

CONTRACEPTION AND CONJUGAL LOVE

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Few arguments in the domain of morality seem as unpersuasive to the great majority of Americans as the customary natural-law arguments against contraception as a "frustration of the generative act." Even when, in addition, the individual's lack of total dominion over his species-directed functions is pointed out, most people remain unconvinced. Yet, when there is question of grave and absolute precepts of natural law, one would expect, if not that men would spontaneously recognize their obligations, at least that the well-disposed should acknowledge them when clearly presented. On the other hand, while well aware of this unsatisfactory situation, theologians seem certain of the validity of their arguments.

This article is presented in the conviction that the theologians are right, but that the laymen are not wrong: those elements of the argument from natural law most capable of producing strong intellectual and emotional impact would seem, for the most part, to have been left only implicit in the more common presentations. The purpose of this study is to seek out in detail such elements and to render them explicit. It seeks to explore a bit further than usual into that concrete human nature which founds the natural law and to stimulate discussion which may ultimately lead, in more competent hands, to a psychologically more effective position than is now available, a position which will confront men's consciences with both perception and feeling of the evil of contraception.

In Part 1 certain relations between man's psychology and the natural law are stressed. Part 2 analyzes human sexual activity in terms of natural law, and the relations of sex to the total person, to other men, and to God are discussed. Part 3 applies the principles developed in Part 2 to the matter of contraception. The basic argumentation is philosophical. But when theology provides an additional insight or useful analogy, we have not hesitated to use it.

THE NATURAL LAW

The Catholic Church's rejection of contraceptive intercourse is firm and clear. But what are the intrinsic reasons for this rejection? A

priori, they might be of two kinds: strictly theological (i.e., based upon the deposit of faith alone and therefore belonging to divine positive law) or philosophical (based upon things knowable by natural reason, though wholly coherent with theological positions). As Protestants have not been slow to point out, there would seem to be small grounds in Scripture for a strictly theological position;¹ nor does tradition in its other forms make up for this lack. In point of fact, the papal documents which have specified the Catholic position seem to argue from revelation very little if at all; rather, the emphasis is upon the natural law and upon the role of unaided reason in the establishing of the norms of human conduct. The arguments adduced by moralists have followed along this same path.

Now, the very concept of a morality based upon the nature of man as related to God is not only foreign to Protestant thought but is rejected with hostility as being antithetical to the Protestant theology of original sin and of justification.² Clearly, then, any argument based upon the natural law will have no value whatever for a dogmatic Protestant. It is of some importance nonetheless to establish a mode of approach which can, if sufficiently elaborated, show the Church's anticontraceptive position to be continuous with and in full harmony with the views of Scripture and, indeed, to be in some sense demanded by these latter even if not provable by them. The explicitations of the natural-law argument which we proffer will, it may be hoped, furnish such a basis for the relating of that law itself to the abundant data of revelation on sex and marriage.

Often, too, non-Catholics woefully misunderstand "the natural law,"³ even though making use themselves, unknowingly, of fundamental aspects of the concept. For these reasons it will not be out of

¹ This is not to say that Onan's punishment was solely for his violation of the levirate law, without reference to his practice of *coitus interruptus*. (For a recent, non-Catholic acknowledgment of the traditional interpretation, cf. Richard M. Fagley, *The Population Explosion and Christian Responsibility* [New York, 1960] pp. 115-17.) But then the detestability of his action would seem to spring from a natural obligation rather than a positive divine law.

² Cf. Stanislas de Lestapis, S.J., *La limitation des naissances* (Paris, 1958) pp. 36-39, for extensive references to a wide range of Protestant theology on this point.

³ Cf., by way of example only: Alvah W. Sulloway, *Birth Control and Catholic Doctrine* (Boston, 1959) pp. 57-73; Joseph Fletcher, *Morals and Medicine* (Princeton, 1954) pp. 92-96, 222-24; Glanville Williams, *The Sanctity of Life and the Criminal Law* (New York, 1957) pp. 59-62.

place to begin the discussion with a few remarks directed to what should still be rather exciting concepts: "nature" and "natural law." Such a procedure will, moreover, enable us to locate more clearly the subsequent discussion in terms of Scholastic morality and to see that discussion as a legitimate enlargement of the standard natural-law approach.

Consider, first, the concept of "nature" itself. By refinement and penetration of the Aristotelian definition, "Nature is a source or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily in virtue of itself and not in virtue of a concomitant attribute,"⁴ one arrives at the well-known Scholastic definition: the nature of a thing is its essence considered as a principle of operation.⁵ It is this aspect of operation which, due to the Boethian and Platonic tradition, is constantly being submerged and is in continual need of reassertion.⁶

Created beings are incomplete:⁷ what they are is not what they are intended to be. The higher they stand in the scale of being and the more perfect they are in themselves, the more radically and comprehensively are they in need of completion. This completion they achieve by their own activity and operation, acquiring what is lacking, developing what is already possessed. A nature, then, is not a static thing, a mere ability to operate in a given way. Rather, it is the whole complexus of drives, tendencies, intrinsic modes of development which are the internal principle of the creature's activity. A nature is what a thing is, precisely as in tension towards what it is meant to be in its fulness. A na-

⁴ Aristotle, *Physics*, 192^b 21-23; translation from W. D. Ross, *Works of Aristotle 2* (Oxford, 1930).

⁵ Cf., by way of example, the discussion given in Eduardus Hugon, O.P., *Cosmologia (Cursus philosophiae Thomisticae 2*; Paris, 1927) pp. 255 ff.

⁶ According to Boethius, "Natura est unamquamque rem informans specifica differentia"; *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 1, 57-58, in *Boethius, The Theological Tractates*, ed. and tr. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand (New York, 1918) p. 80. It is worth comparing the last half of this section in Boethius, in which he includes Aristotle's definition as given above, with Section 2, 1 of the *Physics*, whence that definition is drawn. Boethius' theological interests as well as his Platonism lead him towards the most general and immutable definition possible. Aristotle, however, goes on to supplement his basic definition by the following two: "The form indeed is 'nature' rather than the matter; for a thing is more properly said to be what it is when it has attained to fulfilment than when it exists potentially" (193^b 6-8; Ross, *Works*). "We also speak of a thing's nature as being exhibited in the process of growth by which its nature is attained" (193^b 12-13; *ibid.*).

⁷ The radical incompleteness of which we are speaking throughout this section lies far deeper than the merely sexual incompleteness of male or female found in some created beings and is not to be restricted to this latter or confused with it.

ture is the subsistential urge of what is incomplete, striving to become fully itself.

The end and purpose of this striving is simply the creature fulfilled.⁸ Such an end is intrinsic and its achievement is not a matter of free option: the creature is bound, under pain of perpetual incompleteness, so to act in virtue of what it now is as to develop towards its own fulness.

In the world below man and, indeed, in the human world as well, to the extent that man is subject to the laws of that lower world, no creature, despite all its efforts, achieves an ultimate completion. Completion and fulfilment cannot even be conceived at this level save as transitory, as a momentary balance between growth and decay, as a playing of a useful role for one scene, as a process whose use lies only outside itself. Thus it is that nature (or Nature) has come to signify the whole in terms of which the individual natures of atoms and flowers and wolves, and in one aspect men, alone have meaning, that totality which may be conceived as being perfected, as evolving to its fulness through the rise and decline of the individual natures acting within it.

Only persons can stand outside this Nature. Only persons are capable of an ultimate fulfilment, of a completion which transcends all process. Only persons have, in this sense, integral natures. Personal perfection is the perfection of an individual nature, not merely of Nature, precisely because the person possesses an eternal destiny.⁹

Man, then, can know his incompleteness; he can see what he now is

⁸ This end, then, is "nature" in its fullest sense. Whatever is directed away from or is incompatible with this nature, the perfected being, is unnatural.

⁹ The crucial importance of the concept of "person," naturally knowable and yet unknown outside the Judeo-Christian lineage, is seen in the impossibility of finding any save social (Natural) significance for the individual in other frameworks of thought. Thus, e.g., the statisms of Plato and Aristotle; thus, the nonsignificance of the individual in Stoic and Hindu thought—and all this despite the awareness of some kind of human spirituality and immortality. Indeed, it is only through the fact of the resurrection of the body, i.e., the ultimate immortality of the whole person (as distinguished from the nonpersonal, disembodied soul) that human existence achieves individual meaning. Yet, it is on this same level that we know of the glorified Mystical Body of Christ, in terms of which alone the individual will have eternal meaning—though still a personal meaning, through union of person with Persons. The ultimate value and meaning of the human person is knowable only by revelation. It is this fact, perhaps, which should form the primary principle of connection between the philosophy of man and theology.

and discover the direction of fulfilment by scrutiny of his own nature in body and mind and spirit. God has so created man that man can help to create himself. Precisely as a free agent, man is more strongly bound than the rest of creation, under the intrinsic sanction of ultimate and eternal frustration, to achieve himself fully. This bond of obligation, which is man's free nature, is the natural law, that law which God legislates by His very act of creation. All, then, that is knowable about man through psychology, history, or any of the sciences is relevant to the natural law, is part of the natural law.

This law lies, evidently, outside man's control. It is God's act of creating that founds it. Man's total nature and all his strivings are by very definition under God's exclusive dominion. Man's perfection and goal are unchangeable, for they enter into the very definition of what man is. Man, then, acts well, or morally, when he acknowledges this dominion by free choice of what leads to his true fulfilment in accord with what he already is; he sins when he denies this dominion by freely denying to his operations and activities their ordination towards his total fulfilment.

In concrete cases, an individual nature may be defective in its substance or its functioning, through the intervention of some extrinsic agency. Freely to accept this situation is no moral fault; it is rather the virtue of truth. But to induce such defectiveness is morally evil. One may guiltlessly be born with mental or physical defects; one may not make oneself defective without the radical disorder of freely choosing to be other than one is constituted to be.

In all that follows, we shall assume that the choice of any given mode of operation is fully free and deliberate. It is to the mode of operation, which is the object of free choice, that we shall alone turn our attention.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

Before we can ascertain the moral quality of contraception, we must understand human nature in its sexual aspect. Three levels of such understanding are in vogue today.

The first level regards human sexuality as merely physiological, having meaning only in terms of the immediate effect upon the individual. Thus, it sees nothing of the natural in sex and nothing of the ordination of sexuality to something beyond itself. At this level of

understanding, sexual activity has no meaning or value save individual pleasure, and it becomes impossible to distinguish fornication or adultery from the chaste coition of saints, or even to divide natural intercourse from masturbation or bestiality; for the merely physiological activity of the individual is much the same in each case.

A higher and less inadequate level sees human sexuality still as merely physiological but also as truly natural. Thus, the division of the species into male and female is seen to tend, through sexual desire, to copula and the generation of offspring, whose slow biological development requires long nurture and training if they are to come to viable maturity. Sex appears as something essentially directed outward, toward another. It is meaningless for the individual except in so far as it retains this ordination through another towards adult offspring, the replenishment of the species. To destroy this ordination is to cancel the very significance of sex as such. The physiological fact of two sexes has no other explanation than the greater genetic values obtained for the species by means of sexual reproduction.

This physiological insight into man's sexual nature is, as such, truly and necessarily a datum for human morality. Yet this insight is as valid for many species of brute as it is for man; one suspects, then, that no human moral problem related to sex can be adequately treated on even this second physiological basis alone. Certainly, Christian moral teaching on fornication or adultery can be built upon such a basis only if this basis be enlarged by explicit consideration of the psychological and social nature of sexual activity. Moreover, even physiologically, a merely physiological treatment is inadequate; for in man sexual maturation and the desire for heterosexual activity is critically dependent upon an underlying psychological maturation. Finally, a too exclusively physiological approach to sex treats sex, in fact, not as a natural aspect of man but as a nature in its own right.

Unfortunately, however, in the heat of controversy many Catholic arguments against contraception give an impression of stopping at precisely this level.¹⁰ Higher levels of insight are present only implicitly.

¹⁰ Cf., by way of example only: Alphonse M. Schwitalla, S.J., "Contraception," *Catholic Encyclopedia, Supplement 2* (1951); Eduardus Genicot, S.J., *Institutiones theologiae moralis*, ed. I. Salsmans, S.J. (14th ed.; Brussels, 1939) 1, 320-21; 2, 499; Gerald Kelly, S.J., "Catholic Teaching on Contraception and Sterilization," *Linacre Quarterly* 21 (1954) 110-13; John J. Lynch, S.J., "Another Moral Aspect of Fertility Control," *ibid.* 20 (1953)

It is hardly surprising that such arguments are misunderstood and thought to be merely physiological in character.¹¹ We would suggest that, even within their own context, the more or less traditional presentations seem to call for further development if such misunderstanding is to be avoided.

One may rise, however, to a third level of insight, which sees sexuality in man as physiological, indeed, and natural but also as something far more. It is *human* sexuality, a sexuality penetrated, modified, and elevated by human rationality and distinctively human emotions. Such insight, however, confronts us with a wealth of fact and image greater than we can properly handle; it confuses us by the vast and difficult problems its very richness raises. Many of these problems have yet to be fully solved, and it lies outside our present purpose and our competence to detail either the problems or such solutions as have been found. But there is one class of problems, of great importance for the present topic, which we shall attempt roughly to sketch and to follow with some indication of the direction their solutions might take.

This class of problems arises from the fact that adequately human sexuality seems to be a contradiction in terms, a natural conjoining of utterly disparate and opposed elements. Consider, for example, the essentially individualistic character of sense pleasure. How, then, can the most intensely pleasurable and absorptive of all bodily activities be at once source and sign and consummation of a lofty spiritual love? Yet so it is in fact, explain it as we will. It is true, of course, that whole cultures have existed and still exist in which coition is identified with male gratification and the begetting of children for family or clan, but with nothing beyond. But this very fact will help us in a little while to understand the solution.

As another example, not wholly unrelated to this last, there seems

118-22; A. Vermeersch, S.J., *De castitate*, pp. 267-68. Cf. also the interesting discussion: E. J. Mahoney, *American Ecclesiastical Review* 79 (1928) 133; John A. Ryan, *ibid.* 79 (1928) 408; John M. Cooper, *ibid.*, p. 527; H. Davis, *ibid.* 81 (1929) 54.

¹¹ Whatever the impression occasionally made, Catholics have long insisted on the nonphysiological aspects of sexuality: the child is a new potential member of the Body of Christ; human love is a true end of marriage albeit secondary; it is gravely sinful forcibly to separate love from copula: cf., e.g., Pius XII's condemnation of AIH: *AAS* 43 (1951) 850. Cf. also the approaches taken by Josephus Fuchs, S.J., *De castitate et ordine sexuali* (Rome, 1959); Gérard Gilleman, S.J., *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology*, tr. William F. Ryan, S.J., and André Vachon, S.J., from 2nd French ed. (Westminster, Md., 1959).

no doubt that, though stringent social conditions may work to the contrary, yet it is mutual, sexually-based love that naturally draws man and woman together, and it is their desire and need for mutual, sexual complementation and companionship that is the dominant motivation for marriage, though the ordination to children is certainly present and taken for granted. Yet, on the other hand, the whole of human sexuality is biologically and otherwise meaningless save in terms of reproduction.

One has in sexual relations the seeming contradiction of two antithetical loves: the love of another as an object of desire, as something one uses for one's own gratification, and the love of another as a personal subject to be revered and served for that other's sake and own intrinsic value. Or still again, what are we to say of the double fact that, on the one hand, the whole of every human being is saturated on all levels, both conscious and unconscious, with the species-directed instincts of his sexuality, and, on the other hand, each human being is a person, of individual and incommunicable value, independent and transcendent of the species, not requiring sexual intercourse or procreation for his fulfilment? This last question, as the most fundamental, we shall deal with first. We shall establish in greater detail the facts and the problem and then seek a solution through an analysis of the ultimate purpose subserved by human sexuality.

Sex suffuses the whole human being. The cells of one's body are stamped genetically, all male or all female. The body's chemical constitution, height and weight, skeletal and muscular structuring, blood composition and heartbeat, biological age and metabolism, resistance to disease, recuperative powers, longevity, delicacy and perceptiveness of sensation—to say nothing of intensity of sexual drive and the more obviously sexual physical differences—are all deeply and characteristically affected by and linked to one's sex. Not only the body, however; one's whole psychology and not, as we have come to see, merely one's consciousness is permeated by one's manhood or womanhood: spontaneous interests, natural aptitudes, degree of responsiveness, objectivity and vigor of mind, regard for law, esteem for religion, even one's prayer and personal relations with God are colored and modified by one's sex.¹² Nor is the sexual nature of man restricted to time. Though marriage and sexual intercourse cease with death, yet, as we know from

¹² These points are excellently elaborated in Lucius F. Cervantes, S.J., *And God Made Man and Woman* (Chicago, 1959) pp. 1-140.

the status of our Lord and our Lady, one's distinctive sexuality is retained eternally.

Yet, what is male in a man is, in all its manifold temporal aspects, ordered towards the adequate fathering of a family; what is female in woman is directed towards motherhood. But, since everything in a man is male and everything in a woman is female, all levels of a person's being possess an ordination towards parenthood.

It is nonetheless equally clear that the human person as such is not subordinated to parenthood or to any other created good whatsoever, however true it may be that one must make use of such goods in achieving that fulfilment of the in-created law of his nature which will bring him into full harmony with God's will for him.¹³ The person transcends the species even as he transcends civil society. In one fundamental sense, species and society exist only for the good of the person. The person is incommunicable and unique; his value, therefore, is in some sense absolute and, certainly, irreplaceable.

Moreover, just as one may argue that all in man is ordered towards parenthood, so one may, with equally firm and solid basis in fact, argue that all in man is ordered, for example, towards civil society. For man's sexual activity is ordered to the maintenance of population, and ordered in such a way that it is to be restricted rather than used when the civic good so requires. His very life is submitted to hazard at the just will of the state in time of war. His economic abilities and activity, his knowledge of the sciences and of the arts, his virtues and spiritual development are all ordered towards making the civil society better. Similar arguments can be easily constructed to show how all levels of human existence are ordered to virtue or to economic prosperity or to the contemplation of truth, etc.

The reason that such seemingly conflicting positions are all true in their own way is this: the *person* is at once sexual and social and virtuous and all the rest. But the person acts in virtue of his nature. Wherefore, the person is made perfect in so far as he freely wills all the proper, mutual interorientations of his nature. The person transcends the species only by rationally working for the good of the species, just

¹³ We do not wish to enter here into the important but difficult question as to the role of sexual fulfilment had man not fallen; nor do we wish to state whether the absence of a strict need of such fulfilment is, in the present order, naturally knowable.

as he transcends the state not by rugged individualism but by laboring for the true good of civil society. But the good sought under each aspect must be the *ultimate* good of species, state, etc., or the unity with the good of the person disappears. It is only in terms of the ultimate good towards which human sexuality is directed that the mode in which sex is rightly to be used and the person's transcendence of sex can be grasped.

The ultimate end of human sexuality is not carnal pleasure or companionship or marriage or children or the family or civil society, though it includes and requires all of these; for none of these is perfective of the person as such. The ultimate purpose of human sexuality, as of all else, is to raise the person and, through him, other persons to the most pure and exalted possible love of God. In so far as this can be achieved without sexual activity, sexual activity is unnecessary for a person.

But in the ordinary case, sexual activity is one of the most powerful aids available to lift one to such love of God.¹⁴ For sexual pleasure, even as pleasure, is in its fulness other-directed. The fulness of sexual activity leads not only to another but to love of that other and, through that other, to children. Thus, love is drawn first to one's spouse, then to one's children, and finally, through one's family, to the whole of human society; a family tied up within itself and its friends is as truly stunted, though not as badly, as the couple so tied within their selfish mutuality as to wish no children. Each step in the over-all process of familial growth requires a further outgoing, a truer love, a more open moral attitude. Thus, the love of God, which urges on and motivates these steps or, if absent, is prepared for by them, is rendered more free of the obstacle and hindrance of self-centered loves.

Consequently, a truly human sexual life can in no sense be a compromise or balancing of two antithetical loves: love of the other as a thing and love of the other as a person. The first of these loves is, in its totality, sinful by virtue of its reduction of the dignity of a human person to the status of a mere means to another person's wishes—the penultimate malice of all social sin. Sexual love, even in its beginnings,

¹⁴ Cf. August Brunner, *A New Creation*, tr. Ruth Mary Bethell (London, 1955) pp. 66-67, 71-72, 81-84. In this and the references which follow, unless something else is indicated, the material cited will give a fuller and more highly developed treatment than that to which we are held by the purpose of the present article.

must somehow be already striving to desire the other's good as a person. One enjoys sexual pleasure rightly only in the service of the other. The woman yields to the man for the sake of *his* physical satisfaction, to show him love, to open companionship to him, to bear him children, and to make him, far above man and husband, a father, to ground him in society, and so on. The man *serves* the woman by placing his gratification in subordination to hers, yielding to her his seed to make her fruitful, by reciprocating her love, cherishing and protecting her in her childbearing and nurturing, making her a more perfect person through motherhood, etc.

It is clear, then, that the fact that mutual love is felt to be the most proper and natural reason and motive for marriage is a fact wholly in accord with the ends and purposes of sexual relations. It is clear, too, that though an ordination to children is always present in so far as children will contribute to the ultimate end of sex and marriage, yet they are not required even when they can be had—as in the case of the marriage of those who by common consent vow themselves to virginity.¹⁵

This approach to three of our problems seems only to render the first-mentioned one the more intractable: How can all this lofty talk of flights of spiritual love for God and one's partner and all mankind be reconciled with the brute fact that all sense pleasure is by its very nature selfish—sexual pleasure most of all?

The root of the solution is, of course, the fact that, unlike other sense pleasures, human sexual pleasure in its mature perfection requires a partner for its achievement, a partner who is a person, not a thing.¹⁶ For coition, then, to be human at all, it must take place as an interpersonal act, each person recognizing and reverencing the person who is, at the very least, the source of his own pleasure. Coitus is, consequently, a communication between persons, nonmediated and direct. But it is more. It is a most intimate sensible language and natural sign and symbol of love.¹⁷

A natural sign is something knowledge of which leads spontaneously

¹⁵ Cf. Genicot, *op. cit.* 2, 492; Brunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 85, 87–88.

¹⁶ Cf. Cervantes, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

¹⁷ It seems almost absurd to offer a single reference for that to which the whole history of art and literature bears witness, but Fr. Cervantes' last chapter provides a good outline around which to group one's data.

and by its very fact to the knowledge of something else. A sensible sign of something immaterial is a symbol if it leads to the knowledge of its object by means of its own sensible likeness or analogy to that object. Both sign and symbol can become part of a language by being used by an intellectual being to communicate his thoughts and interior dispositions.

Some of the naturally symbolic aspects of coition appear at once when one considers how a description of the act of intercourse is at the same time a description of deep and mysterious personal relationships. In coition the woman gives and surrenders herself to the man by complete openness, receptiveness, submission, and a full unfolding of herself to this sole partner. The man, on his part, gives himself to the woman through his entrancement with her, his finding of his satisfaction in her alone, his yearning to protect this soft helplessness, his penetration and permeation of her with his very substance, his focusing of all his attention and activity, dominance and responsibility exclusively upon this one woman. Coitus is, then, an external union of man and woman in symbolism of their internal union and pleasure in one another.

Moreover, coitus is the physiological act of procreation. It is the condition for fusion of the male principle with the female. It prepares for the becoming of two in one flesh—the flesh of their common child into which the substance of each has merged and about which all their future activity centers. The yielding of one's body to another is, thus, the natural symbol of willingness to become father or mother, of yearning to make one's partner mother or father, of the love which desires that exalted physical, mental, and spiritual maturity for one's partner which comes only from parenthood. Only through their children does the woman gain the peculiar richness and warmth and fulness of motherhood; the man, the deep responsibility, sobriety, long patience, and quiet nobility of fatherhood. Coition is not merely the condition for but the symbol of the creative act of God; it reflects, by intention, not only His creativity but the love of His eternal providence over each being He has created.

But the gift of self, the becoming two in one flesh, can never be total, for no created person is wholly accessible to any other; and true love for another person is essentially conditioned upon reverence for that

in the other which remains solely his and God's. Neither party can give all that he is to any created being; and, conversely, any attempt to grasp the totality of another person is to seek to possess him as an object—one ceases to give to that other and seeks rather one's own profit.¹⁸ But this radical incommunicability of persons is also stated in the very physical limitations of coitus—the two bodies can never wholly interpenetrate and be dissolved one into the other; and any attempt to pass this limit turns incompleteness into agony.¹⁹

Further still, in even the most intimate of created relationships there still remains the existential loneliness and the nonabsoluteness of the human person who is the recipient of one's love. The deeper the love, the more clearly does it call out for an absolute transcendence of itself and its beloved, a transcendence achieved in part in children, in part, with and through them, in civil society, yet never fully achieved save in the transcendence of God, who is Love.²⁰ And this call for transcendence of all created love is also symbolized in coition by its being a mere condition for conception, in its inability to effect offspring save by His intervention. For coition is *procreation*; God alone creates.

This symbolism of sexual intercourse is, as mentioned, immediate and natural. It speaks all that it has to say—the dedication of one's self to the perfecting, as person, of another—whatever its speakers may wish or intend. As natural to them, it is not within their power to change. To the extent, it is true, that the concept of the person is lacking in a culture, the higher tones in the sexual relationship will be muted and inaudible; but the act itself continues to speak its message, even though unheard. When the day arrives for a culture to come to the understanding of revelation and the human person, the true nature of the act of coition is gradually recognized as something long heard but not attended to.

But sexual activity is not merely symbolic; it is a language. Not only is there the objective order of symbol; there is the intentional one of those who activate the symbolism. Rational beings are called upon so to will, in accord with their nature, as to become more fully themselves.

¹⁸ Cf. Brunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–95.

¹⁹ Consider in this regard John Milton, *Paradise Lost* 8, 622–29; cf. also Brunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–100.

²⁰ Cf. Gabriel Madinier, "Spiritualité et biologie dans le mariage," in *Limitation de naissances et conscience chrétienne* (Paris, 1950) pp. 199–201.

In the case of sexuality, their obligation is to will the meaning of their actions in so far as they can grasp it. They must rise ever higher spiritually so that they can speak ever more sincerely and perfectly the full word of mutual love.

Long before one can in fact utter this word in its total richness, however, one can freely choose and will so to utter it and consent in advance totally to its full meaning. Such a free and deliberate consent to this integral, but as yet unrealized, meaning of coitus is marriage.

The bond and covenant of marriage is indissoluble; for if the whole person has been given, what ground is left for taking back? Marriage is, in its perfection, monogamous; for though one man can give himself to many women, his gift being through multiplicable substance and activity, yet his gift cannot be perfect towards many. He is unable to order his loves for each wife through and in one another as he does his loves for God, his wife, his children, his fellow men. Thus, matrimony establishes by solemn vow a permanent state of union between two persons which issues gradually and through effort in the full life of the family.

In short, this covenant of marriage is a mutual pledge and promise to offer continually to the other all those actions of body and attitudes of heart and mind by which the various significations and fruits of coition are achieved.²¹ It confers on each partner, in consequence, the right to these same actions and attitudes from the other. Since the total signification and fruit of coition can be summarized as familial love, the marital bond is the mutual right and duty to do with love all that pertains to the founding, raising, and progress of the family.

The "goods of marriage" are achieved, then, in their completeness, only to the extent that the partners fully intend and mean in every act, especially of coition, all the love and particular gift of self which that act objectively means and says. Since in man's fallen condition the tendencies to self-love—to the reduction of other persons to the rank of means to one's own ends, to make persons things—are deep and strong, and since these tendencies show themselves with peculiar violence where sexual pleasure is in question, then the permanent commitment to the total eradication of self-love, which is the marriage con-

²¹ Cf. John C. Ford, S.J., "Marriage: Its Meaning and Purposes," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 3 (1942) 333-74, esp. 349-64.

tract, is a commitment to a lifelong asceticism and disciplining of oneself, not only in mind and affection but also in body.²²

Marriage provides, indeed, the proper and holy context for the easing of sexual concupiscence, but it would be a most grave error to regard marriage as making licit unrestrained sexual activity.²³ On the contrary, of its very nature, marriage requires an ever-greater human control of coition and all that accompanies it, an ever-greater awareness of *who* one's partner is and what one is seeking to say ever more perfectly to him or her by the word of love which is coitus. Indeed, this ever-deepening spiritualization of sexual relations—and all others—between husband and wife may progress to the point where even at the moment of mutual orgasm both are elevated in prayer, rejoicing in God for the gift of union He gives them, with each other and Himself. Thus, from the very beginning of married life, the twofold effort towards self-control and towards the awareness of God's creative presence during intercourse must regulate the actions of the young couple. It is this which is so beautifully expressed in the account of young Tobias' wedding night: "Sara, arise and let us pray to God today and tomorrow and the next day, because for these three nights we are joined to God; and when the third night is over, we will be in our own wedlock. For we are the children of saints, and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God."²⁴ Thus, in truth, coition is the "marital act," the symbol of the marital state in its fulness.

All that we have said thus far has rested at the level of man's nature. But God has re-created man into a new order, giving him a share by similitude in His own inner, tripersonal life. Thus, man is given a superior nature with its own new and exalted tendencies, exigencies, and strivings towards a new and higher goal of fulfilment, in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father, in the ultimate glory of the direct vision of the Godhead. The Scriptures show us that all levels of sexual love and activity have been reordained towards a still loftier spiritual end than that natural to them: the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. The conjugal love symbolized by coition is now itself the symbol of the love between Christ and His Church, of the nuptials of the Lamb.²⁵

²² Cf. de Lestapis, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-93, 199-218.

²³ Cf. Pius XII, *AAS* 43 (1951) 851-53.

²⁴ Tob 6:22; 8:4-10.

²⁵ Cf. Eph 5:23-32; Ap 19:7,9; 21:2,9-10; Mt 9:15; 22:2-12; Jn 3:29.

And transcending all created orders of love, the mysterious and eternally fruitful mutual love of the three Persons is now known as the ultimate reality reflected by conjugal union.²⁶

One final point, however, remains to be considered: Has not this discussion implicitly rejected the traditional thought of the Church, who continues the Old Testament tradition which insists that the primary end of marriage is not mutual love and personal self-giving but rather the procreation and raising to adulthood of offspring? Has there not been a sleight of hand replacing this primary end by the secondary ends? The answer is no. The discussion of this point can serve as a summary of this section.

Although the terms "primary end" and "secondary end" of marriage are in standard use today, their sense is perhaps best revealed by going back to the lucid terminology used by St. Thomas. Thomas distinguishes sharply between the more, or less, *essential* ends of marriage (i.e., those pertaining to what is constitutive of marriage) and its more, or less, *excellent* ends.²⁷ The drive from the twofold sexuality of human nature, through copula, to the child leads to the most essential end, the new human adult. Were there no such sexual process, there would be no question of the special type of human love institutionalized in marriage.

Nonetheless, this physiological end is the least excellent of all the ends of marriage and therefore least ultimate. The far loftier ends of sex and marriage presuppose the lower sexual ordination but elevate it and transmute it by reason of their superiority. It is of some interest to note that in the Church's *Rituale*, in all the beautiful marriage ceremony, there is only one brief reference, in the final prayer after the marriage itself is over, to the procreation of children.²⁸ The nuptial Mass contains several references to children, but they receive little emphasis; here also it is the mutual love and total companionship which gain all the stress.²⁹ In fine, then, the most essential but least excellent end of marriage is called "the primary end" because it is the natural goal of

²⁶ Cf. de Lestapis, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-68.

²⁷ Cf. *Sum. theol., Suppl.*, q. 49, a. 3; q. 65, a. 1.

²⁸ Cf. *Rituale Romanum*, ed. 1925: Ritus celebrandi matrimonii sacramentum; *Priest's Ritual*, ed. Benziger (New York, 1949) pp. 247, 261.

²⁹ Cf. *Missale Romanum*: Missa votiva pro sponso et sponsa.

the process constituting conjugal relations; it is that which first must be, but only so that it may be transmuted.³⁰

THE EVIL OF CONTRACEPTION

At the beginning of our discussion we called attention to the fact that the laws of human psychology form an essential part of the natural law. This fact we then used to look more closely into the natural law in so far as it governs man's sexual behavior. Special attention has been focused on the general moral principles which flow from the symbolic nature of coition. We now apply these principles to show the moral evil, i.e., sinfulness, of contraception. We have already discussed the objective aspect of sin, its being a willed violation of a nature, a transgression of the existential law of God. Subjectively, however, sin is essentially pride. And pride is the assent to falsehood—not precisely to the telling of a lie, but to the content of the lie—a deliberate unconforming of the person with reality. This is the proto-sin, the prevarication of Adam: to assent to the lie that man is his own master, that man bears dominion over himself, that man may subject his person and his nature to ends (or idols) of his own fashioning rather than to those ordained by God's creative act.

But Satan is the unclean spirit as well as the essential liar and falsifier from the beginning. The uncleanness springs from the falsehood. The whole of sexual morality can be summed up in the phrase: one may not lie against or falsify the truth of the natural word of love. Thus, concretely, a man pledges by coition the gift of himself to the beloved; but if he is already another's, he lies and is an adulterer. If circumstances are such that he cannot give the fulness of commitment to his partner, he lies and is a fornicator. Perversions are yet worse. Not only do they represent a lie, the heart being kept from agreement with the symbol, but they falsify the symbol itself. They are a mock symbol of the pure beauty of interpersonal love; but they are a true symbol of something monstrous.

What better symbol could there be of isolation of one's person from reality, of self-willed and self-pitying loneliness, of the bleak sterility of self, loved in itself, than masturbation? Sodomy is a genuine symbol

³⁰ Cf. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., "Finality, Love, Marriage," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 4 (1943) 477-510.

of sentimental shallowness of character, of perpetual juvenility and adolescent ambivalence, as well as of radical contempt for one's own sex and for all sex. And so on into the depths. Yet these puerile monstrosities are called love and passed off as such, adding to the basic lie of impurity the consent to the known unreal, the fraudulence of shoddy forgery.

It is to this company of perversions that contraceptive intercourse belongs. The woman who uses a diaphragm has closed herself to her husband. She has accepted his affection but not his substance.³¹ She permits him entrance but does not suffer him to be master. So, also, by any form of sterilization a woman deprives her husband's seed of its power over her body. She accepts his headship only in so far as she can subject it to her own will. The sign and symbol of wifely submission, of patriarchal authority, is made over covertly to serve the purposes of a weakly uxorious male and a domineeringly feminist wife.

Sometimes the man will use a condom for the same reasons; sometimes for more characteristically masculine reasons of selfishness. In either event he no longer dominates his wife as person, he does not permit his activity to penetrate her; he takes no responsibility for her. Her helplessness is deceptive—if she is not armored, he is without efficacy. He worships her with his body—but not enough to share with her his substance.

Thus, such mates perform what appears to be the act of love but is only a sham; they lie to one another in their bodies as in their hearts. They take that which says perfect union and corrupt it till it can express only mutual pleasure. They abuse the symbol of the gift of one's self to another till it betokens precisely the withholding of this gift.

Such people will say: "You are wrong. It is just the fact of our mutual love that leads us to contraception. We are not seeking irresponsible pleasure. We use contraceptives only in those circumstances in which even the Catholic Church permits or even advises her members to refrain from further procreation. Indeed, your strictures on contraceptives might with better effect be applied to the unnatural practice of rhythm."

That those who use contraceptives to control the size of their families

³¹ Cf. de Lestapis, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

often do so under the impulse of mutual love is no more to be doubted than that homosexuals act under such an impulsion—and these two loves are similarly, though not equally, shallow. Lying at the root of each is the assumption that the unique mode of expression of true love is sexual. All love is reduced to sexual love, in consequence, or subordinated to it in value.

Love that is profound, however, does not deliberately frustrate its most nearly adequate mode of expression. Thus, a man who truly loves his wife would die rather than be once unfaithful, rather than retract his gift to her for even a short hour to give it to another. His gift was to be integral; even one such retraction would spoil that integrity and deprive him of an unspotted gift to give his wife. The man who thinks little of this shows only how little he knows of the depth of love.

So with contraception. Even one act is a consenting to the building of a barrier to their most intimate communication. In one single act the integrity of their mutual word of affection is sacrificed to their pleasure; for if they were willing to sacrifice their pleasure, the word could be left intact and pure for the day when it might again be uttered. That first contraceptive act declares that, much as one loves the other, one does not love enough to forgo the pleasure of intercourse so that he or she might reserve for the other the most fitting expression of that love. For these lovers, much less than the best is quite good enough for their beloved. That they do not regret such a loss is scarcely proof of the greatness of their conjugal love.³²

Before we consider the morality of the use of “the unnatural practice of rhythm,” it will be well to finish the indictment of contraceptive methods, so that we may compare the two approaches under all aspects.

What has been said thus far has been chiefly concerned with the effect of contraception on the personal donation of husband and wife. But, we recall, coitus proclaims not a closed love-of-two but an open love, transcending the two to find its fulfilment, by the reception of

³² Characteristic as such insensitivity to the true demands of love is of those using contraceptives, even so, one can only marvel that a man should be willing to have a doctor probing into the secret chambers of his wife to fit her with a diaphragm or cap, when by the man's own self-sacrifice such profanation could be avoided. Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 190, n. 1.

God's creative act, in children. The word of coition speaks not children but the openness of both husband and wife to the creative activity of God. It is a religious act, a submitting of human choices and desires to God.

But contraceptives destroy this ordination towards procreation. The couple using contraceptives offer each other an ersatz symbol of procreative love. Their act does not bespeak the desire for the other's fulness of parenthood; it symbolizes a flat rejection of God's intervention. They are two alone at this moment and refuse to transcend themselves; their pleasure in each other is corrupted at its core.

Sigmund Freud was no friend of Christian morality and in his earlier days, at least, he strongly favored contraception;³³ yet twenty years later he regarded the psychological essence of perversion as just this severance of the act from its intrinsic relation to procreation:

It is a characteristic common to all the perversions that in them reproduction as an aim is put aside. This is actually the criterion by which we judge whether a sexual activity is perverse—if it departs from reproduction in its aims and pursues the attainment of gratification independently. You will understand therefore that the gulf and turning-point in the development of the sexual life lies at the point of its subordination to the purposes of reproduction. Everything that occurs before this conversion takes place, and everything which refuses to conform to it and serves the pursuit of gratification alone, is called by the unhonoured title of 'perversion' and as such is despised.³⁴

In the light which Freud himself and those who have followed him have thrown on the permeation of the whole person by sexuality, it is hardly surprising that such a rending of sexuality by contraception tears apart the deep roots of the human personality.

More profoundly, those who use contraceptives have consented to the old lie that they are masters of themselves. Man's reason is meant to show him what God has made him to be, so that he may become what God has meant him to be. Reason is not a new God, a private household deity which creates man a new creature of what sort it pleases. It has, it is true, the physical power to do so, but it does so only at the price of the destruction of man.

³³ Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, ed. James Strachey (London, 1924) 1, 237–39.

³⁴ Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, tr. Joan Riviere (Garden City, N.Y., 1935) p. 277.

A wholly different viewpoint can be gained of the intrinsic malice of contraception if we consider it not as a violation of the natural symbol of conjugal love but as a violation of the sacramentally elevated and supernatural symbol of the union between Christ and His bride, the Church. Christ's generative activity upon the Church is not, with respect to every member, absolutely continuous. He gives grace freely; and He conditions it upon human co-operation, whether in the reception of the sacraments or in good works. But when He gives His grace, it is not inoperative or sterile; deliberately to reject His grace and to deprive it of all possibility of its fertilizing one's soul is not a trivial matter.

Thus, there are those who at Christmas or Easter are moved by longing for the joy and peace and warmth of soul they recall from happier years; and under the impulse of this sentimentality and pseudo love for "the good and gentle Jesus" they deliberately receive Him in Communion into souls dead in mortal sin. There are also those who render His grace sterile by going to confession and positively blocking the efficacy of absolution in their souls by wilfully holding back one of their mortal sins. Spiritual contraception is a sacrilege; its symbol, physical contraception, though not itself sacrilegious, partakes of the same malice.

Contraceptive intercourse is also a repudiation of the graces of sacramental marriage or is, at least, a disbelief in their efficacy. God, through His Church, both denounces contraception and proffers the graces to regulate the size of one's family by continence. Disbelief in the one truth implies disbelief in the other.

What can be said of the morality of periodic continence or rhythm? How can one maintain what we have said about the symbolic nature of coition and yet state that the coitus of a couple who know with certainty that conception is impossible, who want it to be impossible, and who would not have intercourse if it were not impossible, is symbolically valid?²⁵

The morality of coition, in the case of those making use of rhythm, may not properly be disjoined from the fact of continence. Continence is, especially for the husband, a real hardship, a painful discipline.

²⁵ We are stating the problem in strong theoretical form, not implying anything as to practical chances of success in the use of rhythm.

Thus, continence itself is a symbol of sorrow that children are not to issue from subsequent marital union; it is a sign of regret for the necessities imposing its practice. It proclaims, consequently, the effects of original sin—in this sense paralleling the religious vows—and stands for the submission of man to God in penitence and reparation.

In this fallen order, continence itself, rightly entered into, can be a more tender and full expression of marital love than coitus; for the husband undertakes it for the love of his wife or of his children or of the child yet to be. It is an act of sacrifice of self for others' good. Thus, it can render succeeding coitus more deeply expressive by giving it more to say of sacrificial and other-directed love.

Moreover, periodic continence is by its nature apt to lead more rapidly to the fulness of marital chastity, that progressive purification of sexuality of all selfish elements and its unending spiritualization.³⁶ Thus, again, coition becomes richer in meaning, not poorer. It is quite true that such continence, to be effective, must be vastly more than the mere repression or holding in leash of violent appetites, only to turn them loose without restraint when the sterile period arrives. It requires a deep and abiding asceticism, as much in the sterile period as in the fertile, albeit differently in each. The mind and imagination must be controlled, the eyes held in check, penance practiced, interest in prayer and spiritual things cultivated, energies diverted, the sacraments frequented. Yet some such efforts must enter into every Christian marriage if the couple is to arrive at a purely selfless sexual life.

Returning to the question raised about a possible denaturing of the symbolism of coition by the intent of the husband and wife, we may note first that the act retains objectively its full value. If there is some moral evil inherent in rhythm, it is not a perversion of the symbol but a lie against it, analogous to fornication. Now, do the couple who properly practice rhythm have a mind and heart opposed to what their act says? If, indeed, they positively exclude the ordination to children from their moral activity by selfishness, even without alteration of the physical act, turning what is meant to be always open to the child

³⁶ Lest there be any misunderstanding, by such "spiritualization" we do not mean less frequent intercourse, but the performance of intercourse in a more spiritual manner, whether coitus be rare or very frequent.

and to God into a closed love-for-two, then they sin. But if they use rhythm selflessly—as its very nature leads them to try to do—their psychological state remains open to God’s creative activity, the more evidently because they could close themselves securely by contraceptives. They know the child cannot result from their sterile union; but they also know, in virtue of the persevering openness of their moral attitude, that conception might very well follow if they neglect continence.

More basically, however, coition does not say the creation of the child but its procreation. Coition places one of the necessary conditions for conception, i.e., impregnation, but does not effect conception or guarantee it. It does say a desire on the part of both for children, a rational and human desire, based on the good of the child-to-be and of one’s partner. But it is this very desire that leads, by supposition, to the practice of rhythm. Unperverted coition says conjugal love, a love which finds fulfilment only in a familial relationship. But this natural familial relation is general and somewhat indeterminate, not specified naturally to any given number or spacing of children. The couple’s mind and heart can be fully conformed to what their act of coition says at the same time that they specify this indeterminacy by their intention to avoid conception here and now.

In summary, then, each single act of coition is a natural sign of the full, mutual, procreative love of the two partners. Coition is the symbol of natural marriage and of supernatural, which latter is, in turn, the symbol of Christ’s union with His Church. Contraception is evil because it falsifies this sign. Contraception is wrong because it is a fictitious symbol of love, a substitution of what, in truth, symbolizes monstrous selfishness for what symbolizes utter self-giving.