

In The Service Of Life

The Pope speaks to Midwives

By Pope Pius XII.

London Catholic Truth Society No.s231a (1952)

Translated from the Italian Text as published in the Osservatore Romano, 5-6 November, 1951.

INTRODUCTION.

Importance of midwives' profession.

To watch with solicitude over the silent, hidden sanctuary wherein God infuses an immortal soul into the germ provided by the parents, in order that you may lavish your care on the mother and prepare a successful birth for the child she carries within her: that, dear daughters, constitutes the object of your profession and is the secret of its greatness and beauty.

When one reflects on the wonderful collaboration of parents, nature, and God, which results in the birth of a new human being in the image and likeness of the Creator (see Genesis 1:26-27), how can one fail to appreciate at its full worth your valuable contribution to a work of so great importance? The heroic mother of the Machabees addressed her sons thus: "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... formed the nativity of man." (2 Machabees 7:22).

God's plan for procreation of new life.

Hence, whoever approaches this sanctuary where life originates, and exercises his activity upon it, in one way or another, must be acquainted with the order which the Creator wills to be maintained there, and with the laws governing that Order. For here, we are not dealing with merely physical, biological laws, which irrational agents and blind forces necessarily obey, but with laws whose execution and whose effects are entrusted to the free and voluntary co-operation of human beings.

This order, established by the Supreme Mind, is directed to the end willed by the Creator. It embraces the external activity of man and the internal adherence of his free-will; it involves acting and, when duty so dictates, refraining from action. Nature places at man's disposal the whole chain of causes from which will spring a new human life; it is for man to release the living force, for nature to develop its course and bring it to fulfilment. Once man has done his part by setting in motion the marvelous evolution of life, it is his duty to respect religiously its progress, and this duty forbids him to halt the work of nature or to hinder its natural development.

In this way, the respective roles of nature and of man are clearly determined. Your professional training and your experience put you in a position to know the part played by nature and that played by man, as well as the rules and laws to which both are subject. Your conscience, enlightened by reason and faith, and guided by the authority established by God, teaches you within what limits

action is lawful; and where, on the other hand, the duty of refraining from action strictly imposes itself.

The profession of midwife implies a mission.

In the light of these principles, we propose now to put before you some considerations regarding the apostolate to which your profession binds you. For it is a fact that every profession willed by God implies a mission: the mission of putting into practice in the sphere of the profession itself the mind and intentions of the Creator, and of aiding men to understand the justice and holiness of the divine plan, and the benefit they themselves derive from this plan when it is carried out.

1. THE APOSTOLATE OF PERSONAL INFLUENCE.

YOUR PROFESSIONAL APOSTOLATE IS EXERCISED IN THE FIRST PLACE THROUGH YOUR OWN PERSON.

The profession of midwife demands knowledge and skill.

Why do people call for your services? Because they are convinced that you know your business; that you understand the needs of mother and child, the dangers they are both exposed to, and how these dangers can be avoided or overcome. They count on you for advice and help, not unlimited, of course, but within the bounds of human knowledge and power, in keeping with the progress and the present state of theory and practice in your special field.

If all this is expected of you, it is because people have confidence in you, and this confidence is, above all, something personal. Your character should inspire it. Such confidence must not be disappointed. That is your own keen desire, but it is also demanded by your office and profession, and consequently it is your duty in conscience. So you must strive to reach the summit of knowledge-in your subject.

The midwife's apostolate, also, demands knowledge and skill.

But professional ability is also a requirement of your apostolate and a form of it. For what credit would be given to what you say on moral and religious questions connected with your office, if you were to appear lacking in professional knowledge? But if, on the contrary, you are able to command respect by your superior professional ability, your intervention in the moral and religious field will carry much more weight. To the favorable opinion which you will have won for yourselves by your merits will be added in the minds of those who seek your services the well-founded conviction that Christianity, firmly believed and faithfully practised, far from being an obstacle to professional worth, encourages and guarantees it. They will see clearly that in the exercise of your profession you are conscious of your responsibility before God; that your faith in God provides you with the strongest motive for giving your services with a devotedness which is all the greater the graver the need; that from a solid religious foundation you draw the strength to answer with a calm, but undaunted and unshakable "No" any unreasonable and immoral demands, no matter from what quarter they come.

Knowledge and skill, combined with practical Christianity, will exercise a profound influence.

Esteemed and appreciated, as you are, for your personal conduct, no less than for your knowledge and experience, you will find the care of mother and child willingly entrusted to you, and perhaps even without being yourselves aware of it, you will exercise a deep, often silent, but very effective apostolate of practical Christianity. For however great the moral authority due to strictly

professional qualifications, it is above all by actions signed with the double seal of true humanity and true Christianity that man renders service to his fellowman.

2. THE VALUE AND SACREDNESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

THE SECOND ASPECT OF YOUR APOSTOLATE IS ZEAL IN UPHOLDING THE VALUE AND INVIOABILITY OF HUMAN LIFE.

Every human being has a right to life.

Of this value and inviolability, the modern world urgently needs to be convinced by the triple testimony of mind, heart, and facts. Your profession offers you the possibility and lays upon you the duty of giving such testimony. Sometimes it will take the form of a simple word spoken at the right moment, and with tact, to the father or mother; more often still your whole behavior and your conscientious way of acting will exercise an unobtrusive, silent influence on both. You are in a better position than others to understand and appreciate what human life is in itself, what value is placed on it by right reason, your own moral conscience, civil society, the Church, and, above all, what it is worth in the sight of God. The Lord has made all earthly things for man, and man himself, so far as his existence and essence are concerned, has been created for God and not for any creature, although in his activity, he has obligations to the community, too. Now, the child, though yet unborn, is a human being to the same degree and by the same title as its mother.

This right comes immediately from God.

Besides, every human being, even the child in its mother's womb, has the right to life immediately from God, not from the parents or any human society or authority. Hence there is no man, no human authority, no science, no "indication" of a medical, eugenic, social, economic, or moral order that can offer or give a valid juridical title to a direct deliberate disposing of an innocent human life — that is to say, a disposal that aims at its destruction, whether as an end in itself or as a means to another end that is, perhaps, in no way illicit in itself.

Thus, for instance, to save the life of the mother is a most noble end; but the direct killing of the child as a means to that end is not lawful.

(Footnote:*In an address delivered to the Family Front on November 26th, 1951, the Holy Father returned to this point: "Innocent human life, in whatsoever condition it is found, is withdrawn, from the very first moment of its existence, from any direct deliberate attack... This principle holds good for the life of the child as well as for that of the mother. Never and in no case has the Church taught that the life of the child must be preferred to that of the mother. It is erroneous to put the question with this alternative: either the life of the child or that of the mother. No, neither the life of the mother nor that of the child may be subjected to an act of direct suppression. In the one case as in the other, there can be but one obligation: to make every effort to save the lives of both.

"But — it is objected — 'the life of the mother, especially of the mother of a large family, is of incomparably greater value than that of a child not yet born.' The reply to this harrowing objection is not difficult. The inviolability of the life of an innocent human being does not depend on its greater or lesser value. It is now more than ten years since the Church condemned the killing of life considered to be 'without value'; and whoever knows the sad events that preceded and called forth the condemnation, whoever is able to weigh up the dire consequences that would result, if one were to attempt to measure the inviolability of innocent life by its value, will be well able to appreciate the motives that determined that decree.

"Besides, who can judge with certainty which of the two lives is in fact the more valuable? Who can know what path that child will follow and to what heights of achievement and perfection he may reach? Two greatnesses are being compared here, one of them an unknown quantity.

"On purpose, We have always used the expression 'direct attempt on the life of an innocent person', 'direct killing.' Because if, for example, the saving of the life of the future mother, independently of her pregnant state; should urgently require a surgical operation or therapeutic treatment which would have as a secondary consequence, in no way desired or intended, but inevitable, the death of the foetus, such an act could no longer be called a direct attempt on an innocent life. Under these conditions the operation can be lawful, like other similar medical interventions, provided always that it is not possible to postpone the operation until after the birth of the child, or to have recourse to other effective remedies.")

The killing of "unfit" persons is immoral.

The 'direct destruction of so-called "worthless life," born or unborn', practised to such an extent a few years ago, cannot be justified in any way. So, when the practice began, the Church formally declared it to be contrary to the natural law and to the positive divine law, and therefore unlawful — even when ordered by the public authority — to kill those who, although innocent, are because of some physical or mental defect, of no use to the State, but rather a burden to it. (Decree of the Holy Office, 2 December, 1940 — *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, volume 32, 1940, pages 553-554). The life of an innocent person is sacred, and any direct attempt or attack on it is a violation of one of the fundamental laws without which men cannot live together in security.

The midwife's duty of defending the life of the child.

It is not necessary for us to explain to you in detail the meaning of this fundamental law and its bearing on your profession. But never forget that the law of God stands, indefectible, above every man-made law and above every "indication."

The apostolate of your profession imposes on you the duty of making known to others that knowledge of human life, that regard and respect for it, which your Christian convictions make you nourish in your hearts. When necessary, you must boldly undertake its defense, and when the need arises and you are able to do so, you must protect the defenseless and still hidden life of the child, relying on the force of the divine commandment: *Non occides*, 'You shall not kill'. (Exodus 20:13).

Positive action: instilling in parents a love for children.

While such defensive action sometimes presents itself as the most necessary and pressing part of your mission, yet it is not its most noble and important part.

For your mission is not purely negative, but is, above all, constructive, and aims at promoting, building up, and strengthening.

Instill into the minds and hearts of the mother and father sentiments of respect, desire, joy, and of loving welcome for the newborn child, from the moment it utters its first cry. The child formed in the mother's womb is a gift of God (Psalm 127:3 or Psalm 126:3 in the Vulgate), who entrusts it to the parents' care. How delicately and with what charm Sacred Scripture describes the graceful circle formed by children united around the father's table! They are the reward of the just man, as childlessness is very often the punishment of the sinner. Listen to the word of God, expressed in the matchless poetry of the Psalm: "Your wife (shall be) as a fruitful vine, on the side of your house,

your children as olive plants round about your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that fears the Lord" (Psalm 128:3-4 or Psalm 127:3-4 in the Vulgate); while of the evil-doer it is written: "May his posterity be cut off: in one generation may his name be blotted out" (Psalm 109: 13 or Psalm 108:13 in the Vulgate).

The midwife and the father.

As soon as the child is born, then, hasten — as did the Romans of old — to place it in the arms of the father, but for an incomparably higher motive than theirs. With them, the action was an assertion of paternity and the authority deriving from it; with you it will be an act of grateful homage to the Creator, an invocation of God's blessing, and an indication of the father's obligation to carry out with devotion and affection the office entrusted to him by God. If the Lord praises and rewards the faithful servant for having made five talents yield a profit, what praise, what recompense will he not have in store for the father who has guarded and reared for Him the human life entrusted to him — a treasure more precious than all the gold and silver of the world?

The midwife and the mother.

However, your apostolate is directed chiefly to the mother. No doubt, the voice of nature speaks within her, implanting in her heart sentiments of desire, joy, courage, love, and willingness to care for her child; but to overcome the temptations of cowardice in all its forms, that voice needs to be reinforced, and to adopt, as it were, a supernatural tone. It falls to you, by your whole bearing and conduct more than by words, to make the young mother appreciate the greatness, the beauty, the nobility of the life that stirs; is formed, lives in her bosom; the life that is born of what she carries in her arms and feeds at her breast; to reveal to her eyes and her heart, in all its splendour, the great gift of God's love for her and her child.

Sacred Scripture echoes for you in numerous instances the entreaties and petitions, and then the songs of grateful joy, uttered by so many mothers who had long begged with tears for the grace of motherhood and at last had their prayer granted. Even the pangs which, since the Fall, the mother must suffer in order to bring forth her child, serve but to draw ever closer the bond that unites them; the more pain the child cost her, the greater her love for it. This truth has been expressed with deep and touching simplicity by Him who moulded the hearts of mothers: "A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she has brought forth the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (John 16:21). And again, by the pen of the Apostle, Saint Paul, the Holy Ghost shows the greatness and joy of motherhood: God gives the child to the mother, but in giving it He makes her co-operate effectively in the unfolding of the flower whose seed He had placed in her womb, and this co-operation becomes a path that leads to her eternal salvation: Woman "shall be saved through child-bearing" (1 Timothy 2:15).

This perfect harmony between reason and faith gives you a guarantee that you are in possession of the full truth and that you can pursue with absolute security your apostolate of esteem and love for nascent life. If you succeed in exercising this apostolate by the cradle where the new-born child lies crying, you will not find it too difficult to secure the fulfilment of any instructions, which your professional conscience, in accordance with the laws of God and nature, makes you lay down for the benefit of the mother and the baby.

Children are a blessing.

You who have experienced it, need no proof from us of how necessary today is this apostolate of esteem and love for new life.

Unfortunately, cases are not rare where to speak of children as "a blessing," even to make a cautious reference to it, is enough to provoke contradiction or even derision. More common still is the attitude that prevails of thinking and speaking of children as a heavy "burden." How contrary is this mentality to the mind of God, the language of Sacred Scripture, and also to sound reason and natural sentiment! If there are conditions and circumstances in which parents, without breaking God's law, can avoid the "blessing" of children, nevertheless, such cases of force majeure are no justification for perverting ideas, lowering standards, disparaging the mother who has had the courage and the honour to give life.

The supernatural life. Necessity for Baptism.

If what we have said up to now concerns the protection and care of the natural life, with all the more reason should it hold good for the supernatural life, which the new-born child receives with Baptism. In the present order, there is no other means of communicating this life to the child, who is still without the use of reason. And yet, the state of grace at the moment of death is absolutely necessary for salvation: without it, supernatural happiness, the beatific vision of God, cannot be attained. In an adult, an act of love can suffice for obtaining sanctifying grace and making up for the lack of Baptism; for the child still unborn, or newly born, this way is not open. When, therefore, one considers that charity towards our neighbour imposes an obligation of assisting him in his need; that the gravity and urgency of this obligation are in proportion to the good to be procured or the evil to be avoided, as well as to the inability of the needy one to help himself, then it is easy to understand the importance of providing for the Baptism of a child, devoid of the use of reason, when it is in serious danger, or facing certain death. Admittedly, this duty binds the parents in the first place, but in urgent cases, when there is no time to lose and it is not possible to summon a priest, yours is the sublime office of conferring Baptism.

Do not fail, then, to perform this charitable service and to exercise this active apostolate of your profession. Let these words of Jesus be a source of strength and encouragement to you: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). And what greater or more beautiful act of mercy than to ensure for the soul of a child – between the threshold of life, which it has just crossed, and the threshold of death, which it is preparing to pass – a glorious and blissful eternity.

3. THE READY ACCEPTANCE OF MOTHERHOOD.

A THIRD ASPECT OF YOUR APOSTOLATE MIGHT BE DESCRIBED AS HELPING THE MOTHER TO CARRY OUT READILY AND GENEROUSLY HER FUNCTION OF MOTHERHOOD.

The example of Our Lady.

No sooner had Our Blessed Lady understood the message of the Angel than she answered: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). A "fiat," a wholehearted "yes" to the call to motherhood. A virginal motherhood, incomparably superior to any other, yet a real motherhood, in the true and proper sense of the word (see Galatians 4:4). Hence, the faithful in reciting the Angelus, when they have recorded Mary's acceptance, follow it immediately with the words: "And the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14).

Motherhood a duty for married women.

It is one of the fundamental requirements of the right moral order that to the use of conjugal rights there should correspond a sincere internal acceptance of the office and duties of motherhood. When this condition is verified, the woman walks the path marked out by the Creator towards the end which He has assigned to His creature, making her, by the exercise of this function, sharer in His goodness, His wisdom and His omnipotence, in accordance with the announcement of the Angel: "You shall conceive in your womb and bring forth" (see Luke 1:31).

Midwives must encourage married couples to undertake parenthood.

Such being the biological foundation of your professional activity, the pressing object of your apostolate will be so to act as to maintain, revive, and promote an understanding and a love for the office of motherhood.

When the husband and wife esteem and appreciate the honour of raising up a new life whose unfolding they await with holy impatience, your role is a very easy one; you have only to foster this interior sentiment in them; the disposition to welcome and take care of the nascent life follows, as it were, automatically.

But unfortunately it is not always so. Often the child is not wanted; worse, it is feared. How in such conditions could there still be a ready acceptance of duty? Here your apostolate must be exercised in an effective and efficacious manner; primarily, in a negative way, by refusing any co-operation that is immoral; but positively too, by using all your most tactful efforts to overcome preconceived ideas, fears of various kinds, and cowardly excuses; and also, as far as in your power lies, to remove any external obstacles which might make the acceptance of motherhood a hardship. If your advice and help are sought only to facilitate the procreation of new life, to protect it and direct it towards its full development, you may co-operate without reserve. But in how many other cases is your assistance sought in order to prevent the procreation and maintenance of this life, regardless of the precepts of the moral order? To yield to such requests would be to degrade your knowledge and your skill, by becoming accessories to an immoral act: it would be a perversion of your apostolate, which demands a calm but categorical "no" that permits no transgression of the Law of God and the dictate of conscience. Hence, your profession obliges you to have a clear idea of that divine law, so as to ensure its observance, neither falling short of its demands, nor exceeding them.

Contraceptive practices unlawful.

Our predecessor, Pope Pius XI of happy memory, in his encyclical *Casti Conubii* of 31 December, 1930, solemnly proclaimed anew the basic law governing the conjugal act and conjugal relations: that any attempt on the part of husband and wife, in the performance of the conjugal act or in the development of its natural consequences, designed to deprive it of its inherent power and to hinder the procreation of a new life, is immoral; and that no "indication" or necessity can change an intrinsically immoral act into one that is moral and lawful. (See *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Volume 22, page 559).

This prescription is in full force today as it was yesterday, and as it will be tomorrow and always, being no mere enactment of civil law but the expression of natural and divine law.

Let these words of ours be a sure norm for all the cases where your profession and your apostolate require of you a clear and firm decision.

Sterilization unlawful.

It would be something much more than a mere lack of readiness in the service of life if the attack delivered by man had reference, not to a single act, but interfered with the organism itself, with the intention of depriving it, by sterilization, of the faculty of procreating new life. Here, too, you have in the teaching of the Church a clear guide for your internal and external conduct. Direct sterilization — that is sterilization which aims, either as a means or as an end in itself, at rendering procreation impossible — is a grave violation of the moral law, and is therefore unlawful. Even the public authority has no right, under pretext of any "indication" whatsoever, to permit it, still less to order it, or to have it carried out, to the detriment of innocent persons.

This principle has already been enunciated in the Encyclical of Pius XI already mentioned (*Casti Conubii*, see *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Volume 22, pages 564-565). Ten years ago, therefore, when sterilization came to be increasingly practised, the Holy See found it necessary to declare expressly and publicly that direct sterilization, whether permanent or temporary, whether of man or of woman, is unlawful by virtue of the natural law, from which the Church herself, as you know, has no power to dispense (Decree of the Holy Office 22 February, 1940; *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 1940, page 73).

In your apostolate, therefore, oppose to the best of your ability these perverse tendencies, and refuse them your co-operation.

The "sterile" periods.

Today the further serious problem presents itself, whether and how far the obligation of being readily disposed to fulfil the function of motherhood can be reconciled with the increasingly common use of the periods of natural sterility (the so-called "agenetic" periods in the woman), a practice which would seem to be a clear expression of a will opposed to that disposition.

It is rightly expected of you that you should be well-informed, from the medical point of view, on this well-known theory and on the further developments that may be expected in this department of knowledge; also that your advice and your assistance should not be based on mere popular publications, but should be founded on the objective findings of science and on the authoritative judgment of conscientious specialists in medicine and biology. It is not the priest's duty but yours to instruct married people, either in private consultation or by means of serious publications, on the biological and technical aspects of the theory, without, however, allowing yourselves to be drawn into a propaganda that is neither right nor seemly. But in this field, too, your apostolate requires you, as women and as Christians, to know and defend the moral laws which govern the application of the theory. And here the Church is competent to speak.

The use of these periods not unlawful.

In the first place, there are two hypotheses to be considered. If the application of this theory means nothing more than that the married people may use their conjugal rights, even during the periods of natural sterility, there is nothing to be said against it; for by so acting they neither hinder nor prejudice in any way the consummation of the natural act and its further natural consequences. It is precisely in this that the application of the theory under discussion differs essentially from the abuse already mentioned, which consists in the perversion of the act itself.

Decision to use them exclusively could render marriage invalid.

If, however, the application is carried a stage further, so as to allow the conjugal act exclusively during these periods, then the conduct of the parties requires closer examination.

Here — again, — two hypotheses present themselves for consideration. If at the time of contracting marriage one, at least, of the parties had the intention of restricting to the periods of sterility the marital right itself, and not merely the use of that right, in such a way that the other party would not have even the right to seek intercourse outside these times, that would imply an essential defect in the matrimonial consent, involving the invalidity of the marriage itself, since the right that springs from the marriage contract is a permanent, uninterrupted, and not intermittent, right of each of the parties in respect of the other.

Exclusive use of "sterile" periods in valid marriage requires good reason.

But if, on the other hand, this limitation of intercourse to the periods of natural sterility does not refer to the right itself, but solely to the use of the right, the validity of the marriage is beyond question. But whether the moral lawfulness of such conduct on the part of married couples is to be admitted or denied will depend on whether the intention to keep constantly to these periods is based on sufficient and secure moral grounds. The mere fact that the parties do not offend against the nature of the act, and that they are prepared to accept and rear any offspring that, despite their precautions, may happen to be born, would not of itself be sufficient to guarantee the rightness of their intention and the unquestionable morality of the motives themselves.

The reason is that matrimony obliges to a state of life, which, while conferring certain rights, at the same time imposes the duty of accomplishing a positive work connected with the married state itself. In such a case, we can apply the general principle that a positive contribution may be withheld, if grave reasons independent of the good will of the persons obliged to make it show that such a contribution is inopportune, or prove that the claimant — in this case the human race — cannot in equity demand it.

The marriage contract, which confers upon the parties the right to satisfy their natural inclination, has the effect of establishing them in a particular state of life, the married state. Now, the married couple who, in the performance of the specific act of their state, avail themselves of this right, have the duty imposed on them by nature and by the Creator of providing for the conservation of the human race. This is the characteristic contribution, which constitutes the peculiar value of their state: *bonum proles*, 'the blessing of offspring'. In the order that God has established, the individual and society, the people and the state, the Church herself, all depend for their existence on fruitful marriage.

From this it follows that to embrace the married state, to make constant use of the faculty proper to it, and lawful only in that state; and on the other hand always and deliberately, and without a grave reason, to evade its primary duty, would be to sin against the very meaning of married life.

From the obligation of making this positive contribution, "serious reasons" can exempt for a long time, even for the entire duration of married life. Such reasons are often provided by the so-called "indications" of a medical, eugenic, economic, or social order. Hence, it follows that the observance of the sterile periods may be lawful from the moral point of view, and under the conditions mentioned it is indeed lawful. But if in the light of a reasonable and fair judgment the parties have no such reasons, either of a personal nature or arising from external circumstances, then the determination to avoid habitually the fecundity of their union, while continuing to satisfy to the full their sensual desires, can spring only from a false outlook on life, and from motives foreign to right moral standards.

Complete abstinence necessary in some cases.

At this stage you will perhaps make the point that in the exercise of your profession you sometimes come up against very delicate cases; cases where it is impossible to order people that they should run the risk of motherhood — cases where motherhood should be absolutely avoided — and where, on the other hand, the use of the sterile period either does not afford sufficient safety, or else must be rejected for other reasons. You ask, then, how one can still speak of an apostolate in the service of motherhood.

If, in your sure and experienced judgment, the conditions definitely call for a "no," that is to say, for the avoidance of motherhood, it would be a mistake and an injustice to insist on it or advise a "yes". Here, indeed, we are dealing with concrete facts, and hence with a medical, not a theological, question, so it falls within your competence. However, in such cases, what the parties want from you is not a medical answer, which will necessarily be in the negative, but the approval of a technique in marital relations that is proof against the risk of motherhood. And so, here again, you are called upon to exercise your apostolate, by making it clear beyond all doubt that even in such extreme case any preventive maneuver, any direct attempt upon the life and development of the germ, is in conscience forbidden and excluded; and that there is only one way open: that of complete abstinence from any complete use of the natural faculty. Here your apostolate obliges you to maintain a clear and sure judgment and a calm resolution.

Heroism necessary and possible.

But it will be objected that such abstinence is impossible, that such heroism is impracticable. This objection you will hear and read everywhere to-day, coming even from those who by reason of their duty and their position should be able to judge very differently. And this is the argument they advance in proof: No one is bound to do the impossible, and no reasonable legislator is presumed to wish to bind people by his law to do the impossible. But for married couples, abstinence for any lengthy period is impossible. Therefore, they are not obliged to abstain. The divine law cannot mean that they are.

In this way, from premises, which are partially true, a false conclusion is drawn. One has only to reverse the terms of the argument to be convinced of the falsity: God does not bind men to do the impossible. But God binds married people to abstinence if their union cannot be accomplished according to the laws of nature. Therefore, in such cases abstinence is possible. In confirmation of this argument, we have the teaching of the Council of Trent, which, in the chapter on the necessity and possibility of keeping the Commandments, teaches us that, to quote Saint Augustine. "God does not command things that are impossible, but when He commands, He warns you to do what you can and to ask for help in what is beyond your power; and He Himself helps you so that you can do it" (Council of Trent, Session 6, chapter 11, in Denzinger number 804 — Saint Augustine, *De Natura et gratia*, Chapter 43, number 50, Migne, *Patristics Latin Volume 44*, Column 271).

Therefore, do not let yourselves be disturbed in the practice of your profession and in your apostolate by all this talk of impossibility; let it not affect your internal judgment or your external conduct. Never lend your assistance to anything contrary to the law of God and to your Christian conscience. It is an injustice to the men and women of our time to regard them as incapable of continuous heroism. Nowadays, for many reasons — perhaps under pressure of dire necessity, or even at times in the service of an unjust cause — heroism is practised to a degree and extent that in times past would have been considered impossible. Why, then, must this heroism, if circumstances really demand it, stop short at the frontiers prescribed by the passions and natural inclinations?

The answer is clear: he who does not wish to control himself will not be able to do so; and he who thinks that he can control himself, relying solely on his own powers, without seeking God's help with sincerity and perseverance, will find himself miserably deceived.

Here then you see what your apostolate has to do in order to win over married people to the service of motherhood, not in the sense of a blind slavery to natural impulse, but of an exercise of conjugal rights and duties regulated by the principles of reason and of faith.

4. THE RIGHT ORDER OF VALUES.

THE FINAL ASPECT OF YOUR APOSTOLATE CONCERNS THE DEFENCE OF BOTH THE RIGHT ORDER OF VALUES AND THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON.

Modern theories of "personal values."

"Personal values" and the need to respect them is a subject that increasingly claims the attention of writers in the last twenty years. In many of their studies, even the specifically sexual act has its place assigned to it in the service of the personality of the married persons. The distinctive and more profound meaning of the exercise of the conjugal right is made (only) to consist in this: that the union of bodies is the expression and actuation of the union of persons and hearts.

Articles, chapters of books, whole books, lectures, dealing in particular with the "technique of love," are devoted to spreading these ideas, to illustrating them with advice to newly-married couples as a guide to married life, so that they may not through foolishness, mistaken modesty, or baseless scruples miss what is offered to them by God, who created also their natural inclinations. If from this complete mutual giving of the husband and wife their springs a new life, it is a result that remains outside, or at the very most on the margin, as it were, of the "personal values"; a consequence that is not excluded, but is not to be considered as being at the heart of marital relations.

According to these theories, your devotion to the welfare of the life still hidden in the mother's womb and to securing, its successful birth would be of only minor importance and would take a secondary place.

Now, if this relative evaluation merely emphasized, the personal value of the married couple rather than that of the offspring, such a problem might, strictly speaking, be let pass. But here we are dealing with a serious inversion of the order of values and the ends established by the Creator Himself. We are confronted with the propagation of a set of ideas and sentiments directly opposed to the clarity, the depth, and the seriousness of Christian thought. Here, again, your apostolate must play a part.

Midwives' duty to explain right order.

It may happen that a mother and wife will confide in you, and you may be questioned about the most hidden desires and the intimacies of married life. In that case, how can you, conscious as you are of your mission, make truth and right order prevail in the opinions and actions of the married couple, if you yourselves have not a precise knowledge of them and are not armed with the strength of character necessary to uphold what you know to be true and right.

The correct doctrine.

Now, the truth is that in virtue of the Creator's will, matrimony, as a natural institution, has for its primary and intimate end not the personal perfection of husband and wife but the procreation and education of new life. The other ends, although they too are intended by nature, are not in the same rank as the first, much less are they superior to it; they are essentially subordinate to it. This holds true of every marriage, even an unfruitful one; just as it can be said of every eye that it is intended and made for seeing, even though in abnormal cases, because of special internal and external conditions, it may never be capable of giving vision.

False doctrine condemned.

Precisely for the purpose of putting an end to all the uncertainties and mistaken notions which were threatening to spread errors concerning the order of importance of the various ends of marriage and their relationship to one another, we ourselves, some years ago (10th March, 1944) drew up a statement on the correct order of these ends, indicating what is revealed by the very inner structure of nature's design, what is the heritage of Christian tradition, what the Sovereign Pontiffs have repeatedly taught, and finally what is formally determined by the Code of Canon Law (Canon 1013; Section 1).

Moreover, some short time afterwards, in order to correct the contrary opinions, the Holy See issued a public Decree, declaring inadmissible the opinion maintained by certain recent authors, who deny that the primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of the offspring, or teach that the secondary ends are not necessarily subordinate to the primary end but of equal value with it and independent of it (Acts of the Congregation of the Holy Office, 1 April, 1944, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Volume 36, year 1944, page 103).

"Personal value" to be found in matrimony, but subordinate to primary end.

Does that imply a denial or a minimizing of what there is of good and of right in the personal values, which result from marriage and from its consummation? Certainly not. In marriage the Creator has destined for the work of procreating new life, human beings, made of flesh and blood and endowed with a mind and a heart; and it is in their capacity as human beings, not as irrational animals, that they are called to be the authors of their offspring. It is to this end that the Lord wills the union of husband and wife. Indeed, Sacred Scripture says of God that He created human kind to His own image, created them male and female (Genesis 1:23), and willed — as we find stated repeatedly in the Sacred Books — that man should "leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, and that they should be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:31).

All this, then, is true and willed by God; but it must not be divorced from the primary function of matrimony, that is, from the service of new life. Not only the work of exterior life shared in common, but also all the development of personality, the very development of mind and heart, and even all that is deepest and most spiritual in married love as such, has been placed by the will of nature and the Creator at the service of the offspring. Of its nature, perfect married life denotes the complete self-dedication of the parents to the welfare of their children, and conjugal love in all its strength and tenderness is itself a postulate of the most earnest care for the offspring and the guarantee that this care will be taken (see Saint Thomas *Summa* part 3; Question 29; article 2, 'on the contrary'; Supplement 49, article 2, reply to objection 1).

Artificial insemination sins against the personal value of matrimony.

To reduce the cohabitation of husband and wife and the-marital act to a simple organic function for the transmission of seed would be to convert the domestic hearth, the sanctuary of the family, into a mere biological laboratory. Hence, in the address delivered on 29th September 1949, to the International Congress of Catholic Doctors, we formally excluded from marriage artificial insemination. The marriage act, in its natural structure, is a personal act, a simultaneous and direct co-operation of husband and wife, which by the very nature of the agents and the special character of the act, is the expression of mutual giving, which, in the words of Scripture, results in the union "in one flesh."

This is something more than the union of two seeds, which can be brought about even artificially, that is to say, without, the natural action of husband and wife. The marriage act, as ordained and willed by nature, is an act of personal co-operation to which the husband and wife give each other the mutual right when they contract marriage.

When, therefore, this act in its natural form is from the beginning and permanently impossible, the object of the marriage contract is essentially vitiated. What we said on that occasion was: "Let it not be forgotten: the procreation of a new life in accordance with the will and plan of the Creator alone brings with it, and that in a wonderful degree of perfection, the realisation of the ends intended. It is in conformity at once with the bodily and spiritual nature of the husband and wife, with their dignity, and with the normal and happy development of the child. (Acta Apostolicae Sedis, Volume 41, 1949, page 560).

The advice to be given to young women.

Should, then, a girl who is engaged or a young wife come to discuss with you the values, of married life, tell her that these personal values, whether they relate to the body or the senses, or to the spirit, are really genuine, but that in the scale of values the Creator has given them a secondary and not a primary importance.

Marriage not superior to celibacy.

Put before them, too, another point, which runs the risk of being forgotten. All these secondary values in the sphere of generation and its processes come within the scope of the specific office of husband and wife, which is to be parents and educators of new life.

High and noble though this office is, it does not belong to the essence of a complete human being, as though a human being who did not use his natural generative faculty would suffer some diminution of personality.

To renounce this use — especially when done for the highest of motives — does not entail a mutilation of personal and spiritual values. Of such a free renunciation made for the sake of the Kingdom of God, the Lord has said: *Non mines, capiurit verbum istud, sed quibus datum est.* "All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given" (Matthew 19:11).

Hence to exaggerate, as is often done today, the importance of the generative function, even in the right and moral context of married life, is not only a mistake and a departure from truth, but it brings with it the danger of leading minds and hearts astray in such a way as to hinder and stifle good and noble feelings, especially in young people, who are as yet without experience and are ignorant of the disillusionments that life brings. For after all, what normal person, sound in mind and body, would want to belong to the number of those lacking in character and spirit?

In the field where you exercise your profession, may your apostolate succeed in enlightening men's minds and instilling into them this correct order of values, so that they may think, and act in conformity with it.

Christian moderation in married life.

Our explanation of the function of your professional apostolate would, however, be incomplete were we not to add a few words more on the defence of human dignity in the-use of the generative appetite.

That same Creator Who in His goodness and wisdom has willed to make use of the work of man and woman, by joining them in marriage, for the conservation and propagation of the human race, has also arranged that the husband and wife will find pleasure and happiness of body and mind in the performance of the marriage act. In seeking and enjoying this pleasure, therefore, married couples do nothing wrong. They are accepting what the Creator intended for them.

Still, even here, the husband and wife should know how to keep within the limits of true moderation, as in eating and drinking, so with the sex appetite, they should not abandon themselves without restraint to the promptings of their senses. This, then, is the correct rule: the use of the natural generative instinct is morally lawful only in the married state, and in the service of the purposes for which marriage exists, and in accordance with the order obtaining between these purposes. It follows from this that only in the married state and in obedience to this rule is it lawful to desire and enjoy that pleasure and satisfaction. For enjoyment of pleasure is subordinated to the law of the action that gives rise to it, and not the other way round, action subordinated to the law of pleasure. And this law, so reasonable, applies not only to the substance of the act, but also to the circumstances; so that it is possible, while preserving the substance of the act, to sin by the manner in which it is performed.

Transgression of this law is as old as original sin. But in our times, there is danger that the fundamental principle itself may be lost sight of. Today it is customary to maintain in speech and in writing (and even some Catholics do it) that the sex instinct and its use must be governed by their own laws, that they have their own proper purpose and their own proper value, independently of the object of procreating new life. People would like to submit the very order established by God to fresh examination and to new rules. They wish to admit no other check on the manner of satisfying this instinct than the observance of what is essential to the instinctive act. In this way, for the moral obligation to control our passions they would substitute freedom to obey blindly and without restraint the caprices and promptings of nature. And this cannot fail, sooner or later, to turn out harmful to morality, to conscience, and to human dignity.

If nature had aimed exclusively, or even primarily, at the mutual giving and possessing of husband and wife in joy and pleasure, and if it had ordained the marital act for the sole purpose of rendering their personal experience happy in the highest degree, and not as an incentive to them in the service of life, then the Creator would have adopted some other plan in the formation and constitution of the natural act.

Instead, in the present order, this act is entirely subordinated to and regulated in accordance with the great and unique law of "the generation and education of offspring," that is to say, the accomplishment of the primary end of marriage as the origin and source of life.

The new hedonism.

Unfortunately, ceaseless waves of hedonism sweep over the world and threaten to engulf all married life in a rising sea of ideas, desires and acts, with grave danger and serious prejudice to the primary duty of husband and wife.

All too often people are to be found who are not ashamed to set this anti-Christian hedonism up as a doctrine, and to inculcate the desire to make the pleasure in the preliminaries and performance of the conjugal union ever more intense; as if in marital relations the whole moral law could be reduced to the proper fulfilment of the act itself; as if everything else, no matter how carried out, were to find its justification in the outpouring of mutual affection, which is sanctified by the Sacrament of Matrimony, and worthy of praise and reward in the sight of God and conscience. Of the dignity of man and the dignity of a Christian, both of which act as a restraint on excessive sensuality, no notice is taken.

But no! The seriousness and holiness of the Christian moral law do not allow unrestrained satisfaction of the sexual instinct, or such exclusive seeking after pleasure and enjoyment. The moral law does not permit man, a rational being, to allow himself to be dominated to that extent, either in the substance of the act or in its circumstances.

Some would like to claim that happiness in married life is in direct proportion to the mutual enjoyment obtained in marital relations. This is not so. On the contrary, happiness in married life is in direct proportion to the respect that the parties have for each other, even in their intimate relations: not indeed as if they ought to consider as immoral and refuse what nature offers and the Creator has bestowed, but because this respect, and the mutual esteem that it engenders. It is one of the strongest elements of a love that is pure, and by that very fact all the more tender.

Midwives' duty to combat this error.

Therefore, in the performance of your professional duties, do all that you can to repel the onslaughts of this refined hedonism, which is devoid of spiritual value, and therefore unworthy of Christian married people. Show how nature has indeed given the instinctive desire for pleasure, and sanctions it in lawful wedlock not as an end in itself, but only in the service of life. Banish from your hearts this cult of pleasure, and do your very best to prevent the spread of literature which thinks it a duty to describe in every detail the intimacies of married life, under the pretext of giving instruction, guidance, and reassurance. Common sense, natural instinct, and a short instruction on the clear and simple maxims of the Christian moral law are usually sufficient to calm the minds of husbands and wives of tender conscience. If in certain special circumstances an engaged girl or young married woman should need further enlightenment on some particular point, it will be your duty to give her a simple, discreet explanation, which will be in conformity with the natural law and a healthy Christian conscience.

No Manicheism or Jansenism in doctrine expounded here.

This teaching of ours has nothing in common with Manicheism or Jansenism, as some would like to make out in justification of themselves. It is simply a defence of the honour of Christian marriage and of the personal dignity of husband and wife.

To give your services in such a cause is, especially in our days, a pressing duty of your profession.

CONCLUSION.

This brings us to the end of what we wished to explain to you. Your profession opens up to you a vast field for a many-sided apostolate, an apostolate not so much of word as of action and guidance; an apostolate that you will be able to exercise usefully only if you are well aware of the object of your mission and of the means of attaining that object, and if you are endowed with a firm and resolute will that is based on profound religious conviction, and inspired and fortified by Christian faith and love.

Invoking on you the powerful help of divine light and divine strength, we now impart to you from our heart, as a pledge and token of most abundant graces, Our Apostolic Blessing.
