

## Sound Reasons

by Robert Babecka

How can a married couple be sure the reasons for their decision to delay pregnancy are morally sound?

Pope Paul VI's encyclical, [\*Humanae Vitae\*](#), discussed the spacing of children as it relates to responsible parenthood.

*With regard to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time.*

*Responsible parenthood, as we use the term here, has one further essential aspect of paramount importance. It concerns the objective moral order which was established by God, and of which a right conscience is the true interpreter. In a word, the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society.*

*From this it follows that they are not free to act as they choose in the service of transmitting life, as if it were wholly up to them to decide what is the right course to follow. On the contrary, they are bound to ensure that what they do corresponds to the will of God the Creator. The very nature of marriage and its use makes His will clear, while the constant teaching of the Church spells it out.*

*If therefore there are well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances, the Church teaches that married people may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth in a way which does not in the least offend the moral principles which We have just explained.*

From these statements we can see that physical, economic, psychological, and social conditions can be factors in deciding to delay the onset of pregnancy. However, married couples are morally bound to ensure their decisions correspond to the will of God. Together these statements challenge couples to ensure decisions based on those conditions are "well-grounded."

God, spouses, family, and society - I think the order these were listed in the encyclical is intentional. Family, of course, includes future children.

When couples decide to delay pregnancy they are making a decision that has a real, immediate, and significant impact on all four of these parties. Because of this, a benefit

to only one party that is potential and not significant should not be the cause for such a decision.

Let's assume the wife's health is likely to be seriously threatened. The effect would not be limited to her, but would extend to her husband, her children, God (in her ability to fulfill her Christian duties to her children), and possibly to society.

On the other hand, a couple may be faced with the less serious dilemma of allowing another pregnancy or purchasing a new boat. Although the consequence of pregnancy relative to the boat may be real and immediate, it would clearly not be significant. It is also clear that God and society would not likely benefit significantly from such a decision.

Decisions on the extremes are easy to make. Decisions become more difficult as the length of the delay shortens and the impacts increase in significance. There is no hard formula for Catholics, but if couples align their priorities with the teachings of the Church and reflect seriously on such choices they can approach these decisions with confidence.