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THE IMMORALITY OF CONTRACEPTION*

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Birth control—or, as it is more correctly called, contraception—is a large subject. Our purpose here is narrowed down to the discussion of the intrinsic immorality of “birth control” as it is commonly understood and preached by professional contraceptionists. The moral principles underlying the discussion are clear to the rank and file of Catholic doctors.

Let us proceed at once to delimit the field of our discussion. Birth control, like crop control, can aim in two possible directions. It can aim at greater fruitfulness, and encourage it; or it can aim to check and discourage fruitfulness. Moreover, working in either direction, birth control can be guided by a philosophy, and can make use of methods that are morally reprehensible. Birth control which aims at greater fruitfulness is not our subject.

But popular birth control aims not so much at an increased fertility, as it does at checking it; perhaps we might better say, at destroying it. Its reasons and motives are unacceptable, and its methods are frustrative of the sexual act. This is precisely our battleground. These are our points of diversion. Let us point out at the beginning of our discussion that our quarrel is entirely with an immoral and un-

warranted birth control. There is a Catholic sense in which the principle of birth limitation can be accepted—namely, through abstinence. But it must be noted that most of the reasons alleged by contraceptionists as justifying birth control are not acceptable to Catholics even for abstinence. If, for example, parents must choose between a child and a radio or an automobile, Catholic parents will not hesitate to take the child. Again, the ordinary pains and hazards of childbirth cannot justify the practice of family limitation. We must not temper the mandatory character of God’s injunction to the point of its destruction. Whenever and wherever normal conditions of family and social life obtain, God does intend that marriage shall set up a new cradle of the race; that the husband shall become a father and the wife a mother. God’s plan of the universe pivots around this function of marriage and sex. The world is made for man, but man is made for God. Summarizing this point, we may say that there is a Catholic justification of birth limitation through abstinence, but the list of justifying reasons for its practice is decidedly restricted.

Popular birth control goes hand in hand with the breakdown of religion. We do not mean to say that it was not always practiced. It is as old as human selfishness.

* Address by the Chaplain of the Dubuque Guild at the spring meeting.

Onan, who lived back in Old Testament days, has the unenviable distinction of having given his name to the most common method of contraception known for centuries. But its modern vogue is unquestionably the result of religion liberalized to extinction. For all practical purposes, God has been put out of His heaven, in the minds of millions. They have been engulfed in the overwhelming flood of naturalism. And naturalism is the legitimate child of the Protestant Reformation. For fifteen centuries, the exalted Catholic ideal of marriage held undisputed sway in all civilized countries. Then came the great religious revolt inaugurated by Luther and Henry VIII. They denied the authority of the Church in matters of faith and morals, ridiculed the essential ministry of the priesthood and led the Protestant assault against the sacramental character of matrimony. Foremost in the Catholic idea of marriage has always been the duty indicated in the very name of that sacred relationship—*matris munium*—the duty of motherhood. The intervening centuries have witnessed an incessant warfare against the old Catholic ideals. It is an easy step from private judgment in faith to private judgment in morals. The Protestant world has taken that logical step. The Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, held in 1930, gave its imprimatur to the birth control movement in England. Liberalism in religion joined hands with the intellectual

pride of our scientific, cynical age, to give us this new morality. It is an array of presumptuous, blasphemous, hazardous guesses based upon the half-baked findings of atheistic evolution, biology, and Freudian psychology, all rolled into a bundle and labeled "The Morality of Naturalism." Its cardinal principle, from which all others are deduced, is "Do what you like, because nature is god, and nature is always right." The God of traditional theology, of course, is left completely out of the picture.

Today the Catholic Church stands alone as the champion of the sacramental character of marriage. She stands adamant for the indissolubility of the marriage bond. She holds uncompromisingly for the inviolable rights of the unborn child. She alone vindicates the sacred character of sex, and dares to attach the stigma of shame to its violation and abuse. The prophets of the new morality have abolished the notion of sin by counting noses in convention assembled. The foundations of morality, we are told, are as shifting as the manners and customs of peoples. Governments and welfare agencies are pledged now to give them a scientific mold.

Man's passion and greed seized upon this convenient morality of naturalism. It justified every perversion in the name of self-expression, and condones every sin in the name of subconscious urges. Sex experimentation before marriage, birth control, abortion, divorce,

adultery, all take on the air of respectability. Arguments for all of them are varied and most ingenious; they answer so completely the cry of our nature emancipated from the so-called moral superstitions of the dark ages.

But let us approach our investigation of the methods of contraception more closely. We are discussing the moral aspects of the problem. Birth controllers have scoured every field of human interest in search of evidence and argument in favor of their hobby. They have appealed to psychologists, economists, sociologists, and to medicine.

Dr. de Guchteneere, in his masterful book entitled "Judgment on Birth Control," analyzes all the arguments of the contraceptionists, reviews the available evidence in every field, and, by devastating logic, refutes their presumptuous claims. Wherever careful investigation of facts has been made over a period of time long enough to give the study any scientific significance, the evidence is all against contraception.

The final *coup de grace* to the theory is delivered by its condemnation on the grounds of its intrinsic immorality. We are talking here, naturally, of contraception, that is, an unwarranted limitation of birth, by methods that are directly opposed to the natural law. These methods include onanism, and contraception by chemical and mechanical means. These are opposed to the natural law be-

cause they block out the natural consequence of the sex relation. They frustrate the essential relation between cause and effect as ordained by God.

Now this is a very simple statement. Its import is too profound and far-reaching to pass over with a half dozen words. It demands analysis. It is one of those momentous concepts upon which the weight of eternities depends. Here is the pivotal crux of all human and divine moralities—to preserve, intact, or to disrupt those causal relationships which have been set up by the Eternal, or by the positive Divine Law of God. Let us see what this means. A cause is not something isolated, complete, self-contained, self-satisfying, self-explanatory. It may have its own being or existence, but by its nature it stretches out for its completion to something else—a filial something, which is its effect. A cause, by its very meaning, is genetic; it is a begetter. In the scheme of creation every created cause receives its being, and its commission as a causality from God. Its ordered relation to its effect is the eternal Science of God. What we call natural law is nothing more, and nothing less, than our human knowledge of God's Eternal Law whereby all beings are directed to their final end.

God is the Cause of causes, and the End of all ends and purposes. Because He is Infinite Wisdom, He cannot act without a purpose. He has a divine ideal towards

which all creation moves. All created beings are effects flowing out of His creative purpose, and they in turn become a system of causes and effects with a directional flow back to God. God is the Alpha and the Omega of all things. His will is the Eternal Law which governs the universe. Man is, of course, included in this Sovereignty. All being below the human level by absolute necessity moves in keeping with the Eternal Law. There is no choice here. But man has free will. He has right of choice. But his right of choice does not look indifferently at right or wrong. It involves the moral obligation to obey on his higher level, the same Eternal Law, the same eternal ordering of causes to their effects, of means to their ends, of all beings to God's final purpose. Man is conscious of this obligation, and therefore has a conscience which approves or disapproves according as he obeys or disobeys God's order. There is nothing more fundamental in morality than this sense of duty recognized by conscience, to follow honestly and consistently God's order to which He subjects man, as we know it. We must follow truth. Error and injustice have no claim on our fealty. They have absolutely no rights, for they are mere negations of being. But truth on earth is a fragmentary revelation of Eternal Truth. Earthly justice is a piecemeal vision of Eternal Justice. So by direct line of logic it becomes clear that human law (which presum-

ably mirrors Divine Law, and has validity only when it does so) and natural law are our first-hand allegiances to God's own will. Our sense of duty to the natural law and to human law is derived, and receives its sanction, from our sense of duty to God's Sovereign Law. Giving, then, its proper place and scope to free will, we can still look down upon creation as a vast interlocking mechanism of hierarchical causes and effects, of means to ends—a unit universe, partly physical, partly moral—moving to its “one far-off Divine Event.” All has been designed to accomplish God's purpose. Nothing about this world is arbitrary or purposeless. Each cause has its own responsibility to keep the directional flow of creation moving Godward. Men may sometimes hesitate, ponder, study, pray. The line of duty becomes obscure. We may get only flickering glimpses of the Eternal Purpose at times, but even these glimmerings have sovereign claim over our wills. God often asks us to act on faith and in hope.

Now let us apply these principles to our problem of sex. The primary end and purpose of sex is procreation. Sex is a divinely ordained cause; the child is its end, its effect. God might have arranged otherwise; but God in His wisdom has made sex the instrumentality of human life. We are not Freudians; we are not overwhelmed with the sex ideology. Nevertheless, we do recognize its potency and influence in our men-

tal, physical, social, and even our religious life. You doctors are keenly aware of its critical bearing upon the emotional balance of many of your patients. Recent discoveries in the field of endocrinology reveal in startling fashion the delicate equilibrium maintained by glands whose functions are now recognized as converging in sexual and generative purposes. This is all God's plan. To subserve the procreative end of sex, God has established the permanent husband-wife relationship, that is, He has founded the family. For the sake of the child, He has bound husband and wife together by the permanent bond of fidelity. The child needs this permanency in family life. The long period of infancy and helplessness demands it. This extended period of dependency is not only physical: it is mental and spiritual as well. Hence father and mother must be the teachers of child life, and models in flesh and blood—all through this period of infancy and helplessness. To insure permanency, and to safeguard it, God annexed to the primary function of sex additional ends and purposes. These must always remain subordinate, however. They must never usurp the place of procreation nor obstruct it. The marriage union, by God's decree, becomes the seal and the nourishment of conjugal love; the symbol of that complete mutual offering and acceptance of husband and wife without which permanent companionship would be almost impossible. To this end,

we must add the third end admitted by moralists, the control of sex passion which became so unruly through the sin of Adam.

Contraceptionists refuse to recognize God's interest in the sex relation. Nor do they recognize this hierarchy of purposes. But to the Catholic moralist, this order is essential, and it compels submission to its mandates. The primary end of marriage is procreation. Nothing that husband and wife can do may be allowed to block out this procreative purpose. Every act of sexual congress must be *in se*, and *per se*, that is, as a human act, apt and fit, and adapted to generation. Whether or not, because of accidental reasons of age, existing pregnancy, or bodily conditions, conception cannot take place, means absolutely nothing to the personal responsibility of husband and wife. If for natural reasons, the ordinary effect does not follow, that is decidedly God's business. Invariably, under grave obligation, husband and wife are held by the moral law to their full duty towards the procreative nature of their act. Once the parents have fulfilled their part, the chain of causes and effects which culminate in childbirth must be left to the care of the law of nature.

But here the contraceptionist would break in upon the consecrated ground of God's ordinance. Birth control blocks the first, the direct and immediate purpose of sex.

Just as the wife by nature seeks fulfillment and complement in motherhood, so by manly instinct, the husband seeks fatherhood. It is true that man's emotional nature is less child-centered, but who has not observed the profound changes wrought in him by the advent of fatherhood? It brings out the finest qualities in him. It gives him his completest expression of himself. And most significant of all, it changes radically his attitude towards the wife of his bosom. She has become vastly more than his wife. She has become the mother of his child. Husband and wife have both entered into a new partnership with God. He has charged them with the responsibility of an immortal soul, a child of His own divine heart. Why then should not God, in His wisdom, make the very instrumentality of their child's life also the instrumentality of their mutual enduring love and companionship? Now with the birth of their child, responsibility will begin to weigh down heavily. Now great sacrifices must be made. Let love then grow and be nourished at least in its youthful, uncertain days, where life begins. It is God's will and ordinance. Later on, perhaps, it will gather strength and purity from its sacrifices, and will then walk the way of life on a higher, nobler plane.

Up to this point, we have drawn our arguments chiefly from reason, though we have not neglected entirely the religious viewpoint. From the principles we have dis-

cussed, answers to most questions pertinent to the morality of birth control may be readily deduced. By easy inference, for example, we can justify the Catholic attitude towards the rhythm theory. God Himself is the Author of the rhythmic ebb and flow of fertility in the sex life of women. Men may study natural science and discover to their soul's content. They are free to use, but never to abuse their knowledge. Passion and greed are prone to abuse, hence it is decidedly a matter of debate whether it is wise or not to broadcast all the facts of sex. But granted that family circumstances warrant conscious limitation of births, why may not husband and wife by the natural method of abstinence during fertile periods, exercise this control? There is nothing reprehensible about the abstinence method. It violates no moral law. It involves no inversion of means and ends. It takes God's will as it exists, and acts in accordance with it. True, it demands hardship and a measure of self-control, but any human life worthy of the name is filled with these things.

Again, from our principles, we have the ready answer for those who naïvely assert that "birth control is not opposed to nature; that it, too, merely makes use of natural science; that the contraceptive chemical and device are as much in accordance with nature as the eye-glass, or the crutch, or the chemical contents of a medicine bottle." A clever piece of

sophistry here! And many people are unable to detect it! The crutch and the eye-glass and the medicine are aids to the natural function. They strengthen the weaknesses of function. Or they stimulate to that activity which is proper to function. In a word, they fall right in line with the directional flow of function as constituted by God in the law of cause and effect. But the contraceptive device thwarts the function! Blocks it! Nullifies it! The contraceptive instrument is not like the eye-glass which helps the eye to see, but it is rather very much like the sharp steel which cuts the optic nerve. This is certainly the case with sterilization, which is a form of permanent contraception. The crutch is an aid to walking. Contraception, far from being an aid to nature, is against her.

No discussion of this vital subject would be complete without a brief statement of what faith has to say. The doctor has his daily problems, many of which have profound moral bearings. He has problems affecting his own professional conduct. Frequently he is called upon to give advice dealing with the moral problems of his patients. Often enough, these problems are allied to the subject under discussion, for example, abortion, both criminal and therapeutic, sterilization, methods of contraception, and problems of sexual conduct. The doctor must be a man of strong religious convictions, and of clear moral vision.

To many of us, faith speaks more persuasively than reason. And faith certainly has the clinching argument against birth control, and all meddling against God's law. Faith alone reveals the astounding dignity and worth of human life; the consequent inviolable sanctity of human rights. It alone speaks of the transcendent spiritual grandeur of the Catholic marriage ideal. It alone puts God into intimate touch with human beings—makes Him the Divine Giver of life, the Divine Physician of our ills, the Divine Companion of our earthly pilgrimage. The Son of God became the Son of man. The whole purpose of His incarnation can be put in two words: salvation and revelation. Through Jesus Christ, God the Father revealed His eternal Fatherhood, and His paternal love. Men could never have dreamed that God's love for them could be so boundless and so real, or that His own divine life reached down so intimately into their own. God is Love; we are all His children. Earthly fatherhood is merely a nominal fatherhood compared to God's. He is the real Begetter of all being. The divine family of the Trinity is the eternal prototype of the earthly family. And when the time was fulfilled, Christ who is God was born into an earthly family relationship. He was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. What a revelation! Through her spotless motherhood, Mary became the white ideal of all Christian mothers.

Christ emphasized the sacred character of sex by making marriage a sacrament.

The Old Testament contract of marriage was a natural contract. There was something sacred about it, of course. Sex is the instrumentality of human life, and because human life is sacred, sex is sacred. To safeguard life and its instrumentality, and to sanctify the home, Jesus took that Old Testament marriage contract and raised it to a spiritual plane. He made it a sacrament. It became, not merely a contract between husband and wife, but between them both and Almighty God. In what St. Paul calls this "Great Sacrament," God pledges Himself to give the contracting parties grace for every emergency of married life. Even the sexual act of marriage is not a mere thing of earth, circumscribed by earthly interests, a relationship for mere legal recognition and control. It is a covenant with God, a consecration by the grace of the Most High to one of the noblest purposes of earthly life. The primary end of marriage, we have repeatedly said, is the procreation of the race. But the ultimate purpose of marriage is to people God's heaven with saints. This purpose constitutes the basis for our Heavenly Father's solicitude and gives meaning to His providence. "This is the will of God," says St. Paul, "your sanctification." Whatever happens to us in this life is related to this end. "To those who love

God, all things turn together unto good."

And what is God's personal relation to us in this world? We are not, as we have been so often described by agnostics, "orphaned specks of animated dust clinging for dear life to a grain of sand, so insignificantly small in the scale of the universe that God (if there is a god) cannot be concerned about us." No! Christ's cross is the measure of man's worth in God's sight. Christ gratuitously dying for men's souls reveals the eternal value of human life. How the Gospels insist over and over again that our God's life is inextricably mixed up with our own. God made the world, He lives with it. He lives in it. "In Him we live and move and have our being."

This is part of the grandeur of the Catholic Credo. In the light of these truths, most of our little problems and worries of earth solve themselves. Faith becomes the loadstone of life, pointing out the way to our Homeland where sin and pain and sorrow shall be no more. Faith is the great blazing sun, clarifying and gilding all the doings of humanity with the yellow gold of eternal worth. What a small place have birth control and problems of sex against this background! Surely the thought of God's concurrence of His intimate life with us in this world ought to be the subject of the doctor's daily meditation. Daily the Great Physician works with you and through you. Have you never felt His presence? Have

you never seen His power of healing at work when you, His earthly assistant, had done all that medical art could suggest, and the patient by all laws of your science was doomed to die? Oh! You physicians of our bodily ills, have you not discovered that all these things we think of as evils—pain, disease, and death—are but bodily symptoms of the one great evil which is sin? Have you not discovered that a rebel human will is the only discordant note in all the grand symphony of creation's cult of God?

You merely mend the physical punishments of sin, but doing that, God has put it in your healing hands, by kindness and counsel to lead God's erring sons and daughters back to His love and peace and health of soul. We must all, doctors, priests and lay people, heed the "Sursum Corda" of our glorious Catholic faith. "Lift up your hearts! Lift up

your minds!" "Lift them up out of the dreary lowlands of earth. Dwell on the mountain tops with the God of transforming grace."

Catholic doctors are called by God, ordained by God, we might well say. Your call is not to a mere profession; not to a lowly avocation. It is a ministry of healing both body and soul. And in your work God is with you. He is the Divine Doctor, the Chief Surgeon. He has fashioned clay into bone and nerve and tissue. He has breathed into dust the breath of life. Wherever you can help these laws of birth and health and life to serve God's benign purpose better, there is your call to duty. But when by your knowledge and skill you have done your utmost as servants to nature's laws, and the crisis still endures, then stand aside. Pray! Make way for nature's God! The Chief Physician has taken charge!

How to Reduce Maternal Death Rate

A great part of the national maternal death rate of 7 per 1,000 is the result of induced abortions, one-fourth of the fatalities being thus attributable. The contraceptionists say that their desire is to space childbirths in order to reduce family and maternal hardships. The woman who uses contraceptives is the one to resort to abortion when her method fails.

On the other hand, the woman who feels justified in using the safe period is of a different type. She disdains to do anything to which her conscience and her re-

ligious teachings are opposed. Sometimes, under stress of circumstances, the rule is forgotten and pregnancy may occur. She accepts the situation with as good grace as she can, but the idea of terminating pregnancy is too horrible for her to contemplate. The result is that the children of her family are spaced so as not to be burdensome and the end is accomplished which birth controllers state is their purpose, but which is never attained by their followers, who are, first, contraceptionists and, if failing, abortionists.