am hopeful and believe that the time will come—and it is not too far away—when scientific and theological breakthroughs will make most of the problems of fertility control relics of the past.

When we look back at the past, we find time and again that the problems of one age all but disappear in the next. Fifty years ago, for example, the question of tubal pregnancy posed a great moral problem which seemed almost unsurmountable; today the problem is gone. The oft referred to mother or child dilemma, be it a theological or medical problem or a mixture of both, is one for the books. I do not pretend to know at this time how all the questions will be answered or the problems solved, but we have enough confidence in both scientists and theologians and the interworkings of divine and human providence to know that they will be solved. There is every

<sup>21</sup> NCWC translation, p. 56, par. 195.

reason to hope and believe that some method of human fertility control available to all, simple, easy to use, moral and aesthetic is a real possibility in the not too distant future.

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