

Price 5 Cents

ADK 4310
757618

A
Mother

Looks at

**BIRTH
CONTROL**

A Letter from
a Mother to a Priest

by Daniel A. Lord, S. J.

**The Queen's Work
3115 South Grand Boulevard
St. Louis 18, Mo.**

Nihil obstat:

William M. Drumm

Censor Librorum

Imprimatur:

✠ Joseph E. Ritter

Archiepiscopus Sancti Ludovici

Sti. Ludovici, die 21 Februarii 1947

First printing, August 1947

IN A LETTER to Father Lord a mother of three small children gives an irrefutable answer to the birth-control hawkers: the happiness of a family—husband, wife, and children — whose keynote is wholehearted, unselfish cooperation with the Son of the Holy Family.

ANY FINANCIAL PROFIT made by the Central Office of the Sodality will be used for the advancement of the Sodality Movement and the cause of Catholic Action.

Copyright 1947

THE QUEEN'S WORK, INC.

Deacidified

A MOTHER LOOKS AT BIRTH CONTROL

A Letter From a Mother
to a Priest

Margaret Theresa Boyan to Daniel A. Lord, S.J.

The Priest Comments First

HERE is a letter that came during the course of one busy winter day.

Since I wrote the first of a small series of pamphlets on birth control, I've had many a letter fired at me:

"Why do you priests keep harping on the subject all the time? . . ."

"Anyhow what can an unmarried priest know about the problems of married people? . . ."

"With so many important things to be discussed, must you waste your time and ours on this subject? . . ."

I answered the letters one and all:

"Please—I do not mean to harp. But if we who love the human race and worry about the future of our country do not make at least as much effort to prevent its destruction as do those who beg the young to practice race suicide, we should be failing in our duty. . . ."

"I think we know your problems, and we sympathize with them. The confessional and our close contacts with life keep us in touch with your difficulties. But a doctor does not need to have cancer to be able to cure it. Nor does a lawyer involved in an

important law suit feel as capable of handling his own case as he does of handling the case of someone else in whom he is deeply interested. . . .”

“Important? What could be more important than the whole question of admitting human souls into the world or slamming the door of life in their faces? If this problem is not solved, there won't be many other problems to worry about. The possible extinction of the human race is a pretty vital question. Or don't you think so? . . .”

Then came this letter.

I read the first few paragraphs and felt that once more I was a target. I glanced at the end of the last page to find the writer's name. Frequently enough letters that disagree with what I have said are written by that mysterious character known as Anonymous. This letter bore a signature. Mrs. Boyan was the lady's name, Margaret Theresa Boyan. And in a postscript: “My friends call me Peggy.”

I sighed.

The first two names indicated that at least once on a time she had been a Catholic. The name Margaret may denote any religion; Margaret Theresa is—or was—certainly of the faith. The Boyan left me puzzled. It was an unusual name, very unusual. I personally had never known anyone of that name. Was it a name that the lady had used to cover up her real identity?

I returned to page one and read it again, bracing my soul for the rest of the attack. I read the letter to the end and then wrote to the lady, having assured myself that she was very much a reality, very much a

But here is the letter. Let it speak for itself.

The Lady Writes

“Dear Father Lord:

“I have just been paging through a few of your birth-control pamphlets.

“As a result I cannot help writing you this letter.

“I have been married three and a half years. Recently to our home came our third child. Three children in three and a half years. Even you should be congratulatory.

“Now babies are an awful burden and a lot of work. What’s more, they wreak havoc with your nervous system. They keep you in a state of perpetual weariness. You fall into bed, exhausted. Then just as you settle down and start to doze off in a first happy sleep—beautiful sleep, sleep too long delayed—one of them sets up a howl and a squawk.

“You are up again. Sleep has fled, and the children are very much there.

“Again bed, and again up. Through the night it goes on. Apprehensively you waken to realize how terribly cold it is. So you slip out from under your warm covering to see whether they have thrown off their

blankets. Usually they have, so you tuck them all in again.

“By six o'clock, when you think you haven't a measure of strength or energy left, the alarm goes off.

“You may be sure that your husband feels very lonesome and neglected if you don't get right up and fix his breakfast, pack his lunch, and provide him with lots of cheerful conversation before you finally kiss him out the door.

“Then—back to bed? Ah, no!

“The children are awake and clamoring to be taken up. In fact your day has now begun in earnest.

“I haven't time to initiate you into the minute-by-minute happenings of the day. But let me assure you that one day in a family of three children under three—the oldest exactly two and a half—is something to tax the strongest nerves.

“At least three times every day I reach a point when I am sure I am losing my mind and my patience.

“It's tough. It's hard. And I love it.

“If I have a single bit of advice to offer married couples, it is this: Have children. Have all the children God sends you. Don't ever practice life prevention. Don't ever!”

“That's my stand based, not on any theory, father, but on happy experience.

“For all the fact that they are a burden, they are a sweet burden. They are at once a trial and a consolation. They are one worry after another, and one joy crowding

on the joy just ahead. My home is blessed over and over again because three little saints have come to live in it. I feel my house is rich with God's grace.

"Almost everybody seems to pity me (or condemn me) for having had three babies in three years. Yet I know no married pair who are happier than we, and I personally would not change places with any other woman in the world.

"What I really wish is that I had the time and the chance to tell the world at large all the reasons why life prevention should not be practiced and to go on to all the reasons why children are good for people. The fact that life prevention is a sin against God and the human race makes it bad. But I don't talk of that when I talk with couples who have no religion, no interest in God or the supernatural.

"I tell them what I have seen again and again around me—that they should not practice life prevention because it is a vice that will destroy their love for each other; because it will cause them unrest, dissatisfaction, and will lead to unfaithfulness. It will break up their marriage. And it does, father. I could almost say that in the couples I have known it happens every time.

"People insult me when they suggest that my children have been accidents. (How I detest such talk!) 'You wanted them? They are not just accidents? Why in the world do you have them?' It's a common line of questioning.

“My answer is very simple: I say, ‘So that we can bring them up to know God and love Him and serve Him in this world and so that we will all be happy together in heaven.’

“But I go on. ‘Besides I know they have a right to exist. If Bill and I hadn’t felt this way, we wouldn’t have married. If we simply wanted to live together, it wouldn’t have been necessary to go through the marriage ceremony.’”

The Priest Comments

I interrupt this letter to note the shrewd connection that the young mother traces between the practice of birth control and the promiscuity of modern life, where “living together” comes to be less and less a vice in modern life and literature.

The Lady Continues Her Letter

“There are some however who can’t be stopped. They say, ‘Well you’re one of these good Catholics. That’s your religion, and you have to stick with it.’ They sound as if they meant, ‘. . . and you are stuck with it.’

“I answer that simply enough: ‘Even if I were not a Catholic, I’d have children. No marriage is complete without them. A home kept deliberately without children, a home from which little ones are barred—what right has that to be called a home?’

“‘Besides my children give me and my husband mental and spiritual development. Children make a couple grow up.’

“To me it’s as plain as day. When men and women deliberately keep children out of their lives, it is a sign that they are emotionally immature. They are afraid to face life’s responsibilities. They want to play like children and to dodge trouble and difficulties like children. They want to go on being sweethearts and refuse the full development that comes when the sweethearts progress into the high vocation of parenthood. They choose to stay immature when they determine that they will dodge being mothers or fathers. Whatever peaks in life they may seem to attain, I maintain that the couple that deliberately plans against children or stingily limits the number to a scant one or two lack adult stature.

“Some women resort to charm schools and cram into their brains the textbooks on psychology in order to develop poise and cultivate self-assurance. Mothers get those traits along with their children. Poise and self-assurance are necessary for mothers; hence those traits come naturally to mothers. Mothers who have to make both major and minor decisions day in and day out acquire a deep and instinctive sense of values. (Believe me, these are not merely materialistic values.) And as they do, they rise far above the characters of the deliberately childless women.

“I have been watching carefully the development of mothers. It would be a mammoth task for me to set down the graces and talents that God bestows upon them to equip them for their state in life. Why

should I try to list what great writers have put into great books? Anyhow the Pope brought that all out in his address to the women of Rome recently.

“But let’s talk about the men.

“Children have a way of making men out of what often looks like men but what are deep down inside simply overgrown boys. I’ve noticed that most married men who are deliberately childless always seem adolescent and not quite what they might have been. They are always getting into childish scrapes and putting on adolescent displays of emotion. They lack something.

“I don’t say that children necessarily reform a bad character. H. I. Phillips seems to think they can help do it though. In his column, ‘The Sun Dial,’ he said a lot the day he wrote:

*Little children round the house
Make a man out of a louse.*

(“Oh just to beat any possible rejoinder, that verse emphatically does not refer to my husband.)

“But while we are on the pleasant subject of husbands, let me give you a sample of what I mean—my own husband.

He is not quite twenty-four. That means he is young. He looks young too, and he acts boyish. But he is much more practical, sensible, and mature than plenty of men in their forties. He is most lovable and gentle. Yet no one coming to our home could doubt for a minute that he is the head of the house.

He wouldn't agree to that. And don't get me wrong about it. He always says, 'Christ is the head of this house,' and he means it.

"But if Christ is the head, believe me, my husband is the acting chief.

"I must say that I have not always seen that same adult attitude, that same acceptance of responsibilities, that same maturity combined with youthfulness among many husbands. It is invariably found, I discover, in the few other couples I know who are also rearing families and who have the fine Catholic ideals about marriage and children.

"None of our husbands have that strange softness and that almost effeminate affectation that seem to become characteristic of life-prevention husbands.

"What is most important however in all of this is something pretty lovely to a husband and wife: Living the way we do has brought us very close to God. Maybe that is why we are so happy.

"Everything was so difficult at the start: The war, no money, sickness, troubles no end. He was in service and seldom home. We had to live the unnatural life of separation and shifting about that came to so many couples during the war years.

I have never been particularly strong or healthy, so pregnancy was never easy for me.

Yet we tried to do our best, and we leaned entirely on God. For often enough

things seemed desperate, and we felt the impossibility of helping ourselves. He was just one man, and the higher-ups issued their commands, and he obeyed.

Well God would help us, and to God we prayed. We went to God for every single thing we needed. Before each step, each decision we called on God. My husband was thousands of miles away, in the Pacific; I was in a cold-water tenement flat—in the United States, in the east. But we were tied by our rosary, our family rosary. Every night God was the one bond we had in common. It has indeed been a marriage in Christ ever since the ceremony and the nuptial Mass.

Somehow God let us know what He meant when His Son said, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God. . . .'

Oh if people would only dare to practice that. We tried all the way along. And God is good.

When we started out, we had nothing. In time, little by little, we acquired things. By the time he came out of the service we had our furniture—chairs, bed, baby things. Today we live in this little four-room flat—and it is completely furnished. We have a phone, a brand-new table-top gas range, an electric washing machine—latest model—a second-hand car that, unlike all other on apparent record, gives us no trouble at all.

And we have our three children.

I used to pray for a house—a house of our own. Not any more. Now I know bet-

ter than to ask anything of God except the essentials of love and life. If God wants us to have a house, we'll get it in His good time.

The women in the maternity ward where I spent a week not long ago complained of the cost of living. Many of them said that just as soon as 'the baby got a little bigger,' they'd go out to work again. I told them I didn't intend to work. It was wrong for a mother to work. 'Don't do it,' I told them. 'Children need their mothers at home much more than they need any money that the mothers could possibly bring in.'

" 'Don't be ridiculous,' they retorted. 'It's impossible to get along on one pay check these days.'

" 'I know that,' I replied. 'So let your husband earn both salaries.'

"It was strange to hear them protest. Their husbands couldn't—or wouldn't. Or (what seemed often to be the case) they, the women, didn't want them to. Yet my husband thinks nothing of doing manual work on weekdays and then lining up all the work he can get for week ends and nights—in his chosen profession, music.

"During his time in the service he worked and studied and prayed for advancement. When other war brides were working in defense plants and sending money to their husbands, I was keeping house on an income derived from the government allotment and his voluntary allotment. Other men gambled, drank, and dissipated their money and wrote home to their wives for more. My

husband lived on five dollars a month and spent his free time studying to advance in rating in order to support his ever growing family.

“So you see, although we were separated, he always supported me. He knew I depended entirely on him for living, and he never failed me or the children. It was a great incentive to him to know that no matter where on the earth he traveled he carried in his pocket a key that opened a door to his home—and there his family were waiting and ready for him.

“When it was all over and he made the long trek back from Japan, not for him the disappointment and unhappiness so many men found. There was a place, poor but pretty and complete, and his babies in their cribs, all full of love for him.

“After he came home, he worked first one job and then another, trying to find the way of life that would make us happiest. Now he has settled on a plan. I thrill when I think of it, remembering Joseph and the Boy Jesus. He has become an apprentice carpenter; in addition to his musical profession he will have a trade.

“I’m glad he has the double resource for life. If he doesn’t feel he is doing well enough at one, he can always turn to the other. I’ve noticed that the musicians who practice life prevention are not nearly so industrious and not one half so concerned about their homes.

“Well in spite of what everyone seems to call these crackpot times, we get along, and

we hope to get along. For we have our prayer, 'God's will be done.' It has become our only petition. Then 'Thank you, God' is the echo that goes with it. And that comes often. We work hard and do our best. And we rely entirely on God. He provides most abundantly. We never have a lot of money. But we always have whatever we need—and some left over to give to others.

“'God's will be done' is sometimes less a prayer than a song of joy that sings in our hearts. How I wish I could see other married couples live by that simple plan! How rich we are to have God for our Father! How happy we are to be His children and to bring His children into the world! How wonderful to let Him do with us and for us as He pleases!

“If people only realized that to do God's will brings real and lasting happiness, they'd know so much less sorrow and so much more joy.

“If they would only enter wholeheartedly with Him into this work of creation, they would taste the sweetness of sacrifice.

“Of course bringing up a family is a backbreaking and often heartbreaking job. But what better work could married people do? To what better use could they put their lives? How could they more effectively exhaust their energies?

“As for myself, aside from the fact that I want all my children to be saints in heaven, I secretly dream other things. Perhaps there will be religious vocations. Per-

haps there will be good, holy marriages. Maybe some of them will be ditchdiggers. Maybe some of them will be mere ditchdiggers and nothing more.

“But whatever they become, I secretly hope and pray that this world will be a better place because my children are in it.

“Sincerely,

“Margaret Theresa Boyan.

“P. S.: My friends call me Peggy.”

The Priest Comments

It was a bleak winter day no longer. The sun had come out and seemed to fill the room.

I wrote to her at once. Might I use the letter? Might I publish it for others to read?

Her reply was a genuine surprise. What had she written that was worth publication? But if I wanted to use it, of course I could.

So here it is.

Maybe this Peggy will be a smiling, gay, and challenging mother holding up her shining ideals to other thousands—to their joy in time, their glory in eternity, and unfading gratitude from the Blessed Trinity and the Mother of us all.