

THE TRUTH ABOUT BIRTH CONTROL

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ON February 13th, 1934, Lord Dawson of Penn moved the second reading of a Bill to legalise under certain restrictions the sale of contraceptives in England. In the course of his remarks, he declared that birth control had come to stay, and that it ought to be accepted as a clean and honest practice. His assertions led to a series of questions sent in to my wireless sessions from Station 2SM, covering almost every phase of the subject; and I have thought it well to set out the questions and answers in this more permanent booklet form, that the moral law and its difficulties may be clearly understood by all readers.

THE FACT

“The birth rate is falling in both Catholic and Protestant countries of the Western world—sure evidence of wide-spread birth control.”

No one would deny that. On relative percentages, however, it is evident that the less Catholic the country, the greater the decline. Where Protestantism is in the ascendancy, the fall is devastating. In Catholic countries containing a Protestant and irreligious element, a decline is noticeable, though it is due chiefly to the non-Catholic element, and to such weak Catholics as are affected by the new paganism. In such an almost entirely Catholic country as Italy things are ever so much better than in other countries. We must note, in passing, that a fall in the birth rate is not necessarily sure evidence of birth control by contraceptive means, at least in individual cases.

“Birth control, as part of our social fabric, has come to stay; and the Catholic Church is but beating the air by opposing it.”

If it be part of our social fabric, then our social fabric is rotten proportionately! Contraception by various methods flourished in the pagan civilisation of Rome in the early days of Christianity. Pagan Rome went to pieces. But Christians refused to indulge in the evil practice. In the 3rd century, Origen wrote to the pagan Celsus, “Christians marry, as do others, and they have children. They do not stifle their offspring.” Despite the boast that our civilisation is Christian, paganism has been revived by non-Catholics, with open advocacy of birth control. And the non-Catholic social fabric is doomed if birth control continues. But no man can say that birth control has come to stay. The Catholic Church triumphed over ancient paganism; and she will outlive modern paganism, continuing on her way towards the building up of a new civilisation on the ruins of this. She did it before. She can do it again.

Nor is she merely beating the air even now by opposing birth control. In stating the moral law, the Church is no more beating the air than was Almighty God in giving the commandments, however many human beings have refused to observe those commandments. The moral law must be stated. If many men observe it, many will reap happiness; if many break it, many will reap misery. Good Catholics obey the law, and repudiate birth control, both in theory and in practice.

That not all Catholics who live in a morally rotten social fabric are good Catholics, I admit. It is difficult for Catholics to live in a pagan atmosphere without some being contaminated. It was very difficult for the early Christians to live in the pagan atmosphere of Rome, enduring both physical and moral persecution. We often hear of the early Christian martyrs. But it is true also that many Christians failed; so much so that the Church had a very strict discipline for the reconciliation of lapsed Christians. Today it is even harder for Catholics to stand firm in their principles. Then their opponents were openly pagan. Now they profess to be Christians, and give out their principles of pagan morality in the name of Christianity. The danger is obviously more subtle. But the Catholic Church alone remains firm, and far more Catholics remain true to the teachings of their Church than the superficial might think.

“No civil or military authority has ever succeeded in suppressing contraception.”

That is true. But you overlook religious authority. The religious authority of the Catholic Church did succeed in breaking the immorality of pagan Rome, and it succeeds today in stemming the tide of contraception amongst those of her subjects who are loyal to her, and who have refused to take their cue from the pagans around them. Those who do

not accept the authority of the Catholic Church will yield to the dictates of no authority on earth where their personal morals are concerned. And the Catholics who have been affected by the loose principles of a non-Catholic environment, and who have weakened in their respect for the authority of Christ and of His Church, have also, alas, been contaminated. But with genuine and faithful Catholics the authority of their Church does succeed in suppressing any temptations to adopt contraceptive methods of birth control.

THE LAW

“What is the moral law in this matter?”

Let me first clear up a possible misunderstanding suggested by the very term birth control.

The controlling of the quality and number of children is lawful if lawful means are used. To control the quality of children, unsuitable people should not marry at all, and that is why the Church makes close blood-relationship an impediment. To control the number of children, parents may by mutual consent practise self-control, either by continence, taking such prudent measures as suggest themselves in order to ensure absence of strong temptation, or by abstaining from marital privileges during periods when conception is likely. But the moral law insists that, if they avail themselves of their marital rights, they must do nothing deliberately to prevent God’s normal natural laws from taking effect. If children should happen to result, they must be accepted. The advocates of birth control do not mean it in this lawful sense. They want, as G. K. Chesterton has well said, “fewer births and no control.” They wish to render sensuality lawful for its own sake, indulging in actions intended by God to result in children, but deliberately frustrating God’s intentions. This gratification of desire, for its own sake, whilst deliberately excluding the purpose of such actions, is forbidden by divine law, degrades marriage, reducing it to merely legalised sensuality, and is sinful of its very nature.

“Is contraceptive birth control forbidden by a law of the Catholic Church?”

The Catholic Church did not make the law. She has merely declared clearly to men the right interpretation of the natural moral law imposed by God. And since Christ said to His Church, “He who hears you hears Me,” it is really Christ Who still teaches men through His Church.

“Could the Catholic Church change her teaching on this point?”

No. She is here to explain the law of God, not to break it. The evil of contraceptive birth control is forbidden by God Himself, and the Church has no authority to dispense from the prohibition. Such birth control is evil of its very nature.

“Is not the motive of the Church merely to increase her population?”

No. You should have been able to perceive that for yourself. If the Catholic Church were not really concerned with moral ideals, and thought only of what is expedient, then her predominant desire to attain as large a population of Catholics as possible would not induce her to impose celibacy upon her priests, and sanction the desire of so many thousands of women to lead a single life as nuns. Julius Caesar was at least logical. He did want his empire populated. In 59 B.C., he gave farms to parents of three children, offered further prizes for large families, and prohibited celibacy after a certain age.

If the Catholic Church insists on celibacy as a condition for those who enter the religious state, then her motive must be other than mere population. She condemns birth control because it is morally wrong in itself—and with no idea of expediency in her mind. No one pretends that her explanation of God’s law on this subject is easy or popular, and, if she believed in expediency she could win far more converts by permitting contraception. Many refuse to become Catholics, not because they believe Catholicism wrong, but because they find its standards of moral conduct too high for them. They forget, however, that if the Catholic Church demands a loftier standard, she also offers far more spiritual helps than those with the lower standards outside her fold at present possess.

I admit that an increase in Catholic population would be a happy result of fidelity to Catholic principles, but that is not the real reason for those principles. The Catholic church does not consider what is expedient—but what is right—

and what God commands. I have just been reading a book by a Wesleyan parson lamenting the weakness of Protestantism. And he uses these remarkable words:

“The Roman Church is far less unpopular than she was a decade past. Has she lowered her flag? and become more amenable to popular ideas? Not one whit. Then why does a democracy respect her? Because she has the courage of her convictions, and believes in her authority whilst other churches do not or fear to use it. The world despises a church which is always toadying and compromising for fear of hurting somebody’s feelings.” (Thus the Rev. C. Penney-Hunt.)

“Celibate Priests, who have no wives and children, are the least fitted to pass judgment in this matter.”

A priest hasn’t got to have a wife and family to be able to explain the moral law regulating the conduct of husband and wife. He has to know the moral law as imposed by God. The priest does not make the law—nor does he legislate for married people. God makes the law. The priest merely explains the law. If, before a priest can explain the moral law to married people he has to be married, must he be a thief before he can explain the moral law to thieves? And would you say that God Himself is not able to legislate for married people on the score that He never had a wife and children? Your argument leads nowhere.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE LAW

“If contraception be against the law of God, what is this law, and where is it set forth?”

The law of God in moral matters is manifested either by *natural* principles of morality, or by direct revelation. And in each case the correct sense of the law is set forth by the authoritative teachings of the Catholic Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in virtue of her commission by Christ to instruct *all* mankind in religious and moral obligations.

SACRED SCRIPTURE

“Can you quote any prohibition from Scripture?”

It would not matter if I could not. The general principles are given clearly enough in the Bible, but not every concrete application of those principles. For example, you would admit that it is morally wrong for a man to allow himself to become a drug-fiend, addicted to cocaine, and depriving himself of reason and human responsibility. Yet you could not find in Scripture any text saying, “Thou shalt not become a drug-fiend, addicted, to cocaine.”

“God said, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ but contraception does not destroy existent life.”

It is true that contraception is not murder by the direct killing of an existent being. But indirectly contraception does repudiate the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” How do I make that out? Because by that commandment God reserved to Himself dominative rights over human life. Man directly usurps God’s rights when he takes it upon himself to destroy the life of another. He indirectly violates this law of God when he deliberately frustrates the natural laws ordained by God to the production of life.

“Have you no really direct reference to birth control as evil?”

In Gen. XXXVIII., 10, you will find a reference, clearly indicating God’s mind on the subject. Onan paid the death penalty for his contraceptive conduct, as being guilty of “a detestable thing.” Many people have tried to escape the force of this text, but their efforts do not avail against its true sense in the light of the whole context, and, above all, against the constant interpretation of Christian tradition. St. Augustine, writing in the 4th century, rightly sums up Apostolic tradition on the subject. In his treatise on the sin of adultery, Bk.II., C. 12, he writes: “Marital relations even with a lawful wife, are unlawful and degrading when the conception of a child is deliberately frustrated. This was the sin of Onan, and God struck him dead because of it.” But, besides this indication of God’s law by revelation, contraception is certainly opposed to the laws of natural morality. God’s revelation in no way excludes the wider natural law, based on the very nature of things as established by Him. The natural moral law is antecedent to all civil and ecclesiastical codes, and even to the ten commandments.

NATURAL MORAL LAW

“How is birth control opposed to the natural moral law?”

Goodness is measured by purpose. Food is good if it nourishes. It is for that. A watch is good if it correctly tells the time. It is for that. Our actions are good if they are in accordance with the obvious intentions of the God who endowed us with the faculty. And, above all, the important life-instincts of self-preservation and race-preservation must be subject to the natural moral law. Hunger and sex-desire are obviously ordained to the preservation of individual life and the life of the race. Pleasure attached to the indulgence of these appetites is secondary, and ordained to their primary purpose—the attaining of the results intended by God.

Now the more necessary certain functions are to the individual or to the race, the more pleasure there is attached to them to render them attractive. Food is necessary to the individual, and eating is a pleasant operation—but the pleasure is to induce one to nourish himself. To eat and vomit to frustrate nourishment and eat again for the mere pleasure is a sin of gluttonous sensuality. Contraception is only another and worse form of gluttonous sensuality. Contraceptive practices carry their own punishment—for violated nature has its revenge—mutual respect is forfeited—the true dignity of the wife is forfeited—her health is impaired—marriage is degraded to a state of legalised sensual indulgence—and increased divorces are the result of such conduct.

People should know, even if they don't accept the divine authority of the Catholic Church, that the practice is all wrong. If they don't know, it is only because they have deadened their own consciences. But for Catholics there is not a trace of doubt. If they sin, they sin. But they know enough to refuse to justify such conduct and pretend that it is lawful. They may be weak—but they are not hypocrites, calling vice virtue.

“Is contraception a grave sin?”

Yes. The deliberate frustration of natural laws obviously intended by God for the procreation of children is a grave or mortal sin. This is evident from the gravity of the matter itself, as well as from the gravity of the penalty inflicted on Onan.

“Lord Dawson, whom you have quoted, says that contraception is right so long as it is properly carried out, with delicacy of feeling and proper restraint.”

Lord Dawson is not authorised by God to be the guide of mankind in moral matters. The Catholic Church is the guide authorised by God, and any man who wishes to prove that she is not will find that he has undertaken more than he can manage. Contraception is wrong and gravely sinful in itself. To say that it is right if carried out with delicacy of feeling and proper restraint is like saying, “Don't worry, old chap. I am only going to murder you. I know that murder is ordinarily wrong. But that applies only to brutal murder. I murder people with delicacy of feeling and proper restraint. I shall blindfold you, so that you won't see my horrible preparations. And, having thus spared your feelings, I shall murder you with proper restraint, quite moderately, and with no frenzy for unnecessary mutilation.”

Birth control by contraceptive means cannot really preserve delicacy of feeling, except by drugging one's conscience, and is in itself a violation of proper restraint, apart from all further excesses.

“You argue from the violation of nature. But humility, chastity, the cooking of meat, and many other such actions are against nature. Even the curing of disease is a postponing of the natural process of death.”

You are confusing the various senses of the word nature. Morality is not concerned with merely physical nature, but with human nature, in so far as human nature is endowed with intelligence and free will; in other words, in so far as human nature is endowed with moral responsibility. Intelligent man is meant to attain dominion over purely physical nature, and there is nothing wrong morally in regulating natural processes according to right reason in the purely physical and external order. Therefore, we do not say that any violation of natural processes is immoral.

What, then, do we mean by immoral? We mean that which violates the moral dignity of man. In what does his moral dignity consist? It consists in the rational control of his lower faculties according to the dictates of his higher and nobler faculty of intelligence. It is obvious that blind bodily passions must be subject to, and at the service of, reason. Reason must not be subject to, and at the service of, the passions.

Now in birth control, man's moral dignity is overthrown. It is not advocated in order that man's higher spiritual nature should dominate his lower material nature, but in order that the flesh should satisfy its blind passions, yet escape the burdens which the law of nature, established by God, decrees as the purpose of such functions.

I suppose that you would agree that solitary indulgence in the vice of impurity is immoral—that a youth given up to such indulgence could be termed as one given up to “vicious habits.” But what is birth control but mutual cooperation in similar habits, quite divorced from any essential relation to procreation, and subordinated to individual pleasure. G. B. Shaw has rightly pointed out that birth control is simply a form of reciprocal self-indulgence and as immoral as solitary self-indulgence. It is not the regulation of man's moral nature, but the violation of man's moral nature, and, therefore, immoral. Reason is subordinated to sensuality—and that's all there is to it.

Your examples have no bearing on the case. Humility and chastity are in the moral order, and are not against nature. They are against the diseases of pride and sensuality, which would corrupt our natural perfection. The cooking of meat is in the physical order, and in no way a violation of moral obligations. Nor is the curing of disease a frustration of nature. Disease is not according to man's nature, but an attack upon that physical nature. We are preserving, not violating, man's physical nature, in protecting it from and relieving it of a disease which itself is violating nature. Nor are we frustrating a natural process of death. It is natural to die, but how? Man is adapted to a natural life of three score years and ten, if not more. The natural death of a man should normally occur when the physical body has run the full course of its utility right through to a ripe old age. Nature did not intend man to die young of disease. If disease would deprive a man of the full natural course of life, we are hindering a process of death which is in itself violating man's nature, and we are postponing death to its proper and natural time.

“How can you reconcile this reasoning with your assertion that people may avoid having children by restricting themselves to “unlikely periods?” Such indulgence is in the hope that conception will not occur, is merely sensual, and as immoral as contraceptive methods of birth control.”

That is not so. Let us try to make things as clear as possible on this point.

In the first place, contraceptive birth control means the deliberate interference with nature, so that even if children would result, natural laws are not allowed to operate. The very marital act is vitiated.

But this is not the case when married people restrict themselves to unlikely periods, doing nothing actively themselves to prevent conception. Nature itself has limited the time when conception is possible, and use of privileges during naturally unlikely times does not violate nature. As far as the parties are concerned, their conduct would result in children if nature itself would permit. So in the first place there is a difference between the very actions of the people concerned. In the contraceptive case the actions are abnormal, curtailed, frustrated, and vitiated. In the periodic case they are normal, complete, and, as far as the parties are concerned, calculated to secure their effect, were nature itself operative at the time.

Now we can go to your next point. Though they themselves fulfil all that is necessary, at least the periodic people choose the unlikely period in the hope that conception will not occur. That, however, is not immoral in itself. The Catholic Church has never said that married people are obliged to have all possible children, whether they can afford to keep them or not. They may limit the number of children by abstention. If they are free in conscience to refrain from their privileges by mutual consent all the time, they must be free in conscience to do so some of the time. And they may do so at any time. Now nature itself, in God's providence, has arranged naturally likely times and naturally unlikely times. If married people are free to use their privileges at any time and refrain at any time, they are free to refrain at times when conception is likely, and make use of them at times when it is naturally not likely. But their actions must be normal, complete and natural in themselves, so that at least they are prepared to accept any children which result contrary to their expectations.

Finally, is such indulgence merely sensual? No. Undoubtedly one of the purposes of marriage is the expression and fulfilment of mutual love, confirming and strengthening the marital bond. Such an expression of the self-giving of one to the other for the whole of life according to God's will is an honourable motive, and not in the least forbidden, provided nothing is done positively to frustrate natural physical laws which would operate. And remember that periodic restraint requires voluntary abstinence at certain times. The motive is higher and quite different from

sensuality for sensuality's sake, which does not restrain its own sensual desires, and frustrates nature in order that it may indulge them at any time.

Briefly, periodic restraint is in accordance with nature; contraception violates nature. Periodic restraint is rational; contraception is irrational and merely animal; periodic restraint is permitted; contraception is forbidden by the natural moral law.

OBJECTIONS TO CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

“Catholic teaching robs marriage of its happiness. People marry for a mate; not for a cradle.”

Remember that we are dealing with the law of God. The Church does not make the law. Meantime, those who are still Christians marry both for a mate and for a cradle, begging God to bless their union with children. They do not marry for lust. There is something higher than that. And if they make use of their lawful privileges, they know they must not unlawfully hinder actively and deliberately the operation of natural laws.

“But married people cannot be happy when faced with the alternatives of either having children or practising continence.”

That is against the facts with people who have Christian ideals. The primary purpose of many good Christian people when they marry is not sensual gratification, but companionship, mutual edification, and the privilege of cooperating with God in the work of creation. In the Book of Tobias, which your Protestant Bible wrongly and unfortunately omits, we have this warning given by God to Tobias: “I will show thee who they are over whom the devil can prevail. They are who in such manner receive matrimony as to shut God out from themselves and from their mind, and give themselves to their lust as the horse and mule, which have not understanding. Over them the devil hath power.”—VI., 17. On his wedding day, Tobias and Sara knelt together to pray to God, and Tobias said, “O God, Thou knowest that not for fleshly lust do I take Sara to wife, but for the love of posterity, in which Thy name may be blessed for ever and ever.”—VIII., 9.

“Lord Dawson said that, as a medical man, he thought abstention impossible, or at least harmful.”

Abstention is certainly not impossible. At times it is absolutely necessary, as in the case of permanent invalids. And even with normally healthy people, abstinence for given periods is certainly not impossible; nor does it have harmful results. If periodic abstinence be necessary for grave reasons, it is possible for those who will take the means. If conscience demands abstention, you can be quite sure that God is prepared to give the grace necessary for it. Of course, one must take the means suggested by ordinary prudence, and be faithful to the sacraments and to prayer.

Whilst this is true of periodic abstinence in the normally healthy, and of perpetual continence when that is compulsory, we admit that perpetual continence is not desirable in normally healthy married people as a general rule. The psychological strain would be too great, the physical well-being of either party could suffer, and the spiritual unity of marriage might be endangered. St. Paul himself says to the married; “Defraud not one another.” But that does not justify the use of contraceptives. They have even worse effects. The only natural, healthy, and morally correct method of limiting the number of children is by periodic abstinence. If that fails, such children as God sends must be accepted.

“Do not talk self-denial to us!”

The unbelieving Jews made a similar type of reply to Christ when He gave them a doctrine they did not like. “This is a hard saying. Who can hear it?” As a matter of fact, selfishness is a great factor in the case, so opposed to the “deny thyself” which is fundamental in Christian holiness. Satan tried to emancipate himself from subjection to God, with dismal results. Birth controllers may emancipate themselves from duty and from some temporal difficulties, but in doing so they will find that they have emancipated themselves from God, from the restrictions of virtue, from the grace of Christ, and from their prospects of eternal salvation, unless God's great mercy gives them the gift of sincere repentance before they die.

“It is not always selfishness. What of the mother’s health? Is it not fair to her that children should be spaced?”

If the mother’s health is to be considered, often it is more seriously affected by unnatural contraceptive practices than by natural functions and child-birth. However, if the wife’s health is such that her life is really endangered, then the husband has the obligation to think of her rather than of himself, and to forego his own pleasure. If death took her from him, and he could not re-marry, he would be obliged to practice continence. But even if the wife’s health be not really endangered, it is lawful to space children by mutual restraint, and periodic abstinence. The law is that, if privileges are enjoyed, duties must be fulfilled in a completely natural way, results being left to God. Indulgence and deliberate frustration constitute immoral conduct, and any arguments based on pleasure or convenience involve the immoral principle that the end justifies the means. That principle cannot be accepted.

“Could the Church never give permission for the use of contraceptive means where health is likely to be endangered?”

No. We cannot fall back upon expediency or utility as the standard of what is lawful or unlawful. We must face the question as to what is right or wrong in itself. Expediency cannot render what is morally wrong morally right. If the natural laws intended by God to result in children are set in operation, they may not be frustrated. The true respect for what is right and good shone out in the words of a good Catholic wife and mother to a non-Catholic doctor, much to his astonishment, “I would rather die keeping God’s law than live breaking it.” After all, this life is not everything.

“Apart from pleasure and happiness, think of poverty. Surely the Catholic Church permits family limitation for poorer people.”

The Catholic Church does not say that people are obliged to have a multitude of children. If people feel that they cannot afford many children, they may restrict the number.

But they must choose between the inconvenience of having children, or the inconvenience of self-restraint by mutual consent, either permanently or periodically. Not using privileges is lawful. Use and frustration is simply a sinful abuse, not justified by any temporal considerations. That the observance of God’s law is at times difficult does not abrogate the law. We are not dispensed from every law of God that is inconvenient, and bound to observe only such as happen to be convenient. That would be the end of all morality, for on such a principle what is expedient is right. If it were expedient to break the law, “Thou shalt not steal,” honesty would no longer oblige. Poorer people may limit the number of their children by mutually agreed abstention from marital rights. They are not free in conscience to use those rights and yet, by personal contraceptive practices, to hinder the natural laws established by God from taking effect, if they are operative at the time.

“Is not contraception better than bringing into the world children one cannot adequately nourish?”

No. It is certainly better to face any temporal trial than to commit mortal sin—or any sin. A good end in view cannot justify the use of sinful means and actions.

Remember that there are no privileges which do not carry with them obligations, and at times awkward obligations. Selfish temporal comfort is not the supreme good. Nor will God send a single mouth that cannot be filled. Many children may mean self-sacrifice, but they mean great blessings, and additional temporal comfort in later years.

“You Priests do not know what it is to support a wife and family on a few pounds a week.”

We can know that, without having a wife and children. We have eyes and ears. We have seen the difficulties of poverty, and have heard from the lips of hundreds the story of their distress. And we have heard the story always with sympathy and heavy hearts. We are not indifferent, hard, and callous. But not all our appreciation of people’s difficulties gives us the right to abrogate God’s law.

“Do you call it religion for a mother to continue bringing children into the world, with her husband on the dole?”

No. I would call it continued maternity despite trials and difficulties. If such a mother were actuated by religious principles—fulfilling the duties of her state in life and accepting the consequences, she would be a very good and practically religious mother—one well worth having. Certainly she would be a far higher type of person than one who would pervert the whole purpose intended by God, refuse to face the self-denial and mortification essential to a Christian—and live only for sensual self-satisfaction.

“Children of the poor are born at the expense of the State, are fed by the State, and are a burden on their fellow citizens.

Even if that were true, as it is not, these children are ordinarily a great asset to the common good. If we are going to boast that Australia contains so many head of cattle and of sheep, let us not moan that she also contains so many human citizens.

In any case, the most heart-breaking of temporal trials does not justify morally wrong conduct. It is a fashion to say that the Catholic Church teaches that the end justifies the means, and that one can do evil that good may come. The Catholic Church never has taught that doctrine, but has always condemned it. But, when it comes to birth control, people who falsely blamed the Church for teaching that the end justifies the means now blame her because she doesn't teach it and refuses to permit it.

“I read of large families in want, pitiful cases; and am disgusted with parents who so little love their children as to bring them into the world under such conditions.

Not every large family of which you read is a pitiful case. Where real poverty and destitution exist, it is pitiful from that aspect—but the children themselves are a blessing—and bring further blessings as they grow up and are able to help their parents and appreciate the sacrifices their parents made for them. This is apart from the fact that each child, despite all temporal trials, has a definite opportunity of securing eternal happiness in heaven—an opportunity I would not wish to lack; even if it meant being brought up in an orphanage.

Instead of being disgusted that parents should have so little love for their children, you should be filled with respect for those who have such little love for themselves and such great love for God and for the little ones God sends. You are measuring things on wrong standards, and arguing as would a pagan who does not believe in God, nor in the eternal destiny of each soul. Rather you seem to think that this world is all and that any evil practice is permissible if it spells earthly comfort.

“I could go on almost forever in describing the evils and miseries which result from such teachings as those of the Catholic Church on this subject.”

No amplification of the difficulties and consequences can alter the principle. For example, I might say, “\$1 would be very useful to me; I shall steal it.” You would reply, “No. God says ‘Thou shalt not steal.’ No matter how useful \$1 would be, you must not get it by breaking God's law.” Would it improve matters if I multiplied the gain to be won by saying, “Yes, but I can steal \$10,000—and surely you would not wish me to lose that great advantage. Think of all it would mean to me.” You would say, “No. The end does not justify the means—and the way you propose to secure the money is evil in itself.” In the same way, no advantageous considerations of health, wealth, or pleasure can justify birth control by deliberate frustration of God's purpose after actions intended by Him for the conservation of the human race. If one abstains from those actions, well and good. But, if not, then God's natural laws must be allowed to operate, and it is a mortal sin to prevent them. Natural conscience, in those who have not warped it, dictates this. Very many non-Catholics have admitted to me that they know it is a sin against natural morality independently of any positively revealed law of God. Anyway, the Catholic Church, as the moral guide for all her own subjects, tells them quite clearly the law of God—and they know the truth, whatever obscurity exists in the minds of those who deny the need of a religious guide. Catholics either practice mutual self-restraint, with the help of God's grace, or take the children God sends prepared to bear with the trials such service of God entails. That, at least, is their obligation. It is not of much credit to serve God in easy and trifling matters—but to refuse as soon as difficulty presents itself.

“What thanks does a woman get for having children from a selfish husband who does not want them?”

If she has a selfish husband she may not receive many thanks from him. But is his gratitude any compensation for sin and the loss of the gratitude of Christ for all eternity? After all, a husband cannot go to God and answer at the judgment for the soul of his wife. She came into the world independently of her husband, and her soul will go out of the world independently of him, and she will have to answer to God for her own violations of conscience.

And that this matter has a definite relation to one's eternal salvation is evident from St. Paul's remarkable words, "A woman shall be saved through child-bearing, if she continue in faith and love of God, and the sanctification of herself." (I. Tim. II, 15.) Such a woman, after all, gives Christ little children to redeem. "Suffer little children to come to me, and forbid them not" is true in more senses than one. And yet again, if a woman receives no thanks from her husband she receives compensating blessings even in this life. She secures a greater immunity from many dangerous diseases and neurasthenic disorders. She is spared that wretched misery—the loss of an only child. She has the love of many devoted children, children who are unselfish and doubly devoted precisely because they have seen the many sacrifices their mother has made for them.

Difficulties unselfishly borne when the children are small are compensated as they grow up and begin to earn. And such a mother certainly has a happier old age than the woman who was a wife but refused to be a mother, looking back in lonely sadness to the children who only "might have been"—a woman whose conscience tells her that if she was ever able to practise birth control it was only because her own mother did not when it was her turn to receive the gift of life. No. The thanks of a selfish husband are not everything.

“Let us turn to considerations of the race. Would not birth control improve the quality of the race? In breeding stock we mate only the best and secure perfect sheep and cattle.”

Your analogy does not fit the case. You mate only suitable stock. But that does not suggest that unsuitable people should marry, and violate God's laws in order to avoid having children. It does suggest that people unfit for parentage should not be mated by marriage. To a certain degree that would be desirable, and for that reason the Church has certain impediments forbidding marriage between certain types of people. But if people do marry, and make use of their privileges, no temporal considerations can justify contraceptive birth control. That is falling back on the utilitarian principle that what gives pleasure or seems useful may be done, whether it is right or not.

Nor will birth control by contraceptive means result in better children. Violated nature takes its revenge. The health of the wife is impaired, and a neurotic mother is less likely than ever to give birth to a really sound and healthy child.

As a matter of fact, contraceptive sensuality was one of the big factors in the decay of pagan Romans. It did not improve, but destroyed, that nation.

“G. B. Shaw, whom you have quoted, admits that birth control is immoral, but advocates it as less demoralising than war, starvation, disease, and abortion, as a method of keeping the population down.”

Shaw assumes that the population must be kept down, owing to the uneven distribution of goods in this world. He apparently does not think that rather the uneven distribution of goods must be remedied. He seems aware, however, that it is not right to sanction immorality unblushingly. So he tries to water things down a bit. He says that birth control is more humane and civilised than war, starvation, and abortion. But that says very little. And the fact that it seems to him to be more humane and civilised than these things does not make it actually humane and civilised. It is, in reality, neither humane nor civilised. The humane is that which accords with the best instincts prompted by true human dignity. And birth control violates human dignity. It is a degradation of the parties concerned. Nor is it civilised. It is a reversion to a paganism which was fought from the very first by Christianity. There is no real need to keep the population down, for there is enough wheat, meat, wool and cotton in the world to feed and to clothe all. There is need to remedy the uneven distribution of all that God's providence provides. That is the problem calling for solution. And even if the population is kept down, there is no necessity to choose between immoral means only. With the help of God's grace and human prudence, married people can refrain from having children by mutual self-denial and abstention. If they cannot bring themselves to that degree of mortification, then they must accept the children God's natural laws will send, and humanity must arrange that they will share sufficiently in the abundance of goods this world can provide.

“But what is to happen if the world does become over-populated?”

Whatever happens—you again propose temporal convenience as sufficient justification of sinful conduct. It won't do. Meantime, the future must be left to God. The world as a world is by no means over-populated yet. In almost every age this problem has occurred to men. Yet, as population has increased, production has increased, and there is more than enough today to fill every mouth and leave hundreds of tons of baskets of fragments left over. These speculative difficulties can safely be left to God. Let each individual keep God's moral laws. That is his duty.

CATHOLICS AND BIRTH CONTROL

“Your law against avoiding children is not observed by a great many of your Catholic people.”

To that I have four remarks to make. Firstly, no rules in this matter are my rules, nor are they rules invented and imposed by the Catholic Church. The law forbidding birth control by contraceptive methods is simply the law of God Himself.

Secondly, the law of God in this matter does not forbid people to limit the number of their children; it forbids them to limit the number by unlawful means. If they agree to abstain from the use of those marital privileges which normally result in children, they are free to do so. But if they make use of their privileges, they must leave the consequences to God and accept the children He sends. To enjoy privileges which God intends to result in children, and then to frustrate the operations of God's law by artificial means, is gravely sinful.

Thirdly, if you know of Catholic couples who have few or no children, you would have to know by what means the number of their children was limited before you could accuse them of violating God's laws. If physical incapacity is the cause, or if they have mutually agreed to practise self-control, they are not disloyal to God. If they are making use of contraceptive methods, they are guilty of sin. But we have not the right to judge others, and charity bids us put a lawful construction upon their having but few children.

Fourthly, granting that some Catholics do sin in this matter, well, they are sinning, and that's all about it. But their sin is their own responsibility, not the fault of their Catholic Faith. I have never maintained that every Catholic is a saint, by any means. Catholic individuals sin by dishonesty, by excess in drink, by neglect of their religious duties, and in many other ways. It is quite possible then that some Catholics are also guilty of sin in the matter of birth control by evil means. But the point is that they are sinning when they do—and that a Catholic is evil when he does not live up to his Faith is no argument against that Faith. The Faith is all right even if some given Catholic is not. And there are thousands of Catholics who do live up to their Faith in this matter.

“Cannot Catholics sin regularly and go to Confession regularly?”

If a Catholic sins, then as often as he truly repents, he can receive sacramental absolution of such sins as he may have committed.

But confession absolves past sins of which one has truly repented. If a Catholic goes to Confession in a state of grave sin, but with no real repentance of such sin, no sins are forgiven; the Confession is sacrilegious, and, such a Catholic would very much deceive himself if he thought that by merely going through the procedure of Confession all is well.

It is bad enough, then, when he lacks true repentance of past sins. It is far worse when he intends to continue the same sins in the future.

If a man at the moment of Confession is sincerely sorry for the sins of the past, he at least intends to try to avoid them in the future. Whether he succeeds or not is another matter. But at the moment of absolution, he must at least intend to do his best to avoid future transgressions.

“Could not a Catholic continue sinning for years, continuing his Confessions, and die with a last penitent Confession?”

If he continued with regular Confessions, yet had no intention of trying to rectify his conduct, he would simply have a series of additional sins by such bad Confessions. As regards dying with a last penitent Confession—did he do so, he would, of course, save his soul. But that would be a miracle of God's mercy. He cannot know that God will give

him an opportunity of a last Confession. One-hundred-and-one factors could prevent its being possible. And even if it were possible, no man, after a long series of insincere Confessions, has any guarantee that he will obtain the grace of true and sincere repentance sufficient for valid absolution. The man who relies on God's mercy to deny danger, and denies danger to free himself from God's law, is simply making a mockery of God's most precious attribute. To say, "God is merciful," and then use His mercy as an excuse to offend Him still more, is to forfeit any right to His mercy in the end.

Remember that there is no state in life which consists of privileges only, and no attendant obligations and restrictions.

The Catholic Church exists to lift men to holiness and the observance of God's law—not to water down God's law in order to suit the passions of men.

Nor to win people to the Catholic Church can we be silent about the obligations of Catholics. If men want the true religion, we simply have to say, "There it is." We say with Christ, "If any man wants the true religion, and is willing to serve God, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow the teachings of the Catholic Church." There is a cross in Catholicity, and the Catholic who finds that he is not called upon to deny himself fairly frequently in many things is simply not living up to his religion.

Nihil Obstat:
FRANCISCUS S. McNAMARA, O.F.M.
Censor Dep.

Imprimatur:
✠ MICHAEL
Archiep. Sydneyen.
27 Julii, 1934.
