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The Christian Attitude Toward Birth Control

Don C. Preisinger

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_preisingerd@csl.edu

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Recent surveys conducted by leading magazines, medical groups, doctors, sociologists, and social workers, conclusively show that the majority of married people are in favor of the dissemination of more knowledge on birth control. There seems to be little doubt that the majority of American and Canadian couples do practice birth control of one type or another during their productive years.

Pastors should be fully informed about this subject, and should qualify themselves mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to be able to discuss the matter calmly and objectively in their adult Bible classes and adult membership classes. Our people are wondering what Scripture has to say on the subject. Certainly many are practicing birth control and some to the searing of their consciences. Very seldom will people broach the subject on their own initiative, but pastors ought not to think that therefore their people are not vitally concerned with the subject.

Not too long ago a physician said to Alfred Rehwinkel of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis: "You men of the clergy have not the courage to come to grips with this question. You are letting it slide and the people are coming to us for

advice."¹ Let us hope that in the near future no one will be able to make such a criticism.

This thesis grew out of a paper presented to the Northern Alberta Pastors' Conference of the Alberta-British Columbia District of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. The discussion showed that many of the pastors were poorly informed on the matter, and not a few based their views mainly upon tradition rather than on the clear Word of God. The writer of this paper thought, therefore, that a thesis on "The Christian Attitude Toward Birth Control" might fill a need and serve some purpose. This monograph presents only a bird's eye view, and in no way does the writer consider it as exhausting the subject.

Although, technically, abortion is a form of birth control, this paper is mainly concerned with birth control in the narrow sense of birth prevention.

¹Alfred M. Rehwinkel, Planned Parenthood or Birth Control (Mimeographed thesis, n.d.), p. 2.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF BIRTH CONTROL

There is evidence of some rudimentary knowledge of birth control from very ancient times. The earliest extant prescription in writing is contained in an Egyptian papyrus that dates back to about 1850 B.C. The remedy probably was of some use. The most remarkable classical work on the subject dates back to the first century of the Christian era and was called The Gynecology of Soranus. The descriptions of contraceptive methods contained in this work surpass any right down to the middle of the nineteenth century. Recipes found in ancient Chinese and Indian literature, as well as prescriptions contained in medieval European literature, are largely the products of folk medicine and are of little or no value.¹

Infanticide and abortion were the chief methods of birth control used by savages as well as the Greeks and the Romans. Even a philosopher of such high standing as Plato, in his The Republic, advocated the exposure of sickly and deformed new-born infants. The Hebrews did not permit abortion or infanticide, but to some extent they did sell children into slavery. It is common knowledge that even today in

¹Millard Spencer Everett, The Hygiene of Marriage (New York: Eton Books Inc., 1951), p. 159.

the Orient infanticide is still practiced.

Uncivilized tribes have been found in various parts of the world who have had the practice of inserting some sort of material into the vagina to prevent conception. Some savage peoples have even performed operations on the vagina or the male urethra to prevent insemination.² The Biblical story of Onan³ shows that coitus interruptus has been employed as a method of birth control for thousands of years.

The male sheath, which is still perhaps the most popular device for contraception, was introduced in 1564 by Fallopius.⁴ Originally it was intended as a protection against venereal diseases.⁵ In the eighteenth century Casanova further developed the sheath, and soon after Doctor Condom of Britain crusaded for it, till finally this device became known by his name.⁶

The modern idea of birth control actually began with Thomas Robert Malthus, an English political economist. Malthus studied theology at Cambridge and was an ordained minister in the Church of England. In his famous "Essay on

²Ibid., p. 158.

³Gen. 38:8 ff.

⁴Ralph G. Martin, "Birth Control, Where Do We Stand Today?" (Reprinted from the July, 1952 issue of Pageant; New York: Planned Parenthood Federation of America).

⁵Everett, op. cit., p. 159.

⁶Martin, op. cit.

the Principles of Population 1798," he propounded what is known as the Malthusian Doctrine, based on the hypothesis that population increases in a geometric ratio while provisions increase only in arithmetical ratio.⁷ Malthus wanted to attain this limitation only by means of self-restraint.

Francis Place, in 1822, wrote a reply to the essay of Malthus, showing the inadequacy of Malthus' ideas. Place said that prevention of conception was the only remedy. A year later the "Diabolical' Handbill" came out, giving explicit information on conception prevention. One suggested method was a mechanical device to be used by women to prevent the semen from contacting the cervix.⁸

This method was invented by a pious Christian,⁹ Dr. W. P. J. Mensinga of Germany, in 1878. A number of variations of Mensinga's device soon appeared and were used considerably in Europe in the latter half of the eighteen hundreds.¹⁰

In America, and now in other parts of the world such as India and Japan, Mrs. Margaret Sanger, born 1883, has probably done the most to popularize birth control or "planned

⁷"Malthus, Thomas Robert," The Encyclopedia Americana, Canadian Edition (Montreal: Americana Corporation of Canada, Limited, c.1949), XVIII, 171.

⁸Everett, op. cit., p. 169.

⁹J. Rutgers, How to Attain and Practice the Ideal Sex Life (New York: Cadillac Publishing Co., c.1940), p. 222.

¹⁰Everett, op. cit., p. 160.

parenthood" as she prefers to call it. In 1912 Mrs. Sanger was a nurse in the New York slum area and there became convinced that women of the underprivileged class should be taught how to limit the size of their families. After a few trips to Europe where she studied the birth control methods of France, England, and Holland, Mrs. Sanger began publishing and editing The Birth Control Review, the official organ of the American Birth Control League.¹¹

The first Birth Control Clinic Research Bureau was opened in New York in 1923. In 1942, after an earlier merger of the American Birth Control League and the Margaret Sanger Research Bureau, the name of the movement became "The Planned Parenthood Federation of America."¹²

Mrs. Sanger founded the Journal of Contraception, later called Human Fertility, in 1935, and first edited by Dr. Abraham Stone. This publication did much to familiarize the medical profession with recent advances in contraceptive techniques and has made available some valuable contributions to research. At first the medical profession was much against the birth control movement. But finally, in 1937, as a result of Human Fertility the American Medical Association resolved to carry on research in materials and methods of

¹¹"Sanger, Margaret," The Encyclopedia Americana, op. cit., XXIV, 261.

¹²Alfred M. Rehwinkel, "Planned Parenthood or Birth Control" (Mimeographed thesis, n.d.), p. 161.

contraception.¹³

Early researches took the form of statistical investigation of the results achieved by various methods of contraception. Now, however, research of a more fundamental nature in physiology and chemistry is being done, scientific discoveries are being made all the time which well may revolutionize and greatly simplify contraception.¹⁴

Medical authorities today agree that the most reliable method of birth control is the combination of a rubber diaphragm with a spermicidal chemical. The general public, is not well acquainted with this method. The male sheath, used without a spermicide, still remains the most widely used contraceptive, even though it is not thoroughly reliable. Over a million are sold in the United States every day.¹⁵

¹³Everett, op. cit., p. 161.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 160.

CHAPTER III

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW

The Roman Catholic Church is the most militant organization against the use of birth control. At least three articles, giving the view of this church body, have appeared within recent years in the Reader's Digest. The Catholics themselves produce an abundance of books, tracts, and pamphlets on the subject of birth control.

Sterilization

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that in most cases, sterilization of either the male or female is contrary to the natural law and divine law. This includes vasectomy, severing or crushing of the Fallopian tubes or the use of X-ray.¹ However:

If it is plainly evident that the organs necessary for procreation in each sex are diseased and the disease or condition is such that operative means should be taken for the preservation of the patient's health, the operation is perfectly licit even if it results in sterility.²

¹La Rochelle, Handbook of Medical Ethics for Nurses, Physicians, and Priests, translated from the fourth edition by M. E. Poupore (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Bookshop, 1947), p. 134.

²F. L. Good and O. F. Kelly, Marriage, Morals and Medical Ethics (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1951), p. 146.

But the Catholics teach that if an operation is done on these organs for no other reason than to make procreation impossible, then it is contrary to nature and is most sinful. Even sterilization to protect the health of the mother is forbidden by Canon Law.³

On the matter of sterilization for criminals of the state, Pope Pius XI says:

Public magistrates have no power over the bodies of their subjects. Therefore, where no crime has taken place and there is no cause present for serious punishment, they can never directly harm or tamper with the integrity of the body, either for reasons of eugenics or for other reasons.⁴

Contraception

Pope Pius XI, in his Encyclica Casti Connubi of December 31, 1930, says the following about contraception:

The Catholic Church, to whom God has entrusted the defense of the integrity and purity of morals, standing erect in the midst of the moral ruin which surrounds her in order that she may preserve the chastity of the marriage union from being defiled by this foul stain, raises her voice in token of her Divine ambassadorship and through our lips proclaims anew: Any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life, is an offense against the Law of God and of Nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin.

No reason, however serious, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, there-

³Ibid., p. 134.

⁴G. C. Treacy, Love Undying (New York: The Paulist Press, c.1944), p. 17.

fore, that marriage act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose, sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.⁵

This idea of the Catholic Church is by no means a new one. In 1823, the Sacred Penitentiary declared that the provision of contraception was contrary to nature. On May 21, 1851, the Holy Office branded as scandalous, erroneous, and opposed to the natural law of marriage, the proposition that for honest reason the onanistic use of marriage was permissible.⁶

The Roman Catholic Church is against "unnatural birth control" and it quotes the classic passage, Genesis 38:9 about Onan. Besides this it also refers to Romans 1:26-27: "For even their women did change their natural use and do that which is against nature" These Scripture passages are quoted at the very end, after papal pronouncements and human reason have been exhausted. Whether the above quoted Scripture passages prove the Catholic point or not, will be discussed later in this paper.

The Catholic Church is not against birth control in every form. From time immemorial it has felt that self-restraint - complete abstinence - living as monk and nun in

⁵Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁶Dominic Pruemmer, O.P., Birth Control (New York: The Paulist Press, December 28, 1933), p. 5.

marriage has been the most highly acceptable method.

But "Holy Mother Church" which prides itself on being semper eadem has changed its teachings on this matter in recent times. In his Encyclica Casti Connubi, Pius XI tries to meet the need of married persons who are aware that they should not have more children for one reason or another, and yet do not want to give up intercourse. The Pope tells them that he permits his children to have intercourse on the days when there is no likelihood of conception taking place. This means that the Catholic precedent has broken down and sexual intercourse is permitted even when its aim is not that of conception, in fact, when conception is being avoided.⁷

Rhythm Method

Before the modern Catholic idea of the rhythm method, there was another theory called the "Capellman Theory" developed by Father Capellman. His idea was that couples would refrain from relations for a week or ten days after cessation of the menses, and for a week or ten days before the onset of the next period.⁸ It was found from experience that there was very little scientific thought to this theory. But about twenty-two years ago two scientists working

⁷ Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, translated from the German by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1947), p. 654.

⁸ Good and Kelly, op. cit., p. 125.

independently came out with what today is called the rhythm method. One was a Japanese, Ogino, and the other an Austrian, Knaus. Their theory is that in a twenty-eight day menstrual cycle, ovulation occurs twelve to fourteen days before the first day of the next expected period. With this idea in mind the Catholics have gone to great lengths to publish "conception calendars." In fact, Fathers Fred L. Good and Otis Kelly in their book, Marriage, Morals, and Medical Ethics, which was reviewed in Time magazine, state: "We believe that if the rhythm method is rigidly followed, the results can be one hundred per cent successful."⁹

Other Catholic medical men are by no means as optimistic and are of the opinion as are most geneticists today that impregnation is possible any time during the month.

The question was asked, "Since the principle is the same, by what fine line does the Catholic Church differentiate between rhythm and mechanical contraceptives?" The answer was:

The Catholic Church differentiates between the two by the same kind of fine line it uses to differentiate between borrowing \$50 and stealing it. The purpose of using rhythm is the same as the purpose of using mechanical contraception, just as the purpose of borrowing is the same as the purpose of stealing. They are, however, obviously means of a different sort, though they aim at the same purpose. The Catholic Church is still able to distinguish between means, even when those who accused her of saying that the end justifies the means, are now acting upon the very same false principle of the means

⁹Ibid., p. 152.

being justified by the end.¹⁰

The Roman Catholics do not teach that married people are obliged to have as many children as physically possible. The Pope mentions that for economic (sic) or health reasons, they are justified in limiting the number of their children, or, of spacing them at longer intervals than would normally occur, but the only lawful way that they may do it is by total or partial abstinence which must be mutually agreed upon.¹¹

If the marital relationship is for the primary purpose of begetting children, why is it that the Catholic Church should approve the rhythm method when its purpose is to prevent pregnancy? This is the answer in "Shall We Have Children?"

The primary purpose of the marital relationship is the procreation of children. Its secondary purpose, however, is to afford a mutually satisfactory means of expressing conjugal love. We may say that marriage relationship may be sought for its secondary purpose, provided that the primary purpose is not artificially and unnaturally excluded. Marital relations, as a mutually satisfactory means of expressing conjugal love, during the wife's sterile periods, do not artificially and unnaturally prevent pregnancy.¹²

¹⁰"Shall We Have Children?" A panel discussion and open forum conducted under the patronage of the Most Rev. Michael Curley, D.D., Arch-bishop of Baltimore and Washington (New York: The Paulist Press, 1947), p. 38.

¹¹L. Rumble, Quizzes on Hospital Ethics for Nurses, Doctors, Priests and Sisters (St. Paul, Minn.: n.p., 1946), p. 36.

¹²"Shall We Have Children?" op. cit., p. 38.

Roman Catholic theologians do not take the attitude that it is always lawful to take advantage of sterile periods by means of the rhythm system. They say:

Whilst it is not in itself morally wrong to restrict marital relations to the sterile period, it must be remembered that morality depends on one's motives. If married people restrict themselves continuously to the sterile period for merely selfish reasons, such as to avoid the ordinary inconvenience of family responsibilities, their conduct would be sinful. Such conduct would not be called moral and ethical. Moreover, even periodic continence can have bad physical and psychological effects on the parties to it, and it should be a temporary expedient only. Young people, above all, should never begin married life with the intentions of deferring conception by restricting the relationship to the sterile period only. It would be much better for them to defer their marriage until they are prepared to have children than to marry with such an intention.¹³

Abstinence

Most Catholic moral theologians are agreed that "total abstinence" is the preferred way of life. Catholics need not have any children at all if they do not desire, or they can have them only when it pleases themselves, when they choose to live together as man and wife. The Catholic Church has canonized husband and wife as saints, who, though having the right to marital intercourse, agree to forego it entirely throughout their lives.¹⁴ Hence, you need not have

¹³Rumble, op. cit., pp. 37-8.

¹⁴R. W. Fulgence Meyer, Plain Talks on Marriage (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Francis Book Shop, 1951), p. 74.

children, or many children, or children close together.¹⁵

The same Catholic authority quoted above brings out that if a pregnancy would result in poor health for the mother, the couple should completely abstain from intercourse. He says, "That is the only virtuous birth control."¹⁶

Another Catholic thinker, however, says that total abstinence for a longer period of time is not advisable. "Celibacy within marriage is not the same thing as celibacy outside marriage, and it can have the most harmful consequences."¹⁷

To sum up, either the rhythm method or total abstinence is the only ethical means of birth control for the Roman Catholics. Although there is some disagreement, most authorities agree that the use of these means depends upon the motive behind their employ. It would seem, however, that Catholic people are not living up to the statutes of their church nearly as much as we would suppose. Emil Brunner says:

There is the complaint, which is heard on all hands, that even the Catholics no longer abide by the statutes of their church, and priests who receive confessions are bidden not to probe into this question save under

¹⁵Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁷Rumble, op. cit., p. 37.

special circumstances.¹⁸

¹⁸Brunner, op. cit., p. 370.

The Roman Catholic Church is the most numerous on the earth, with over a billion members, but other churches have also had considerable success in the world. Generally, however, they have not been nearly so successful as the Roman.

The Christian Church

The views of the Church of England would also cover the views of the Episcopal Church of the United States and also the Anglican Church of Canada.

Until the year 1930, the Anglican Communion, like most Protestant Churches, was of the opinion that the use of force in religious matters was intrinsically wrong. However, under certain circumstances the use of the force of law was permitted by the Anglican Church. A statement prepared in 1914 by the Committee of Bishops and approved by a large majority of the Anglican Bishops stated:

It seems to me that in every application of such self-restraint that it is certain upon which only the purpose of the law is to be considered and that the law should be applied in such a way as to secure the best results possible in the circumstances.

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA, 1914, p. 10.

CHAPTER IV

VIEWS OF OTHER RELIGIOUS BODIES

The Roman Catholic Church is the most vociferous on the matter of birth control, but other churches have also had something to say on the matter. Generally, however, they have not been nearly so clear-cut on the issues.

The Church of England

The views of the Church of England should also cover the views of the Episcopalian Church of the United States and also the Anglican Church of Canada.

Until the year 1930, the Anglican Communion, like most Protestant Churches, was of the opinion that the use of contraceptives was intrinsically wrong. However, under certain circumstances the use of the "safe period" was permitted by the Anglican Church. A memorandum prepared in 1914 by the Committee of Bishops and approved by a large majority of the Diocesan Bishops stated:

It seems to most of us only a legitimate application of such self-restraint that in certain cases (which only the parties' own judgment and conscience can settle) intercourse should be restricted by consent to certain times at which it is less likely to lead to conception.¹

¹H. Sutherland, Control of Life (London: Burns Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 95.

Nothing further was said on the subject of birth control in Anglican writings until the time of the Lambeth Conference of 1930.

I wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Mr. Fisher at Lambeth Palace for the views of his church. My request was turned over to the Rev. Canon H. C. Warner, the Education Secretary of "The Church of England Moral Welfare Council - the Church's Council for Sex, Marriage and the Family." In his letter of July 9, 1952 (letter in my possession), he said:

I think you may be interested in seeing the enclosed booklet: "The Threshold of Marriage," setting out the three views held among the different members within the Church of England. The Church, as such, has never come down on the side of one or the other on these three points and, as you will see, the Lambeth Conference - which does not speak officially for the Church of England - gave its own views in 1930.²

Following are the three views of the Church of England under the heading, "Family Planning and Birth Control:"

1. Christians are inevitably faced with moral problems about which there is a difference of opinion even among themselves. In such matters each must decide as seems right to his own conscience, after getting the best advice and information that he can. Birth control is one of these problems and most married couples have to consider their attitude towards it.
2. There is a general agreement that it is right to limit the size of the family when the well-being of the mother or children demands it. It is about the method of doing this that opinions differ. Some Christians hold that to abstain from intercourse for as long as necessary is the only right way. Others use what is called the "safe period," though many doctors think this

²Letter from H. C. Warner, July 9, 1952.

quite unreliable. The method of withdrawal before intercourse is complete, spoils the act for both husband and wife, and in any case often fails to prevent conception.

3. It is on the use of artificial contraceptives that disagreement is sharpest. There are, speaking generally, three different points of view:

A.

The use of contraceptives is always wrong, since it imposes limitation upon intercourse such as to alter the nature of the act. Those who hold this view allow that the use of the "safe period" is a legitimate means of birth control, since it involves no interference with the sex act itself; seed is deposited where it can reach the womb, even though there is no egg-cell present to be fertilized. What is not permissible (they say) is to make the act of intercourse something less than it is by nature.

B.

That expressed by the Lambeth Conference of 1930 (the assembly of all the Bishops of the Anglican Church throughout the world) in the following resolution (carried by 193 votes to 67) - "Where there is a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on Christian principles. The primary and obvious method is complete abstinence from intercourse (as far as may be necessary) in a life of discipline and self-control lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless in those cases where there is such a clearly-felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the Conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the same Christian principles. The Conference records its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception-control from methods of selfishness, luxury or mere convenience."

C.

That the use of contraceptives is normal in every fertile marriage, so that husband and wife may continue to express and deepen their love by sexual intercourse even at times when they do not intend to conceive another child. Man (it is said) is always "interfering with nature" for his own purposes; and, wisely used, contraceptives allow a fuller and richer married life than is possible without them, at least for the majority of couples. There is, therefore, not only no moral reason against their use, but a positive case in their favour.

All Christians are in complete agreement there is no justification for the use of contraceptives

- (1) for purely selfish motives, or in the attempt to avoid proper and necessary self control;
- (2) to avoid parenthood altogether;
- (3) outside marriage, which is entirely different from their use by husband and wife. Intercourse outside marriage whether contraceptives are used or not, is against the teaching of Christ.

What should a married couple do? You may feel it right to ask the advice of a priest or Christian doctor or a trusted friend. In the end no one can make the decision for you; you must do that yourselves. If you really want to do the right thing, and not just the easiest thing, and if you ask God to guide your choice, you may be quite sure He will.

It may be helpful to add a note about the use of contraceptives in early marriage. So many couples have to start married life on somebody else's home - with "in-laws" very often - that this is a burning question. Is it better to postpone the first baby until you are living on your own - or earning more money?

This again is a matter which each couple must decide for themselves. But there are other considerations which they should bear in mind and which will help them to choose wisely.

(1) Many couples find that to use contraceptives at the beginning of their marriage detracts from the pleasure of intercourse by spoiling the natural spontaneity of their love-making.

(2) If there is any physical defect which means that you cannot have children, the use of contraceptives will prevent you from finding this out and having it treated. The sooner such treatment begins the more likely it is to be successful.

(3) It is dangerously easy for a couple who decide not to have children for a time, to get so used to a higher standard of living and more freedom to go about together, than they could ever have once they became parents, that they put off starting a family year after year, and sometimes decide in the end not to have children at all. Not only is this wrong in itself, but it means they deny themselves some of the greatest joys men and women can have.

It is sometimes said that husband and wife are better fitted to be parents if they have a short period - six months or a year - in which to settle down to the business of living together before they have also to face the responsibilities and anxieties of caring for children. Whether or not this is true of certain couples, in most cases it is certainly best not to postpone the first baby unless the circumstances of the husband and wife make it imperative to do so. If they decide not to have a child at once, then they ought to review their

decision at least once every year. The anniversary of the wedding is a good time to do it.³

The United Church of Canada

The General Council of the United Church of Canada approved a statement on "The Meaning and Responsibilities of Christian Marriage" in 1932. In part this statement said:

The Church believes that the highest values can never be attained in the pursuit of selfish ease and pleasure at the cost of a childless home Nor can the Church censure the renunciation of parenthood when it is reasonably certain that any offspring of the marriage will be in the form of a stunted humanity and a burden to society. Many a mother, whose strength has already been seriously depleted by the demands of a rapidly-recurring maternity experience, finds her continued ministry, her health, and perhaps her life imperiled should another similar experience become imminent. Still others are perplexed about their ability to render highest service to the children already born to them should the number and frequency of births be subject to caprice or random chance.⁴

This church body believes that parenthood should not be left up to instinct or accident but that it should be a matter of conscience - a considered judgment based on the recognition of all of the facts and of the obligations inherent in a situation.⁵

³The Threshold of Marriage, published for the Church of England Moral Welfare Council (London: Church House, Dean's Yard, 1949), pp. 26 ff.

⁴Voluntary Parenthood, published by the Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada (Toronto: Board of Evangelism and Social Service, 1936).

⁵Ibid.

Contraceptives are definitely approved by this church in the following statement:

We find substantial unanimity in the voices of the major bodies of Christendom and of Jewry affirming that there is no religious obligation to have intercourse only when no precaution is taken against resulting conception; but, on the contrary, marital intercourse brings its own contribution to Christian life when it is definitely divorced from the quest of parenthood.⁶

In 1936 the Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church came forward with the following recommendation:

In view of the facts and considerations here submitted we recommend the General Council to record its approval of the establishment of Voluntary Parenthood Clinics under public control and supervision according to standards and regulations prescribed by the Provincial Departments of Public Health, these regulations to be drawn up in the light of experimental work already done in Canada and of more permanent enterprises conducted in other countries.⁷

Although the present writer wrote to the Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada he has not been able to get anything more definite on the stand of this church than the statements quoted above. The report on this church's Commission on Christian Marriage and Christian Home, however, leaves the impression that a conscientious

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

use of contraceptives in marriage is morally right.⁸

The Federal Council of Churches

In 1931 the Federal Council's Committee on Marriage and Home dealt with the matter of birth control. The committee was of the conviction that both the use of contraceptives and abstinence for longer or shorter periods of time are to be considered forms of birth control.⁹

A majority of this committee held that by careful and restrained use of contraceptives by married couples it is morally right.¹⁰

They take this position because they believe that it is important to provide for the proper spacing of children, the control of the size of family, and the protection of mothers and children; and because intercourse between the mates, when an expression of their spiritual union and affection, is right in itself. They are of the opinion that abstinence within marriage, except for the few, cannot be relied upon to meet these problems, and under ordinary conditions is not desirable in itself.

But they cannot leave this statement without further comment. They feel obliged to point out that present knowledge of birth control is incomplete, and that an element of uncertainty, although it is small, still re-

⁸Report of the Commission on Christian Marriage and Christian Home, published by the Board of Evangelism and Social Service and The Board of Christian Education of the United Church of Canada (Toronto: The Board of Evangelism and Social Service and the Board of Christian Education, 1946), passim.

⁹Moral Aspects of Birth Control in 1938, published by the Committee on Marriage and the Home of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America (New York: reprinted by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America Inc., n.d.), p. 4.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

mains. More serious is the fact that all methods are as yet more or less subject to personal factors for their effectiveness. Married couples should keep these facts in mind and welcome children, should they come.¹¹

The committee's minority believes that "sufficient stress has not been laid upon the idealistic character of the teachings of Jesus concerning marriage and its obligations."¹² The minority stated their views as follows:

In view of the widespread doubt among Christian people of the morality of the use of contraceptives, and the scruples experienced by making use of them, it appears to these members of the committee to be the plain duty of the Christian church, when control of conception is necessary to uphold the standard of abstinence as the ideal, recognizing it as a counsel of perfection, and that Christian morals are much more exalted than generally supposed. But they would point out that the grace of God is sufficient for those who are conscious of a difficult and high vocation; and that we have as yet but touched the fringes of spiritual power which is all about us like God's gift of air and sunshine. Those who adventure and trust are rewarded, and they know the joy and strength which accompany all victories of the spirit.

The method of abstinence is therefore to be used to meet conditions and situations in which otherwise contraceptives would be necessary. This does not mean that sex relations between married people as an expression of mutual affection are wrong, but they are to be denied when childbearing is hazardous to the well-being of the mother or child or the household. That this is possible is shown by the large number of unmarried people who lead chaste lives, and by the number of married couples who practice self-control at all times and abstinence when necessary.¹³

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 6.

¹³Ibid., pp. 6-7.

The Congregational and Christian Churches

In 1931 the General Council of Congregational and Christian Churches endorsed the majority report of the Committee on Marriage and the Home of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, issued on March 21, 1931.¹⁴

The following resolution was added:

We believe in the ideal of marriage as the complete union of one man and one woman, who, forsaking all others, give themselves wholly unto each other. This ideal, we are convinced, cannot be realized without mutuality and freedom resulting from physical and spiritual oneness. We believe in the right of children to be wanted and the right of husbands and wives to assume parenthood. Therefore, we favor the principle of voluntary child-bearing, believing that it sacramentalizes physical union and safeguards the well-being of the family and society.¹⁵

The Universalists

The Universalist General Convention of 1929 passed on the committee's report concerning birth control. The committee was of the opinion that the passage of the Comstock laws by Congress and twenty-four states grew out of confusion of contraception with abortion and obscene practices. These laws threw "medical science" and "obscenity" into one "ill-considered prohibition."¹⁶

¹⁴Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

The report went on to say:

This committee finds that birth control is one of the most practicable means of race betterment, and thereby recommends:

1. That this Convention urge the immediate repeal of such federal and state laws as interfere with the prescription of contraception by physicians; and
2. That where legal barriers do not exist, socially minded persons be urged to establish in every center of population clinics where those needing it may receive contraceptive advice under medical supervision.¹⁷

The American Unitarian Association

In 1930 the American Unitarian Association adopted the following resolution:

Resolved, That the American Unitarian Association recommends to its constituent churches and members an earnest consideration of the fundamental social, economic and eugenic importance of birth control to the end that they may support all reasonable efforts in their communities for the promotion of the birth control movement.¹⁸

The Jews

In 1929, the Central Conference of American Rabbis passed this resolution:

Mindful of the noble tradition obtaining among the Jewish people with respect to the holiness and the crucial importance of domestic relations; but realizing at the same time the many serious evils caused by uncontrolled parenthood among those who lack the prerequisites of health and a reasonable measure of economic resources and intelligence to give to their children the heritage to which they are entitled;

We, the Central Conference of the American Rabbis,

¹⁷Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁸Ibid.

urge the recognition of the importance of the control of parenthood as one of the methods of coping with social problems.¹⁹

The Lutheran Church of Sweden

The Lutheran bishops sent an episcopal letter to the Lutheran clergy of Sweden concerning various problems of sex confronting the Swedish people. The following is a quotation of one of the two paragraphs on contraceptives:

There is something wrong in any marriage where the couple are biologically normal but want no children. Yet children are not the sole purpose of marriage. Above all, marriage is significant because it establishes a firm and genuine fellowship between man and woman. Sexual intercourse between man and wife can be a complete expression of this fellowship though unusual conditions may make necessary an avoidance of conception. Seriously considered this situation does lead us to concede that under certain circumstances contraceptives may be permitted.²⁰

The American Lutheran Conference

The Commission on Social Relations of the American Lutheran Conference, submitted a statement on "Planned Parenthood" to the American Lutheran Conference in its convention of 1952. The convention referred the statement to its five member church bodies for study prior to the next convention. The statement, in part, reads:

Believing firmly in the power of the principles of love,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Swedish Episcopal Letter on Sex Problems," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIII (June, 1952), 454.

of freedom, and of stewardship to guide the actions of Christian men and women in whom dwells the sanctifying Spirit of the Living God, the Commission on Social Relations of the American Lutheran Conference expresses the following guiding principles concerning the planning of parenthood.

1. A Christian husband and wife know that children are the natural and desirable fruit of their marriage in fulfillment of God's command, "Be fruitful and multiply."

2. Every child born into the world should be a wanted child. To be unwanted by its parents is a fate more cruel to the child than its poverty, low social standing, or nearly any other handicap.

3. Married couples have the freedom so to plan and order their sexual relations that each child born to their union will be wanted both for itself and in the relation to the time of its birth. How the couples use this freedom can properly be judged not by man but only by God.

4. The means which a married pair uses to determine the number and spacing of the births of their children are matters for them to decide with their own consciences, on the basis of competent medical advice and in a sense of accountability to God.

5. No moral merit or demerit can be attached to any of the medically approved methods of controlling the number and spacing of children. Whether the means used be those labeled "natural" or "artificial" is of far less importance than the spirit in which these means are used.

6. Continence in the marriage relationship, when its sole purpose is the selfish avoidance of pregnancy, is equally wrong as is the use of contraception toward this same selfish goal. An overabundant production of children without realistic regard to the responsibilities involved may be as sinful and selfish as is the complete avoidance of parenthood.

7. Undue delay in beginning their families, or too great an interval between births, will be recognized by the Christian married pair as unwise for many reasons. The Christian married couple also will realize the falseness of using economic and other materialistic excuses as the sole reason for limiting their acceptance of

parental responsibilities.²¹

²¹"Planned Parenthood," Concordia Theological Monthly,
XXIV (April, 1953), 296-8.

CHAPTER V

THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod does not have an "official view" on the morality of birth control. There no more is a unified view on this matter than there is on dancing. There is, however, a "traditional view" which certainly does carry weight.

Some have said that conservative protestantism has forsaken the view of the Reformers who took the attitude of Paul and the Jews that asceticism was not right or natural; has passed through the stages of Puritanism and Pietism, and finally has fairly well sided with the attitude of the Roman Church on birth control.

Our literature on the subject is scanty. To this writer, there seems to be a tendency to hedge around the question and not meet it head-on.

The passages quoted against any form of birth control are the same ones cited by the Roman Church. They are: Genesis 38:9; Psalms 127:3-5; Psalms 128:3; 1 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 2:5-14; Romans 1:26-27. We shall discuss many of these Bible passages in the following chapter.

In speaking of Margaret Sanger and the American Birth Control League, the Concordia Cyclopedic, which is "a hand-

book of religious information, with special reference to the history, doctrine, work, and usages of the Lutheran Church," has this to say:

The Bible very emphatically does not sanction movements of this kind. Ps. 127:3-5; Ps. 128:3; 1 Tim. 2:15; 1 Tim. 2:5-14, and other passages are in force today as they ever were. One of the objects of marriage is the procreation of children, and this cannot be set aside by the whim or selfishness of men. In a Christian home, husband and wife will live together according to knowledge, 1 Pet. 3:7 and each one will possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, 1 Thess. 4:4.¹

The Cyclopedia continues and gives an instance where birth control may be used, but the method must be complete continence.

In the case of illness and by the advice of a competent physician, total continence may be practiced, but beyond this Christians may not go, especially in advocating the murder of unborn children, for that is what abortion amounts to.²

In all fairness to Margaret Sanger and the Planned Parenthood Federation it must be said that abortion is by no means advocated. In fact, one of the objects of the movement is to eradicate abortion and the excuses for it.

Pastoral Theology for the pastors of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod has this to say in the section on marriage:

While a pastor should not hesitate publicly to denounce birth control that is practiced by wrong means, yet he should be careful not to put those who have no child-

¹"Birth Control," The Concordia Cyclopedia, edited by L. Fuerbringer, Th. Engelder, P. E. Kretzmann (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1927), p. 84.

²Ibid.

ren, or only one or two, under the suspicion of artificially limiting the number of their offspring. . . . The one-, two-, or three-children family system is contrary to Scriptures; for man has no right arbitrarily or definitely to limit the number of his offspring (birth control), especially not if done with artificial or unnatural means, Gen. 1:28; Ps. 127:3-6; Ps. 128:3,4; Gen. 38:9,10; Rom. 1:26,27. . . . Birth control, that is, the frustration of conception or the limitation of the number of children by the use of artificial means, by drugs or unnatural practices, is a sin that has become widespread in modern civilization. . . . Doing this (restricting or preventing conception) is both an unnatural and a harmful practice.³

Again John Fritz writes:

By the unfruitful periods in a woman's life God Himself has made provision for the prevention of too frequent conception. However, God did not intend that man should use such limitation for the absolute prevention of childbirth nor to permit parents to determine for themselves how many or how few children they will have.

Under circumstances, such as the illness of the weakened condition of a wife, a Christian husband will exercise due self-restraint (continence). A Christian must learn to avoid doing what in itself is not wrong if that is demanded by his neighbor's welfare.⁴

The statements from Pastoral Theology quoted above are not clear-cut. Fritz hesitates to come forward with a direct, unequivocal answer to the problem. It would seem that the author frowns upon man's use of the "rhythm method" and fully countenances only continence as the really morally acceptable method of birth prevention.

³John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), pp. 162-6.

⁴Ibid., pp. 165-6.

In a pamphlet intended for the instruction of married couples, one of our pastors, in speaking on the prevention of conception, put it in the same category as abortion. He writes:

Sometimes this prevention of conception is accomplished by operations, which needlessly and wantonly produce artificial barrenness in the female. But more commonly it is brought about by various questionable and dangerous practices and devices, mechanical or of a different nature, by means of which people try to cheat nature. . . . All the authorities on this subject that the writer has had an opportunity to consult are unanimous in condemning and denouncing all these practices as unnatural and revolting as well as unsafe and dangerous. For it must finally be said also of these practices that, while they may not be so revolting to even the natural conscience as the crime of abortion, yet they, too, are potential murder, intended, as they are, to forestall the generation of human life and directly contravening the divine command: "Be fruitful and multiply." This is the one great and chief reason why Christian married people must avoid all these: they are a sin against the Fifth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."⁵

It is difficult to see how the writer quoted above, is able to make birth control a sin against the Fifth Commandment. It is even more difficult to see, how later on in his monograph, the writer feels that birth control of the continent kind is not birth control, and therefore permissible under special circumstances. He says:

. . . undoubtedly there are also cases where it is advisable and even necessary for married people to deny themselves this joy of offspring altogether, or at least limit the number of their children. Perhaps the health of the mother may make this imperative: perhaps

⁵G. Luecke, Be Fruitful and Multiply (n.p., n.d.), pp. 7-8.

some taint in the blood of either or both parents, which has produced disastrous results in the health of early offspring, may make it advisable. Possibly there may be other valid reasons. Where such conditions exist, there is only one safe and certain way of producing the desired result - and here again all the authorities that the writer has been able to consult, agree - and that one safe and certain way is sexual abstinence.⁶

The book, For Better Not For Worse is widely used and read by people of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. It can almost be termed a semi-official marriage manual for Lutheran married couples. The author devotes a whole chapter to "The Blight of Birth Control." One section of this chapter is labeled "The Church's Position." Five points are considered. In his third point the writer states:

In the third place, it should be emphasized that there may be certain unobjectionable, if not infallible, means that will help regulate the size of the family. Christian physicians can offer sound advice in emergencies confronting honest young couples who spurn the artificial methods of birth control. The Church has never protested against the employment of those means which the course of nature itself seems to provide, unless their employment is a selfish attempt to evade the responsibilities of parenthood.⁷

The writer seems to indicate in the above passage that the rhythm method of birth control is in itself not wrong. But this idea, in the opinion of the present writer, seems to be a departure from others in our church body who have written on this subject in the past.

⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

⁷ Walter A. Maier, For Better Not For Worse (Third revised edition; St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1939), p. 411.

Continence is also mentioned as a moral means of control: "The Church also calls attention to continence, self-denial, and restraint."⁸

It is to be noted that the author does not quote any Scripture as proof of these two afore-mentioned arguments. His sole authority seems to be "the Church."

Now in a previous section the author says, "The Lutheran Church is definitely arrayed against birth restriction."⁹ But then as his final point under "The Church's Position" he states:

Finally, the Church says that in the infrequent and exceptional conflicts between childbirth and material health, the Christian conscience must seek pastoral advice and the counsel of a Christian physician.¹⁰

Once again no Scripture is adduced, only what "the Church" says. Furthermore, this last point seems to overthrow everything that the author had said previously, and seems to leave the door open, after all, for the use of contraceptives in special cases.

The Concordia Theological Monthly, in 1938, in the Miscellanea section lists a number of quotations against birth control and child spacing. The quotations are appar-

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 410.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 412.

ently condoned by the compiler.¹¹

The Gresset ran an editorial entitled, "Birth Control Seeking Respectability." The article does not render a specific opinion on the morality of birth control other than the general spirit which is contained in the following quote:

We are concerned with the bid which the dissemination of birth control methods among all classes, young and old, married and unmarried, is making through the pages of a respectable magazine.¹²

To sum up, the traditional view of the Lutheran Church is that abstinence and perhaps observing the infertile periods of the woman's cycle are the only moral means of birth control.

¹¹p. E. Kretzmann, "Miscellanea," Concordia Theological Monthly, IX (March, 1938), 205-7.

¹²"Birth Control Seeking Respectability," The Gresset, II (August, 1939), 10.

CHAPTER VI

A PROPOSED SOLUTION

The views of various church bodies have been considered, including the usual views of members of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. But what does the Word of God say on the matter? It is very important that a definite, Scriptural answer to this perplexing problem be found, because the minds of many, including those of pastors, have been troubled over this matter. A medical doctor put his finger on the sore spot with these words:

While the propriety and ethics of contraception methods are still vigorously debated in various centers often with much more heat than light, and while the different organized bodies make the question an issue at their conventions, the great majority of the middle and upper strata of society are actually making use of contraceptive means. The truth seems to be that common sense leads most couples sooner or later to resort to contraceptives in order to make childbearing fit into an ordered family scheme, even while they may retain mental uncertainty about the propriety or ethics of doing so.¹

The writer quoted above mentions that out of one thousand married women of the "better class" of society, 730, or eighty-five per cent, employed contraceptive measures. In another group of one hundred married men and one hundred married women, it was found that ninety-two of the men and eighty-seven of the women mentioned that contraceptives were

¹M. J. Exner, The Sexual Side of Marriage (New York: Pocket Books Inc., 1950), p. 102.

used.²

Contraceptive methods certainly are being used, and are being used by our Lutherans also, and often with bad consciences as a result. How are pastors going to counsel their people?

The begetting of children must be the hope and one of the prime aims of marriage. The Word of God sets forth the blessing, the beauty and joy of parenthood. It is usually said that only the married person can be a complete, matured and integrated personality. But a person may go one step farther and say that only the married person with children to care for can understand life and know what it is all about. The following quotation states the case succinctly:

Those who deliberately avoid having children at all need to be helped to understand and appreciate the fact that they are thereby blocking for themselves one of the highways of life to its self-realization and full, rich living. No compensation can wholly make up for this loss. The one-child family needs to be made to realize that by its limitation they are placing upon this child one of the greatest handicaps to personal and social development, and to the effectiveness and successful adjustment in this world.³

It goes without saying that willful abortion is a sin against the Fifth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." In its destruction of human life abortion must be regarded as murder, and so the laws of the land regard it. Note that by

²Ibid., p. 103.

³Ibid., p. 101.

"abortion" is meant the artificial termination of the existence of the embryo or fetus in any stage of development, from the moment of conception on to birth.

This discussion is concerned with birth control in the narrow and specific sense. What is meant is the limiting of offspring by preventing conception through devices and methods such as: total abstinence, the rhythm method, coitus interruptus, and the use of various mechanical and chemical devices.

Many Lutheran authorities and the Roman Catholic Church, as such, advocates asceticism, complete abstinence, and self-denial. But call it by any name, this method is still birth control. Usually this method is thought of, and is called "the noblest method." Certainly if an effort costs people some thing, if that is the measure of its ethical value, then this method is the noblest. If monastic asceticism is difficult, then obviously the living together of married people as monk and nun is much more difficult. Luther, in his realistic manner said, "You might as well put fire and straw together and say it should not burn."

Many doctors advise against this method, and some with much experience say that only a few people are able to practice it.⁴

⁴Alfred M. Rehwinkel, "Planned Parenthood or Birth Control" (mimeographed thesis, n. d.), p. 21.

Psychologically, as well as physically, complete continence is not healthful. To deliberately avoid sexual relations in married life gives rise to all manner of stresses and strains which can ruin a marriage. If this does not happen, then the terrific repression can unbalance, and has unbalanced, husband and wife emotionally, and perhaps even mentally to some extent.

Abstaining from intercourse for the purpose of limiting offspring is the point under discussion. Sickness, on the part of the husband or wife, is an altogether different case. Then according to the law of love, the spouse is called upon to exercise self-restraint.

Granted, some married couples have been able to use the abstinence method of birth control successfully. It cannot be said that, however, it is the best way. And certainly the Word of God does not substantiate this view. In fact, the Bible seems to say the very opposite:

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.⁵

St. Paul says that cohabitation is not to be refused except with mutual consent and then only "for a time." Think-

⁵1 Cor. 7:3-5.

ing of Paul's pharisaic background we read that, according to Shammai, the Pharisee was allowed to withdraw from his wife only for short periods, for two weeks at the most.⁶

"Fasting and prayer" is the reason Paul gives for not fulfilling the obligations of marriage. Abstinence for the purpose of birth control does not come under this reason.

Furthermore, does not abstinence over a longer period of time encroach upon the "one flesh" idea of marriage and conflict with the saying of Christ, "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder?"⁷

The Roman Catholic Church and many Lutheran authorities advise that when birth control becomes necessary, the rhythm system is the only method (after total abstinence) which may be ethically employed. It seems that many Lutherans have been won over to the Thomistic philosophy that "the best is the most natural."

But why should the idea of a "natural method" really make any difference? After all, the idea is to control birth no matter what method is used. If this argument means anything, then there are other things that are immoral. For example, by the same argumentation Caesarian section in childbirth would be immoral, for it, too, is far from

⁶Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, translated from the German by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1947), p. 653.

⁷Matt. 19:6.

"natural."

Rehwinkel in writing about the rhythm method says:

To observe so called "safe periods" or even total abstinence is merely another form of birth control. Judging in terms of "frustrating nature," or "violating the laws of nature," of "perverting the purpose of marriage," this method offends even more seriously than other methods of birth control. It frustrates the female precisely when she is most ready for the sex act and for conception. If the injunction to be fruitful and multiply is to be applied literally and to every sex act, this would be the very time to make continence a crime. By recommending the rhythm, Catholics and others are no longer disputing principles, but method. And as to methods - medical experts may be more competent to advise than clerics.⁸

It may all be that in the beginning the Creator implanted the woman's cycle and its use as a means of natural control, in order to check excessive fertility. Probably because of sin and its resultant physical degeneration, this means is no longer dependable. No moral weight then, can be placed on the idea of the "natural method." And most certainly Scripture does not suggest the "rhythm method" as God's Law.

Consideration of the passages usually quoted as proof that birth control (particularly with mechanical or chemical means) is sinful is of paramount importance. If pastors endeavor to prove something from Scripture, and to preach and counsel that such and such is definitely sinful, they had better have clear Scripture on their side, or at least a

⁸Rehwinkel, op. cit., pp. 21-2.

clear, logical deduction from Scripture.

The first passage usually quoted against the use of "preventatives" is the story of Onan, Genesis 38:8-10:

And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also.⁹

The argument that is brought up on the basis of the passage quoted above, is that the Lord killed Onan because of his sin of using an unnatural birth control method, viz. coitus interruptus. The Bible passage, however, rather brings out the point that the Lord killed Onan because he refused to fulfill the Law of the Levirate and raise up seed to his brother. This story cannot be used as conclusive Scriptural evidence that various methods of birth control are in themselves intrinsically wrong.

Another passage that Roman Catholics and Lutherans like to use is Romans 1:26-27:

For even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature; and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the women, burned in their lust one to another.¹⁰

Those who use this passage as a proof text no doubt argue that birth control by "unnatural" means is a perversion

⁹Gen. 38:8-10.

¹⁰Rom. 1:26-27.

similar to the perversions of which Paul is speaking. But this line of argument begs the question. It has not been established that mechanical or chemical preventatives are a perversion of the sex act. Taking the passage just as it reads, it is evident that Paul is speaking of sex perversions such as sodomy and Lesbianism. It is a misuse of this passage to quote it as proof against certain forms of birth control.

The Psalmist is often quoted by those who are against "unnatural" birth control:

Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of the mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.¹¹

And again: "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house; thy children like olive plants about thy table."¹²

These two passages bring out the truth that children are a wonderful gift and a blessing which the Lord gives to parents. The Psalmist says that a large family can be one of life's greatest rewards.

In 1 Timothy 2:15 and 5:14, St. Paul speaks of marriage and childbearing as the natural order of things. He says

¹¹Ps. 127:3-5.

¹²Ps. 128:3.

that bearing and rearing children is woman's sphere. In 1 Timothy 2 Paul lays down the rule that women are not to speak in the church, nor to "usurp authority over the man." Paul then shows that woman's greatness does not lie in this direction but rather in the sphere of bringing children into the world. Here is where she may achieve her most important purpose in this life. But again, no valid deduction can be made from these passages, that birth control is in itself wrong.

Again, the words to Adam and Noah are oftentimes cited where the Lord blessed these men and said, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth."¹³ Commentators, in general, agree that this was a blessing of the Lord and enabled man to propagate. But many argue that this Word of the Lord to Adam and Noah is on a par with any of His definite commands. If this line of argumentation is used would it not perhaps come to the point that anesthesia in childbirth would be considered a violation of the words addressed to Eve, "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children?"¹⁴

There is no doubt that God's word, "Be fruitful," states one of the purposes of marriage. But it cannot be argued that this is the only, or even the most important pur-

¹³Gen. 1:28; 9:1.

¹⁴Gen. 3:16.

pose. The Lord also said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."¹⁵ It is interesting to note that this statement was made prior to the words, "Be fruitful, and multiply."

(There is no question that procreation is one of the purposes of marriage, and normal Christian couples will want children and should want to have them. But this does not mean that a true Christian marriage must therefore be unrestrictedly fruitful.

Brunner is to the point on this subject:

Once more we are here confronted by a prejudice which is widespread in Church circles: namely, that in this matter everything should be left to chance, which will be accepted without question as the Providence of God. Here, in the most important act of which men are capable, reason, reflection, responsible consideration, are to be eliminated; here the supremacy of accident is to be regarded as reverence for Divine Providence, and responsible determination is to be tabooed as an unwarrantable interference with the Divine administration of the Almighty.¹⁶

There is not a single Scripture passage that can be cited as proof against birth control or against the use of "preventatives." Oftentimes it would appear that ideas in this sphere are traditional rather than Scriptural. Perhaps the ideas of many have been based on Puritanism, Pietism, and Roman Catholic asceticism, and therefore in the back of many minds there is the feeling that sex is simply and main-

¹⁵Gen. 2:18.

¹⁶Brunner, op. cit., p. 368.

ly for the sake of procreation.

But man is higher than the animals and for him marriage and sex have a psychological and sociological significance besides the purely biological one. When the Lord said that a man "shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh,"¹⁷ and that it was not good for man to be alone, "I will make an help meet for him," the Lord indicated that man and woman were to complement each other in marriage. It is generally conceded, that under normal conditions, man cannot obtain his highest end in life except in the marriage relation. Conjugal love is necessary in a happy marriage and this conjugal love is nurtured and fostered by intercourse and finds its expression therein.¹⁸ The very fact that the human need for sex expression is a permanent one, throughout life, even beyond the productive period, indicates further that the Creator intended sex for more than reproduction only.

It is wrong to bind the consciences of others where Scripture does not bind them. The question of whether to use birth control or not must be left up to the individual concerned. Both husband and wife must be sure, however, that in using birth control they are not violating their own con-

¹⁷Gen. 2:24.

¹⁸In 1 Cor. 7 St. Paul also mentions that since sin entered the world conjugal love is also a prophylactic against fornication.

sciences, "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."¹⁹ If, then, a married couple is honestly convinced that birth control should be practiced in their case, the manner or method used is not a moral factor. The motive for the use of birth control determines the morality in each case.

St. Paul says, "Love is the fulfilling of the Law."²⁰ Martin Luther used to say, "Love is the highest law." This must be the criterion for judging the rightness or wrongness of birth control in a specific instance.

Of course, a couple must be sure that they do not decide to limit their family for selfish reasons, such as a love of ease, or to maintain a false standard of living. But if competent medical advice indicated that a mother should have a longer rest between pregnancies, then any method of birth control is proper; in fact, it may be said that according to the "law of love," the surest method is the most ethical.

Finances may be a valid consideration, however. With hospital, medical and living costs today, the family of modest means may find it impossible to afford an unlimited number of children. But in considering the financial angle, the Christian should bear in mind how the Lord cares for the "fowls of the air" and the "lilies of the field."²¹

¹⁹Rom. 14:23.

²⁰Rom. 13:10.

²¹Matt. 7:25-34. *R.*

Today, many women must bring their children into the world through Caesarian section. Medical science can deliver only three or four children by this method without seriously endangering the life of the mother as well as that of the child. Sterilization is often indicated after a number of such deliveries. What about the morality of such a practice? Sterilization is another form of birth control even though it is the most drastic. Would it not be right in a case as outlined above? The present writer believes that it would.

Recently the newly discovered Rh factor of the blood has come into prominence. The study is still in its infancy, but medical science has learned that after a number of pregnancies, depending upon the individual mother who is "Rh negative," children will be born who are physically and/or mentally defective. Reproduction is for the purpose of bringing normal children into the world - not miscreants. Would not sterilization also be morally right in such cases? Certainly it would.

The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod has been very cautious in speaking either for or against sterilization.

Rehwinkel says:

The opinion of the church has been divided on the question of sterilization. The Catholic Church has taken a positive position in opposing this procedure. Our own church has made no official pronouncement on the subject. But a few years ago the faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis was requested to render an opinion in the matter. The sum and substance of this opinion

was that if it is evident beyond question, so far as human knowledge is able to determine, that the offspring will be feeble-minded, sterilization is not a violation of God's creation order.²²

The opinion of the faculty mentioned above begs the question. It has been shown earlier in this paper that "God's creation order" to "be fruitful" was a blessing rather than a command, and that in any case unrestricted multiplication is not commanded in the Bible.

No hard and fast, out and dried rule can be laid down on the morality of birth control, because each case must be decided on its own merits. But one may accept this guiding principle: birth control, whether by abstinence, rhythm, mechanical or medical means, is not evil in itself - is not intrinsically wrong. The morality, in each case, depends upon the reason why birth control is used.

²²Rehwinkel, op. cit., p. 5.

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