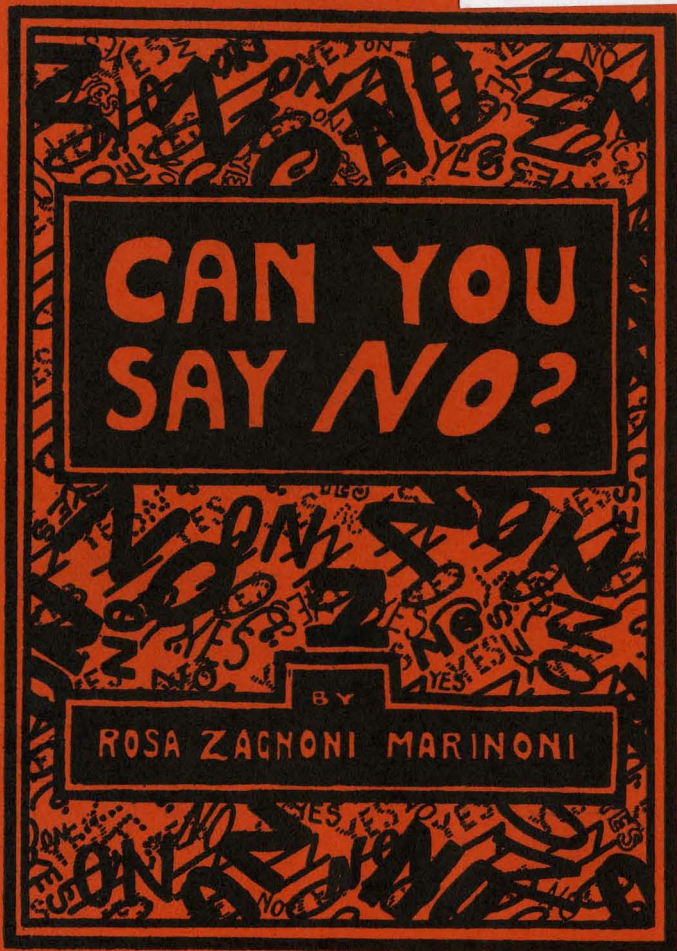


Marinoni, Rosa Zagn  
Can you say "No"  
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# CAN YOU SAY "NO"?

*By*

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**Deacidified**

# CAN YOU SAY "No"?

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**A**RTICLES, books and dramas have been written in an attempt to analyze the modern trend of youth, the attitude of parents and the "what is the matter with us?" question. Yet this problematic situation can be summed up in these few words: "We are forgetting to say NO."

This is an age of gratification, of blindly following the impetus of elemental emotions. Youth does not wish to say "no." Parents are forgetting to say "no," or shirking in their duty to say "no."

We Catholic parents, who have before us the great examples of men and women who knew how to say "no" to material pleasures, to worldly urge and to themselves, should take time to ponder over the importance of this little word, which gave to the glory of our Church and edification of humanity, such men as St. Paul, St. Francis, St. Anthony and many others

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whose greatness stood upon the solid base of the word "no."

Had St. Francis failed to say "no" to the worldly influences of his father's house, had he fallen slave to the material instinct in him, one of the greatest inspirational lights of the world would have failed us, and just another "rich man's son" would have passed as a grain of sand down the slim neck of time.

Had St. Anthony not denied temptation, he would have been merely another rounder, another human failure.

Had St. Paul not turned from his over-yielding mode of living and said "no" to himself, the imposing figure of one of our greatest Saints would have been lost.

Even Jesus, in His superior righteousness, was confronted with the necessity of uttering a "no" when Satan tempted Him with visions of the ephemeral glories of the world.

All of us are called upon to say "no" to ourselves and to those we love.

"No" seems to be a destructive word, but in reality is a creative word since it contradicts that which would destroy our spiritual, moral or physical self.

When I look about me and see the youth of today going forth seemingly bent not only on gratification, but on finding new desires to gratify, I look up to those great figures of our Church and wonder: "Has their example been given in vain?"

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### PLAIN FACTS

Do you fathers and mothers fully realize the importance of the word "no"? Or do you say to yourselves and those about you: "Boys will be boys—Mary can take care of herself—they are young but once—"

Please consider that the greatest proof of love you can give to your children is in using the word "no"!

Look back into your hearts. Do you not find that this word has saved you from many wrong steps . . . and that word "yes" has oftentimes led to regrettable situations? If things have worked out that way for you, so will they for your children.

Nowadays the younger generation is not prone to do much thinking, and you just naturally have to do the thinking for them.

Of course, each of us is likely to believe our sons and daughters are different from modern youth, as we have lately come to regard it. Perhaps a few of them are—many of them in fact—for I do hope that the Catholic atmosphere of our homes has kept the wolf of modern sophistication away from many of our doors. However, parents—even we Catholic parents—must sleep like the proverbial cats, with one eye open, and the catnip ball of "no" right under our noses, lest we be suddenly called upon to offer it to our children and find we have misplaced it.

The word is one of the easiest to pronounce, easier in fact than Mama and Papa. Yet it is



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one of the hardest words to utter, especially to those we love. The over indulgent parent who often says "yes" to his children just as often lifts the barriers of discipline.

How many times could a "no" have prevented tragedies and the first step that led down the hill of self gratification?

### DO OUR CHILDREN WANT US DIFFERENT?

How often do we hear our daughter say in a pleading tone in answer to our remonstrations as to scant body attire: "But everybody is wearing this!" or "Nobody is wearing that!"

Who is "everybody"?

If we say, "Well, I'm somebody . . . and I'm not wearing this or not wearing that," the young bel-ligerent shrugs her slim shoulders and mumbles: "Oh, but you're different!"

For the benefit of those parents, and especially mothers, who might have heard this statement from their daughters' lips, let me cite an individual case to illustrate the message I am attempting to place before them.

I had a friend. I shall call her Nora. She had a daughter. I shall call her Tilda.

The mother was young, but thirty-two, Tilda sixteen. Nora was a rather retiring sort of mother. A pretty kind of woman who "just couldn't say no!" Daughters of women who cannot say "no," generally



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are flames burning upon the altars of modern youth—and Tilda was a flame. Rouge, cigarettes, parties, dancing, bare legs, cocktails, joy rides, loud language—were all part of Tilda's self gratifications.

When her mother tried to remonstrate, Tilda would expostulate glibly: "You're different . . . you do not understand . . . times have changed since you were a girl!"

One day I went to Nora's house and found her flushed and perspiring, dancing alone to a jazz tune bawling out of her radio. Quite confusedly she told me she had been learning new steps so as not to be "different" when Tilda entertained her friends at home.

From that day on Nora changed. Knee-length skirts, cosmetics, bobbed hair, cigarettes. I suddenly became an old woman compared to her. Tilda seemed in the Seventh Heaven. The boys she brought home danced with her mother and declared her "a Queen!" In fact, they lionized Nora far more than Tilda.

Months passed.

One day, as I went to Nora's house to bring her some silver she had asked me to loan her for a party, I found myself standing on the threshold of the dining room looking on as Nora danced, smoked and even drank from a hip flask a young man was offering her.

Tilda was standing in a corner, staring at her mother, her face blanching under her rouge. On see-

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ing me she ran past me into the kitchen, sank into a chair and began to cry. I put my arms about her and the child clung to me, sobbing out: "Oh, I am so ashamed of Mother! So ashamed!"

It was no time for me to say: "Well, Mother is not different now!"

Later, I tried to talk to Nora . . . but she would not listen to me. The poor woman had gone jazz mad, just as Tilda had before her.

Nora became cross, ill-humored, and began to explode to me on the least provocation on how unreasonable Tilda was getting to be. I noticed then that Tilda, since her mother's change, was seeing things from another point of view. To Tilda's horror, she saw in her mother what had awakened the first reproach of her mother toward her.

Tilda withdrew from what she called "her crowd." That was the Spring that I went on a visit East, and upon my return I learned Nora had left her home, divorced her husband and married a young chap who had soon left her after squandering what money she had. Tilda was living a lonely, retired life with her father in a little apartment in the outskirts of the town. This is but one of the family tragedies that came to my notice.

In spite of "what they say," youth wants to look up to its elders. So, mothers, when your child tells you "YOU'RE DIFFERENT," take it as a compliment, for your own child *wants you* to be different!

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### CHEAP TRIUMPH

The first "no's" are the hardest, for one weak "no" will create the possibilities of thousands of other little "no's."

The man who "just can't say no" to his friends who offer him a swallow from their hip flasks, is as the girl who "just can't say no" to the first man who asks her for a kiss.

Young folks fear the word "no." They are afraid it will hurt their popularity. But popularity based on the word "yes" is never desirable.

Good young men, clean young men, fear the word "no," for at times it brings about cutting remarks, teasing and laughter from "their crowd," until they are led to believe their "no" is a sign of weakness. It is the escutcheon of strength, for that little word stands for strength of character, of convictions, of principles.

Let us not be ashamed of this word. Let us not fear to be called "prudes," "sissies," "unreasonable," "narrow-minded" and all that caravan of words which go to mask the real meaning: "He or She is striving to be the decent sort!" What if a girl should lose the company of that certain young man simply because she said "no"? Chances are, if he placed her in the necessity of saying "no" he would not be a worthy companion anyway.

In youth we find it very hard when the spirited horse of our emotions tugs at the reins of our reason.

But in youth is the time to learn how to say

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"no" . . . a firm "no" . . . not a "please don't" . . . which generally means "coax me again."

I find that a man senses the meaning of "no" with acute accuracy. "You mustn't do that!" said with a tilt of the head and a pucker of lips means, "Please do!" and the young man knows it.

The first "no" is what builds the foundation for others. If a girl stands by her first NO she will not be called upon to chant a litany of "no's" . . . "Please don't's" and "You mustn't do that's," all end with the usual result—yielding, and tend to make the next "no" all the more ineffective.

What if Bill should lose prestige with "his crowd" on account of a sharp "no" when a suggestion is made to take a hand in a poker game, to go to a certain road house, or take a "swig" from a hip flask? Even the very young men who tease and jibe at the "lack of nerve" of the chap who says "no" feel, in spite of themselves, a subtle jealous admiration for him.

To follow the crowd, to be one of them, is a cheap triumph.

Not long ago, I was called upon to go bail for a young girl who had been caught in a raid at a certain wayside inn where intoxicating drinks were served. When I asked her how she came to be there, she, the daughter of a prominent family, sobbed: "I *had* to go. They were all going—I didn't want them to think I was afraid!"

Afraid? She was afraid—TO SAY NO!

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### DIVORCE AND SUICIDE

Some say that the "wild time" girl will eventually make the best wife for, having had "her fling," she will settle down only too gladly after marriage.

This is erroneous. Youth is the foundation of life. When that foundation has been built upon marshy ground, chances are that the structure of matrimony will crumble.

The increasingly high percentage of divorces is to some extent due to the slack discipline of youth, the shirking of responsibilities by the parents and the regarding in a superficial light the deep shadows and values of life with its serious problems.

For financial gain, books and productions tending to destroy respect for authority are periodically flaunted before the eyes of youth. In these the mother or father is painted with obvious dark colors, as obstinate and unreasonable, in order to establish the moral that "children know best." To these sugar-coated pills children lend an attentive and willing ear. But if a scenario or book exemplifies the reverse message, namely: "*Parents* know what is for the best welfare of their children," the book or production would be labeled as "inspirational blah" which young folks would not crave to read or see. For here again comes into play our instinct of contrariness which makes young people crave to see and hear that which is less constructive to their moral character. Let a picture be advertised as an inspirational or educational production and an audience must be inveigled

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by some clever device, or the production will show to an empty house. If, however, the news spreads that the book has been banned, or the picture is objectionable, people will stand in line for hours before the ticket office. This is only a proof of how people react to the instinct or contrariness.

Going even deeper into the tragedies of life which a "no" could have prevented, let us take the matter of suicide among young people.

I have scanned statistics and had the misfortune of coming into rather close contact with more than one individual case, and I find that what brought about the consummation of the drastic action was the hectic quandary in which the young victim had been afraid to say "no."

The greatest fallacy, which is oftentimes traded from lip to lip after a case of suicide, is this remark: "What nerve he had!" No, it does not take nerve to commit suicide—it takes cowardice. For all suicides prove in the act of taking their lives, that being afraid of the conditions which face them, they choose taking their lives as the less frightful of the two. In choosing what in the moment seems to them the course of least resistance, they prove themselves cowards, for had they had the *courage* to face the condition confronting them, they would not have resorted to the revolver, poison, or the river. Again another quandary in which the party could not say a forceful "no" to the cowardice in him. It takes courage to say "no" even to fear.

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### COMBATING CONTRARY INSTINCTS

If we take into consideration the Ten Commandments, placed before us, not only for our ultimate spiritual and moral good, but also for our material benefit, we can see that they are ten "no's." They cannot be classed as affirmative, for they have been placed before us to contradict evil and destructive impulses rather than to second natural leanings.

Human nature has an uncanny instinct to be drawn to contrary moves. That is when our inner self must say "no." Were we drawn to constructive and beneficial tendencies, then "yes" would be the word which should stand paramount before us. Unfortunately this is not the case. From the very budding of our elemental emotions we find that our instincts are to act contrary to constructive ends.

We seldom find a child reaching up into the pantry shelves for the milk bottle, but rather for rich pastry.

This contrary instinct is puzzling and alarming. Not even a sense of preservation halts the hand of the child as it reaches for bright objects such as pins, pieces of glass and the like, and places them into his mouth; or sends him splattering with his feet in the puddle of water and smear his face with mud.

Were it not for this contrary instinct in us and were we subject only to a reasonable amount of natural logic and observation of what has gone on before us,



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we could live sanely and wisely, taking only into consideration what befell Biblical characters thousands of years ago. Knowing that certain actions bring about certain consequences, we would, through a sense of at least self-preservation, automatically abstain from what another has proven is not for our ultimate good. In other words, a dozen men *having* lived, sinned, reaped and recorded their experiences, would be sufficient examples for us to look back upon. But this is not the case. In spite of the fact that we *know* certain laws cannot be broken without detriment to our physical and spiritual selves, each life has to live its own experiences.

The example of what happened to others seems to matter little, and bad examples are more readily followed than good examples. We seem to derive an uncanny satisfaction in proving to ourselves that *we too* can slide down the sandy hill, skid here and there and laugh, as we dive to the bottom, on finding ourselves yet alive. The crosses along the way matter not, but add to our thrill. If we happen to meet with an accident, we often slide breathlessly down that hill again, thrilling once more in attempting to escape the very dangers to which we fell victims but yesterday.

The development of our will power is the most important factor, not only in the success of our material life, but also for our eternal salvation.

Will power speaks through us with the word "no," a negative word which makes for a positive balance.

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"No" is an antidote. An antidote at times can be poison in itself. But when taken to counteract another poison, it annuls itself as well as the poison.

If we were endowed with a natural leaning toward goodness, "yes" would be the word contradicting evil influences. But as things are, "no" becomes the big, important word, springing from our will power—the big, constructive word, the corner stone of right living, of fairness toward ourselves and our fellowman, the solid conductive rungs leading up the ladder to eternal salvation.

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The word "no" is an antidote of times can be poison in itself. But when taken to constitute an antidote, it would kill as well as the poison. If we were endowed with a natural leaning toward "yes," would be the word contradictory in our influence. But as things are, "no" becomes the big important word springing from our will power. The big constitutive word, the corner stone of right living of fairness toward ourselves and our fellowmen, the sound conductive ring leading up the ladder to eternal salvation.

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