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Birth Control
WRONG?

D. F. Miller



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by

DONALD F. MILLER

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This pamphlet is written for the benefit of the married, those about to be married, and those who counsel the married. It is a clear, frank discussion. It should not be read by those whose state of life frees them from the need of knowledge of the topic.



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Why Is Birth-Control Wrong?

DONALD F. MILLER

WE ARE asked the question in the above title often. Sometimes by good, conscientious Catholics, who know that their Church considers birth-control seriously sinful, but who do not know and could not explain to others just why it is considered so wrong. Sometimes by disloyal Catholics, who have deliberately adopted the position that birth-control is not sinful, and whose question implies the assumption that it cannot be proved to be sinful. Sometimes by persons in mixed marriages, whose partners have plied them with arguments in favor of birth-control that they cannot adequately answer.

There are several reasons for the fact that many Catholics find themselves hard put to give a good explanation of why birth-control is always seriously sinful. They may have had few opportunities for receiving thorough instruction on this matter. They may have received instructions before they were married, but, because the issue as yet had no personal, practical application to their lives, they may not have been impressed with the force of the argu-

ments, or may have forgotten them soon after.

By far the most important reason for ignorance or mental confusion on this point, however, is the fact that Catholics find themselves in the midst of a constant stream of propaganda against the uncompromising position of their Church on this important point of morality. It assails them in books, magazines, newspapers and dodgers. It is brought to bear on them by friends, neighbors, co-workers, relatives, sometimes even members of their own family. It is supported by the tendency to find an easy way out of their own problems, contrary to God's laws, that is a part of the effect of original sin upon their mind and will.

Very often they fail to see the connection between the arguments in favor of birth-control and basic concepts about life and its purpose that not only offer people freedom from strictures in their marriage relations, but also destroy every last vestige of religion and morality. Many Catholics who defend and practice birth-control still want to be Catholics. They miss the point that every argument in defense of the goodness of birth-control has its origin in one of two theories. The first is the theory that there are no fixed, unchangeable moral laws; that all laws are merely adjustments to circumstances, to be changed as circumstances change. The second is the theory of secularism, which admits of no immortality or

eternity or other-world destiny for man, and therefore measures everything by its temporary value in this world. Both these theories do more than justify birth-control; they make untenable and foolish all religion and all morality.

Despite this fact, the propaganda in favor of birth-control does make for mental confusion and serious temptations in the lives of married Catholics who have not learned how intimately the right attitude toward birth-control is bound up with all the truths of their religion. They are scarcely married when they receive booklets from birth-control organizations offering them information on why and how they should practice birth-control. After the birth of a second or third child, they are sure to be advised and even scolded by friends to the effect that they should now put a stop to the business of having children. Even so-called reputable but morally illiterate physicians to whom they go for medical attention will often suggest ways and means of preventing conception. In each case they are torn between their knowledge that, in the eyes of their Church, birth-control is considered a serious sin, and the prodding of the world around them that they make use of it anyway.

Only a clear knowledge of God's law, clear convictions of the tremendous issues at stake, and the constant use of God's ready graces, can preserve Catholics, and

all good Christians, from succumbing to the forces of evil. Too many have already succumbed. This is an effort to save some of them, and to make all others ready for the struggle that is nothing less than a battle for heaven.

I. Wrong Answers

In answer to the question, "Why is birth-control wrong?" — wrong answers are often given. The propaganda of the birth-controllers themselves is filled with misstatements concerning why the Catholic Church maintains that birth-control is wrong. Catholics themselves are very often misled and misinformed in this regard.

1. One of the most common misstatements is this: "*Birth-control is forbidden to Catholics only because the Catholic Church has made a law against it, somewhat like the law by which she forbids them to eat meat on Friday.*"

This idea, that the Catholic Church has made a positive law forbidding birth-control, is evident in the way many Catholics and non-Catholics speak about the matter. They say: "When is the Catholic Church going to change her stand on birth-control?" "Why doesn't the Pope get wise and repeal the law forbidding birth-control?"

The truth is that the Catholic Church has never made a positive law concerning

birth-control. She has repeatedly pointed out the truth that birth-control is contrary to the natural law, the law written on the nature of man and woman, the law that is unchangeable so long as human nature remains the same. And she does not hesitate to state that, because birth-control is contrary to the natural law, it is sinful for everybody, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. No Pope will ever be able to change this law, because no Pope will ever have the authority to change the natural law of God.

Of course the fact that the Catholic Church tells her members that birth-control is a mortal sin is sufficient evidence for every loyal Catholic, even though he has not yet studied the matter sufficiently to know why the Church must speak thus. But the point we are making is that it is not the Church that makes the law. The Church merely re-affirms it as a natural law of God.

2. Another misstatement about birth-control is this: "*Catholics are forbidden to practice birth-control because the Catholic Church maintains that Catholic parents should have as many children as possible.*"

This is nonsense. The Catholic Church does not command Catholic husbands and wives to have even one child. She considers it more than normally meritorious for them to have no children, if they mutually and perpetually give up the use of the marriage

right for the love of God. She only maintains that the free use of the marriage right involves the acceptance of whatever children God may send them. She also sets down reasons for which it is lawful for husbands and wives to practice temporary abstinence from the use of the marriage right, with the result that there may be fewer children than would otherwise have been born.

3. Still a third common misstatement is this: "*Catholics are forbidden to practice birth-control because the Catholic Church frowns on sex as something evil, and wants to limit its use as much as possible.*" The answer to this false statement may be found in any manual of Catholic theology, or any approved instruction for the married. The very definition of marriage according to Catholic principles refutes it: it is the state in which a man and a woman give to each other the right to their bodies for those actions that are necessary for the procreation of children. Both husband and wife are bound by the contract of marriage to accede to the request of their partner for marriage relations whenever it is seriously and reasonably made. There is no sign of prejudice against the proper use of sex in that principle.

II. What Birth Control Is

The right answer to the question of why birth-control is wrong requires a clear un-

derstanding of what is meant by birth-control in the question. Wrong ideas are very prevalent in this regard.

The sin of birth-control means using the privilege of marriage while directly and intentionally doing something to render it incapable in itself of resulting in conception. This "rendering it incapable in itself of resulting in conception" may be done by the use of instruments, medications, temporary or permanent mechanical gadgets; or by imperfect union (withdrawal) while perfect satisfaction is sought; or by attempts to prevent union of the two principles necessary for conception by the removal of one right after marriage relations (douching).

It is not the sin of birth-control, but a greater sin, for a wife to take medication or other measures to stop the progress of a conception that is suspected to have already taken place. This is the intention of committing abortion, and is always a mortal sin, whether it be successful or not, whether the suspicion was justified or not. If it successfully terminates a true conception it is a sin punished by excommunication.

It is not birth-control, nor is it a sin for husband and wife to use the privilege of marriage when they know they are sterile, or after their child-bearing years are over, or even for some time after conception has taken place, so long as it is always a proper

act, in itself designed to fulfill the purposes of marriage. The one thing that is always wrong is to make it a sterile act in itself in one of the ways mentioned above.

III. Why It Is Wrong

There are several angles from which one can come to see the intrinsic evil of birth-control. We shall take but two.

A. *From the basis of all natural laws.* That birth-control is wrong, is intimately bound up with the same principles that force us to conclude that any other action is contrary to the natural law of God. Many who practice birth-control are still convinced that lying is always a sin, that murder is always a sin, that adultery is always a sin. These things they recognize as contrary to an actual eternal natural law. They blind themselves to the fact that the same principles that make these actions always evil make birth-control always a sin.

All natural laws are the expression of an obligation to permit certain actions, obviously designed for a necessary purpose, to fulfill that purpose, and to take whatever enjoyment is connected with those actions as a reward for accepting their purpose. That may sound abstract, but it can also be expressed very concretely by examples.

Most people admit that telling a deliberate lie is a sin against the natural law.

It is such for these reasons. The purpose of speech is to bring about confident and cooperative social intercourse among human beings. Lying destroys that purpose, making for mistrust, quarrels, hatred, dishonesty and many other evils. At the same time one of the great enjoyments of life is association, friendship, cooperation with one's fellow-men, made possible especially by speech. This enjoyment may never be sought through lying. It is a reward for the right use of speech, which is clearly designed for the communication of truth alone.

Instinctively most people would realize that to enjoy eating and then deliberately to vomit for the purpose of being able to enjoy more eating, is contrary to the natural law. The necessary purpose of eating is to sustain the body. The enjoyment connected with it is obviously intended to be an incentive to sustain one's body, and a reward for so doing. To make this enjoyment an end in itself by removing food from the stomach before it can nourish the body is surely wrong.

In these, and in every natural law, there is, then, the threefold element of action, purpose, pleasure. The action is lawful so long as the purpose is not deliberately separated from the pleasure. It is unlawful if the purpose is deliberately eliminated or destroyed. And in no case is this more clear than in that of the use of sex in marriage.

Indeed, the evil of every form that impurity may take is revealed through these principles. The purpose that God clearly established for sex relations, and for any use of sex, is procreation, and procreation in a state in which children can not only be born, but also reared properly to adulthood. The pleasure attached to the use of sex is clearly an incentive and a reward for those who accept this important purpose. That is why the use of sex outside of marriage is always wrong. That is why, even within marriage, it is against the natural law to take the pleasure and deliberately to interfere with the divinely established purpose of sex relations.

It may be, and often is, objected that there are other purposes that the use of sex in marriage can fulfill. Those who object thus say that it adds to the happiness of husband and wife; it helps them to avoid sin. Then they argue that the fulfillment of these purposes sufficiently justifies the use of sex even when procreation is made impossible. The answer to this is that these purposes are clearly subordinate to the primary one for which God ordained the use of sex; nay more, the happiness and security from temptation of which they speak are more truly to be called a part of the reward for accepting the first purpose than purposes in themselves.

God's evident plan leaves ample room for the happiness of the married through

the proper use of sex: they do not have to limit that use by any consideration except one, viz., that its own possibility of fulfilling its primary purpose be left intact. Their actions must be "apt for generation," no matter what circumstances of time or age or bodily condition may actually prevent conception from taking place.

B. *From the nature of marriage.* Another way of perceiving the evil of birth-control is through a consideration of the nature of marriage itself. In short, the argument is this: if birth-control were lawful, there would be no necessity for the institution of marriage at all.

All but a few grossly perverted minds accept the institution of marriage as the one state that justifies and even glorifies the use of sex. The reason for this is that the human conscience instinctively perceives that the use of sex ordinarily means the conception and birth of children, and that this must, by an inescapable design of God and nature, be limited to a state in which the children can be properly reared. Even apart from the spiritual elevation of marriage by Christ, the mind can perceive that marriage is demanded by the inevitable relationship between these three things; the use of sex, the birth of children, the rearing of children.

Anyone who states, therefore, that the second and third of these three things may

be lawfully eliminated from marriage, even though they are not always eliminated, is thereby laying the foundation for the destruction of marriage. He is saying that sex-enjoyment is a proper and lawful end in itself. If this were true, marriage would not be needed to justify it, because marriage is necessary only on the assumption that the use of sex does involve essentially the birth and education of children. If sex pleasure were an end in itself, it would be perfectly lawful for men and women to indulge it without benefit of marriage. But it is not an end in itself; it is related to the necessary purposes of the procreation and education of children, and that is why nearly all the world demands that people be married before they indulge in the use of sex.

The viciousness of the argument based on the right to sex-pleasure for itself can be seen in other logical conclusions. If sex pleasure is an end in itself, as those who favor birth-control argue, then there is no rational argument to be raised against any form of what is called impurity. If it is lawful to remove the purpose from sex relations, on the ground that an individual has a right to sex-enjoyment for its own sake, then no one can say that there is anything evil about self-abuse, fornication, adultery or even the various forms of perversion. That is what St. Augustine referred to when he said, about 1500 years ago, that the husband who insists on birth-control

makes a prostitute out of his wife; and the wife who insists on it makes an adulterer out of her husband. The truth is clear; birth-control is the same evil as prostitution and adultery; if one of them is lawful, the others are lawful too.

IV. The Christian Outlook

It is to be expected that all this will have but little force for those who have had no contact with Christianity, who possess no convictions about heaven and hell, who have decided to live for this world alone. Not recognizing God, they are given up, as St. Paul says, to a corrupt sense, so that "they abuse their bodies amongst themselves."

The attitude of the true Christian is far different. He knows that the most important thing in life is to do God's will, to obey God's laws. He knows that his everlasting happiness depends on this. Once He recognizes God's law in regard to birth-control, as made known to him through his reason and through the affirmations of the Catholic Church, he starts out with the determination that this law is going to be kept, and that he will find a solution to any difficulties that arise in something other than disobedience to God.

His fidelity will involve one of two things. It may mean a large family, in the midst of pagans and hypocritical Christians who ridicule those who refuse to make use of

the many methods and gadgets they have invented for sterilizing the joys of marriage. He pays no attention to this ridicule. He remembers that Christ said to all His followers not only that they would be ridiculed but that "the world will hate you." He even sympathizes with those who scorn him, because he knows that they have given up heaven, and in the process have lost many of the natural joys that he will have on earth.

Or his fidelity may involve considerable self-denial in the form of renunciation of the joys of marriage for short or long periods of time. His wife may become ill, or his economic situation may make it prudent for him to "plan" carefully the birth of his children. In any case he faces the problem with the unshakable conviction that the only lawful way to limit his family or to space his children or to spare his ill wife is by periodic or continued abstinence from the use of the privilege of marriage.

Nor does he complain that this is a terrible injustice, or permit it to make him bitter and impatient and mean and unkind. He has heaven to think about, which is the one reality that can make any hardship or sacrifice easily bearable. He has prayer and the sacraments and the constant inspirations provided by his religion, with which to face his day-to-day temptations and problems. He has a secure conscience, and a realization that his example and his loy-

alty to God are not only saving his own family, but winning merit for the world and helping to save society from the pagan decadence into which it has fallen. He is the kind of Christian the world needs in large numbers today.

May Newlyweds Put Off Having Children?

Problem: We are just recently married. My wife wants to insist on not having any children for a few years. She wants to keep her job and to save up money until we have a solid bank account. She is also quite interested in not being tied down right away by reason of pregnancy and the demands of a family. I feel that this is wrong because it is going to lead us into sin, and because I don't want my wife to be working. I am confident that I can support both of us and whatever family we may have, even though we may not be on easy street. How can I convince her of this?

Solution: Alas, this is the kind of problem that should have been gone into thoroughly before marriage. A couple who get married with the intention of putting off the business of marriage "for a few years" have no business getting married. They should know each other's mind on this point before they kneel at the altar and give over to each other "the right to their bodies for the actions necessary to the generation of children." There is something of that odi-

ous thing called "companionate marriage" in going through the motions with the reservation that the essential purpose of marriage will be put off for a few years.

Almost certainly such a determination will bring upon marriage the blight and curse of contraception. This is the most important point, but there are other considerations. Records of divorce indicate that the most dangerous years for married couples are the first few, and that the danger of "incompatibility" or dissatisfaction with each other multiplies greatly when there are no children during the first few years. Nature intended that just about the time when a husband and wife are getting used to each other, becoming fully acquainted with each other's faults, finding the strong attractions of courtship leveling off under the effect of familiarity and routine, a child should appear on the scene to restimulate and seal their affection for each other. If no child appears "for a few years" familiarity can too easily breed contempt. Moreover the graces granted through the sacrament of marriage will have become ineffective to offset the danger because of the many deliberate sins.

The Dangers of Child-Bearing

Problem: "What is the duty of a husband and wife when a doctor warns the wife that it will be dangerous for her to have another child? We have three children, and I suffered considerably with the last one. Both my husband and I feel that it would be wrong to risk my life when I already have the three children to raise. But we also know that it is wrong to practice birth-control. We are confused, and badly in need of guidance."

Solution: With due respect for the many upright physicians who are practicing obstetrics, it may be stated that there are many doctors who recommend the sin of birth-control whenever they foresee that a wife will have the least bit of difficulty in child-bearing. It is our experience (and we have had more than 20 years of it, much of it dealing with the moral problems of married people) that 1) many doctors do a great disservice to their patients by making them fear child-bearing because of minor or unimportant complications; and 2) that they are often influenced in this by the common desire of wives for any excuse for practicing birth-control. There is solid ground for the opinion, recently expressed in high medical circles, that the process of gestation and child-bearing often cures certain physical and nervous disabilities of women. On the other hand, there is no question that the practice of birth-control

causes many nervous and physical disorders among women.

This is not to imply that there are no cases in which a certain pathological condition would render child-bearing a grave danger to life. Serious heart trouble, advanced kidney infections and such like, would be examples. In such cases a doctor can be quite certain of his diagnosis and quite certain of the degree of danger, and has the obligation of giving a warning that is proportionate to the facts. But when a doctor speaks in rather vague terms to a wife of danger in having another baby, or tells her to "be careful" because she had trouble with a previous child, she and her husband should 1) ask for the specific reasons for the danger; 2) consult another physician to check on the matter; 3) if doubt remains, lead a normal married life and, with perfect trust, leave the issue in the hands of God. We know of innumerable cases in which such trust was wonderfully rewarded. In all situations of this kind, a good Catholic doctor is of the utmost importance, since three out of four non-Catholic doctors are quick to recommend birth-control.



How a Wife Must Resist Sin

Complaint: What can a wife do to induce her husband to give up practices of birth-prevention? I'm not afraid to have a large family and I am afraid to go on through married life committing sin. He claims that we cannot afford to have more children than the two we have; he protests that he will not put more burdens upon me. He maintains that he is a Catholic, but refuses to obey God's law in this regard.

Solution: This is another of those problems that we believe should be thoroughly discussed before marriage, at least at the time when the instruction is given to a couple as to what is right and wrong in marriage. In many dioceses a definite statement must be signed to the effect that the persons to be married will not make use of contraceptive practices. It would be a good thing if the Catholic young woman (and also the Catholic young man) would make sure before marriage that their partner-to-be is sincere in promising that there will be no sinful misuse of marriage.

When the problem arises after marriage, the loyal Catholic partner is of course bound to use every persuasive means to win the other away from sin, and not to give the appearance of consent to wrongful actions. For a wife to convince a husband who is stubborn in this matter requires patience, intelligence, prayer and persever-

ance. She should inform herself thoroughly, by reading and consultation, on the different aspects of the subject: why it is contrary to nature; why it is harmful to married happiness; why it can have worse results than the bearing of many children. She should make a point of the fact that God does not command married people to have many children, but does demand that if they freely use their privileges they must be willing to bear the responsibilities that accompany them. She should convince herself that a large family is not a curse but a blessing; that even among the poor it will reward a mother and father with a happy and secure middle life and old age, as exemplified to the last degree by an article in the *American Magazine* of December in which a mother of fifteen children tells how at the age of 49 she thanks God for every one of her children and for the health and happiness and good times that are hers. Then patiently a wife must try to transfer her convictions into the mind of her husband. Where one partner has real love and true Catholic convictions, backed by knowledge of the subject, the problem will never be insurmountable.

How a Husband Must Resist Sin

Complaint: It seems to be assumed that the husband is usually at fault for practices of contraception in marriage. What about my case (and I know there are many more like it) in which my wife is almost neurotic for fear of having another child? What can a husband do in such a case?

Solution: It is not right to assume that only, or even mostly, husbands are at fault in the matter of contraception. Apart from those cases in which both husband and wife have equally agreed to live in rebellion against God, the predominant blame is probably to be laid to a wife as frequently as to a husband. In fact it probably belongs oftener to the wife, because one of the chief reasons alleged by husbands for contraception is a false sense of "consideration" for the wife, which has usually been carefully cultivated in him by the wife herself.

Wives are far more subject than husbands to the influence of human respect and popular opinion in regard to limiting their families. If, in her circle of women friends, eyebrows are raised or sarcastic comments are made at any mother having more than three children, many a wife is inclined to permit the fear of such things to become almost a mania. A thousand mortal sins are as nothing to her if they can prevent one snub from a socialite or

one buzz of amazed comment from a "career woman."

Wives are also subject, as is natural, to varying degrees of fear with regard to child-bearing and -rearing. More often the fear involves the latter rather than the former: with a powerful but erroneous imagination they picture themselves surrounded by babies, all of the same age, all clamoring for attention, none ever growing up to be a helper and comfort in any sense of the word.

What can a man do about a wife who has become obsessed with such inhibitions? Heart and head must work together to overcome the fears. Heart must work first, to win and hold the kind of love that from time immemorial has made women willing to suffer anything for those they love. Then the head, i.e., reason, understanding, conviction, must put across the lesson that true love can remain neither "true" nor "love" in the midst of sin.

The Morality of Rhythm

Problem: There is so much discussion of the morality of rhythm of late that we are confused as to what is right and wrong concerning it. Some say it is all right under any circumstances and others that it is permissible only under exceptional circumstances. Still others say it should never be adopted as a practice by Catholic cou-

ples. Can you give a simple statement that will clarify the matter?

Solution: One simple statement can be made about the use of rhythm in marriage and it is this: Every case in which it is considered at all is an *individual* case, and should be presented, with all the attendant circumstances, to the judgment of a confessor. The confusion arises from the fact that a decision given for one case is so often passed around as a norm for other cases, and these other cases may not be similar to it at all. Another difficulty is that advertisers of rhythm charts and booklets have so often made general statements affirming the universal acceptability of the practice, for the sake of making sales. Of course they do not take into account any of the many circumstances that can make the practice evil.

According to the natural law, it is not sinful for husband and wife voluntarily and mutually to limit the use of their marriage privileges to certain times for a variety of reasons, some of which may have nothing to do with the possibility or expectation of conception. The natural law demands only that there be no interference with the proper method and end of the marriage privilege whenever it is used.

Circumstances that can, and frequently do, make limitation of the use of marriage to certain times wrong are the following:

1) If this is dictated by one partner alone, so that the other is unwillingly made to follow it. This forcing of one's will on the other is contrary to the very essence of the marriage contract. The unwillingness of one partner may be expressed or merely implied, and may be temporary or permanent; but wherever such unwillingness is present, the partner may not insist on rhythm without a grave and objective reason. 2) If the limitations demanded by rhythm lead to frequent sins at times when it has been decided not to use the marriage privilege. The adoption of the rhythm system becomes a serious and unnecessary occasion of sin when it leads to sins of adultery, self-abuse, and other forms of impurity during the fertile periods, and as such is wrong itself. 3) If it leads to quarreling, bickering, unhappiness in the home, and even the possibility of divorce. Rightly to take into account all these circumstances demands of married people that they have the right attitude toward children. While it is true that there is much selfish avoidance of the responsibilities of children in modern families, it is also true that if all husband and wives would take a serious view of the responsibility and mutuality of their duties to each other, they would at the same time be cultivating the right attitude toward the size of their families.



Is "Rhythm" Birth-Control?

Problem: It is frequently thrown up to us Catholics that the practice of rhythm in marriage is the same thing as the practice of contraception, and that our Church is inconsistent in forbidding the latter while it permits the former. What is the difference between them? It does seem to us that the same end is attained by rhythm as by any other form of contraception.

Solution: There are few subjects on which there is more confusion of thought than on this topic of limiting offspring. The reason for the confusion is that the publicists for birth-control have abandoned all the logic and reason that support the natural law, and have made up a morality of expediency on the question of contraception. Therefore the best way to arrive at an understanding of the above question is by starting out with simple, universal principles and then applying them to the morality of rhythm and contraception.

First of all, the Catholic Church, in promulgating the natural law, does not blindly object to limitation of offspring on the part of parents. Sometimes she even advises and urges such limitation, as for example, in cases of severe or contagious disease on the part of parents, extreme poverty, etc. She does maintain, according to the nat-

ural law, that such limitation may be effected only by limitation of intercourse, because it is contrary to the natural law ever to use the marriage right while frustrating its primary purpose.

Secondly, the Catholic Church does not maintain that the sole purpose of intercourse is the begetting of children. She maintains that that is the first and primary purpose—the one that may never be deliberately avoided through the manner of exercising the marriage right. But the Church states the natural law that there are secondary purposes of intercourse, which are the showing of mutual love between husband and wife and the avoidance of the wrong use of sex. These purposes may still be sought and fulfilled in the use of the marriage right, even when the primary purpose cannot be achieved because of age, sterility, etc., so long as the marriage act is properly performed. In other words, a husband and wife are bound always to act in their relations with each other in cooperation with the primary purpose of sex, even though they know it cannot be attained.

Contraception, therefore, is wrong because it means attacking the primary purpose of the marriage act in the very manner of performing it. The use of rhythm may be justified in certain circumstances because in this no attack is made on the primary purpose of the marriage act in

the way it is performed. It should be remarked that rhythm is not universally permissible to married persons; they must have a reason for using, and should ordinarily subject that reason to a confessor's decision.

How "Rhythm" is Justified

Problem: Is it true that a husband and wife, after having three or four children, have by that very fact sufficient reason for adopting the practice of rhythm during the entire remainder of the time in which they might have children? A married friend of mine stated this recently and was surprised when I expressed a doubt about it. Will you clear up the matter for us?

Solution: It seems to be clear from the Pope's recent pronouncement on the morality of the so-called rhythm practice that the mere fact of having had a certain number of children does not justify a husband and wife in deciding to use rhythm continually thereafter. In fact the Pope seems to have made his statement on this matter just to correct erroneous views that were becoming widespread and were being followed by many married people.

The pertinent point of the Pope's instruction is that *only a serious motive or reason*, deriving from external circumstances, can make it lawful for husbands and wives to adopt the practice of rhythm

for either a short or a long time. He even goes so far as to set down a list of the kinds of serious reasons that are to be considered sufficient to justify the use of rhythm. The reasons must be either)1 medical (e.g., ill-health of wife); 2) eugenic (e.g., great probability of bringing forth defective children); 3) economic (e.g., poverty); 4) social (e.g., inescapable dependence on others, or being dependent on others.)

Nothing is said in this connection about the mere fact of already having children as constituting a reason for attempting never to have any more. It is very true that in many cases in which a couple already have several children, one of the above reasons may be clearly present. But if it is not present, then there is not a good reason deriving from external circumstances for the continuous adoption of the rhythm practice.

It must always be noted that, even in cases in which there are reasons that might make the practice lawful, two other conditions must be fulfilled before it actually becomes lawful. The first is that both husband and wife agree to it (unless the reason be so serious that it would be clearly unreasonable for one of them not to agree to it.) The second is that there be little danger of deliberate incontinence during the fertile periods. It is these conditions, together with the importance of a serious

reason, that make it prudent for every married person to consult a confessor for a decision when there is question of practicing rhythm.

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