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## Cana Needs the Doctor

*Rev. Raymond T. McKee, C.S.S.R.*

**W**HEN Jim and Jane at the altar say "I do!" the essence of their contract of matrimony is an agreement about the use of the body of the man and the body of the woman by each other. Because of the bodily basis for marriage and because the primary purpose of marriage is reproduction, the doctor has always had a great deal to do with marriage. He has enlightened bashful young men before their marriage, he has been the first confidant of the happy but anxious young wife who thinks she is pregnant. He has restored the father to health, brought the babies into the world, set broken bones, sewed up their cuts and bandaged their wounds. He has been almost one of the family. It is only natural, then, that the Cana Conference Movement, bent on helping good people to have good marriages and happy people to have happy marriages, should enlist and need the help of the doctor in this important and complex work.

Since the talks or conferences of the Cana Conference cover all aspects of married life, they will be concerned, among other things, with the physical functions of marriage. In the Pre-Cana Conferences for the engaged couples, it will ordinarily be the task of the doctor to explain to the young couples the mysteries of the various organs of the body used in love-making as well as in reproduction. Since most young people, even after high school or college biology, have but the slightest amount of accurate information about the reproductive system, it will be the doctor's task to clearly and simply explain it to them. His task will not only be the positive one of explaining ovulation, generation of the sperm, the process of conception and the reactions of the body as it prepares for union under the influence of passion, but he will have the task of removing fears and wrong ideas about the effect of masturbation on the coming marriage, worries

about incompatibility in the size of organs, fears of pain, fears of impotency. He will have to debunk old wives' tales about things which will mark babies, ruin husbands or infect wives. By a reverent religious and scientific presentation of the facts of life, he will have to build up their esteem for the human body and its functions in marriage. He will at the same time warn them but not scare them about excess, immorality, possibilities for harm or infection, and the use of proper hygiene for cleanliness.

In the Cana Conferences for the married couples, the doctor may be called upon to give some of the talks. In these his task will not be so much instruction about the human body, as that of answering questions which he knows from experience the married people are interested in. He will answer the questions of women about their various complaints and the effect on married life. He will discuss sterility, impotence, pregnancy and nursing. Beyond this he will sometimes be asked to discuss married love-making and the common errors or mistakes that husbands and wives make with regard to their intimate union. He may be asked, or he may see fit to speak to a group already well instructed in the spirit of Cana, about the technique of love-making. Even if the doctor does not make these specific topics part of his lecture, he may be asked about them in the question period.

In these days when psychosomatic medicine is being preached so widely, it would not be in line with the times for the doctor to limit his lectures and discussion to reproduction, love-making and ill health in marriage. From his studies and from his experience, even though he may lay no claim to being a psychiatrist, he should be prepared to talk about fatigue, general nervousness, phobias, scrupulousness, insomnia and the various physical symptoms of psychological upset. Married people listen with rapt attention when the doctor explains to them how malnutrition can affect their outlook upon the world, how chronic infections can sap their energy and make them tired and discouraged. It helps couples greatly in the understanding of each other to learn how the bodily constitution or temperament plays such a large part as a determinant of their way of acting and their outlook on



the world. A little explanation of the endocrine system, of the autonomic nervous system and its connection with the emotions, of the things affecting metabolism, helps people to understand themselves and the partner. It is a mistake for a doctor to think that when he talks about marriage, he must necessarily discuss only reproduction and love-making. He has abundant treasures of knowledge that will help couples live together with greater understanding. His general understanding of human nature will help him to explain to them what they think are peculiarities. His contact with many married people will enable him to dissipate the fear that they are unusual. He will be able to tell them how others met their problems and solved them.

Even if the doctor does not actually give Cana lectures, he may be called upon to advise priests who are giving the conferences. Since Christ made marriage a Sacrament, the Church will always be concerned with helping couples make their marriages both holy and happy. Priests will always be instructing engaged couples, listening to the difficulties of married couples and advising them. Moral problems about marriage relations will always be referred to the priest, and often the practical problems about the psychology or biology of love-making will be brought to him. In his conferences he must reverently touch on these topics. He looks to the doctor for information and advice on the intimate details of married life. In helping the priest, the doctor must beware of overemphasizing the body. As a physician he is dealing with the body and its functions constantly and the marriage difficulties which he is asked to treat do have a physical or bodily basis. He may be too concerned with the importance of bodily functions, while on the other hand, the priest may undervalue the importance of physical relations in marriage. Often priests need to discuss marriage with the doctor, in order to be able rightly to advise penitents. But in this there is some danger that the doctor may tend to talk about the unusual rather than the common, to tell about the pathological rather than the normal. Often too, the doctor, in telling about the various cases he has had, may spend too much time and emphasis on symptoms and personalities, instead of outlining what was done and could have been done to help the people concerned. If he is a good teacher, the doctor must supply the common details

of married life, the little things which make married life happy or disagreeable.

Technical literature on Catholic marriage is not very abundant. Many doctors have not given much time to the study of the religious aspects of marriage. They could, even though they are busy men, gather for regular discussions on religion in marriage. They could find a priest to be moderator. However, they would have to find a moderator who will not do as one did: "talk of everything in the Church except marriage." The wives could be invited to these discussions, not only as spectators, but to give the woman's point of view. This would be more proper in the spirit of Cana.

There are so many problems which call for discussion between doctors and priests. To pick one at random, we might take the problem of douching after marriage relations. Morally there is the question: "How soon after union may a douche be used?" The answer to this depends on the answer to the biological question: "When will the douche prevent conception?" Unfortunately some might stop the discussion after answering these two questions. They should go on to ask: "Why does the woman want to use the douche?" Is it because of the so called hygiene advertisements? because she considers the human seed unclean? or because she dislikes marriage relations and wants to free herself of the feeling of contamination? To answer the moral or biological questions alone, would be to overlook the underlying problem which is very widespread among married women. Unfortunately they are passing their ideas and feelings on to their unmarried sisters, teaching them the absolute necessity of douching. This question and many others with as wide implications calls for thorough and scientific treatment for the benefit of both doctors and priests. A book entitled "A Manual of Marriage for Professional Men" would seem to be very much needed in Catholic circles. It should contain thorough religious, psychological, biological and sociological discussion of the ordinary problems that face priest, doctor, and increasingly, the social worker. If the priests and doctors do not take the initiative, soon the social worker will take over entirely the lead in the field of marriage, and tell both the priests and the doctors that they



are to keep their places and be called only for professional consultation. Some marriage counselors are critical of both priests and doctors because they take a narrow view of human personality and human marriage, looking only to the religious or medical aspect. In individual cases there may be reason for this criticism, so it behooves both doctor and priest to increase their technical horizons and provide greater help to married couples.

With the correct instruction they receive in Cana Conferences about what should be the normal happy married life, the couples often want to correct situations in their own lives. They may have lived for many years patiently enduring sterility, impotence, pain in love-making, painful female complaints, excessive fatigue, nervousness or any of the other conditions which can arise in marriage. With the knowledge that God wants them to live a relatively happy and reasonably painless life, they may be looking for someone to help relieve their troubles. They may go immediately to the doctor, or they may consult a priest. In either case, they usually end up in the doctor's office. This is the doctor's usual role and a sacred one. He should be most conscientious to do his best to give the couples more than a physical examination and trite advice and sympathy. One obstetrician has let it be known that on Sunday mornings from ten until twelve he is available in his parlor to discuss marriage problems with couples. He makes no charge for this service, considering it a part of his duty in Catholic Action.

In his role as professional consultant, the doctor will often be asked to explain Rhythm to married women. Confessors, when they find penitents who in their judgement need this information, will send them to the doctor. Not only should the doctor be acquainted with the method, but also with its scientific value. The Catholic doctor should know the arguments and the scientific findings both for and against its effectiveness in attaining the end desired. He should be able to show that merely from the scientific viewpoint alone, Rhythm, if it is correctly used, makes conception less probable than do contraceptives. This argument will be especially valuable in dissuading women from the sin of contraception. Sometimes doctors doubt the efficacy of this

method of not having children. It would be a big help to them if the doctors who have kept extensive records over the course of years for several thousand women, would publish their findings. The doctor must be aware of the Church's attitude toward periodic continence, that She does not condemn it, nor does She recommend that couples use it through selfishness to the exclusion of children and the exclusion of trust in the loving Providence of God. The doctor must not let his own feelings on the matter take the place of either the findings of science or the teachings of the Church.

The Cana Conference Movement is concerned not only with the marriages of couples who attend the conferences, but with all marriage, Catholic and non-Catholic. It is motivated by God's care for every married couple. The Catholic doctor too, should be motivated by the same spirit and have care for every marriage and every married couple with whom he comes in contact. Among Catholics who come into his office, there are men and women who are unhappy in their marriage. They may be the selfish, inconsiderate husbands or wives who refuse to think of helping their partners be happy. It may be a man who has been unfaithful to his wife, coming for treatment for an infection. It may be a woman who is resentful of her husband's demand for intimate relations, seeking the doctor's authoritative word about her health to use as an excuse for refusal. It may be a man crushed by shame and lack of self-confidence causing or due to impotence. It may be a woman whose maternal heart is yearning to love a child that her womb will not bear, and is resentful against God and man. These people need not only medical skill, but understanding and an explanation of God's plan for marriage. They need to realize that God sends crosses to mankind so that they may imitate His Divine Son. To the erring husband, the road of duty must be pointed out in such a way that he will not resent it, but will see the value of it. To the frigid wife, God's plan for the expression of love between husband and wife should be explained.

With non-Catholics too, the doctor has a wonderful chance to help elevate marriage. From the Catholic Church he has the blueprint for happy marriage. He knows God's laws for mar-



riage. He does not have to rely on any doubtful teachings of sociologists, anthropologists, historians or human lawgivers. He does not have to worry whether the findings of the Kinsey report are going to repeal the natural law or not. He has the law from the infallible law-giver. He does not have to examine the evidence as to whether divorce is bad for the individual or for the human race. He has the clear teaching of Christ. He can advise fidelity to one's spouse and be certain that his advice is sound. He can condemn contraception and abortion as being the cause of unhappiness, and know that he cannot err. He can urge the practice of all the virtues and know that the practice of them will be conducive to the happiness of his patients. He can teach the spirit of charity, the spirit of trust in God, and know that he is giving something more truly valuable than the science of medicine can give.

But if the doctor is going to be the good influence for marriage that he should be, if he is going to be God's instrument in helping married couples the way God wants him to, then he will have to train himself for the task. Just because the doctor has a degree, just because he can deliver babies, or just because he is married, does not mean that a doctor is by that very fact adequately prepared to help couples with marriage problems.

In the area of strictly medical problems, not every doctor can be an expert on sterility, impotence, and the various male and female reproductive disorders. In this age of specialization, the ordinary physician is not expected to know all about these things. However, the specialist, besides knowing his field thoroughly, should apply his scientific knowledge with a view to the good of the whole personality, not just to the good of the body. For instance, it would seem that the obstetrician would be applying his scientific knowledge very narrowly when in every case he recommends that the couple refrain from marriage relations entirely during the first three months of pregnancy and during the last three months. Admittedly this may be more conducive to the health and safety of the child, but the danger involved would not, according to the opinion of many responsible obstetricians, be great enough to outweigh the psychological strain for the two people whose love may have increased greatly with



the knowledge of the blessing of their love. The obstetrician who does not know all the standard tests and remedies for sterility, would be depriving many women of the medical help they have a right to expect from him.

The general practitioner, the specialists in the other fields of medicine, should have a general knowledge of the various factors causing sterility and pain, the physical and psychological factors rendering love life or family life more difficult. Especially should they be conversant with the psychology of man and woman. Many a doctor, prescribing iron, vitamins and tonics, could greatly supplement his medicine by helping the man or the woman to get rid of inhibitions, to understand and handle his frustrations.

In advising others about their marriage, the doctor must beware of projecting his own personal feelings, his own prejudices into their lives. A famous doctor made a statement to a group of people studying marriage, that "Marriage can be happy despite the fact that sex plays such a big role in it." Those who heard him, were astonished that he would take such a disparaging attitude toward the physical intimacies of marriage. Those who knew his background were not surprised. It was a rationalization he had built up due to his own life. The doctor who is married to an efficient and capable woman, finds it hard to be objective and sympathetic with women who are clumsy, inefficient and fearful. Being accustomed to assuming responsibility and meeting emergencies, the doctor is liable to be impatient with the man who is fearful of every change in his routine, constantly worried whether he will make his wife angry, whether he can really follow the doctor's advice or not.

A field in which the doctor needs much study and meditation is the field of asceticism. Asceticism is the practical application of religion to man's daily life. In this field it is not enough to have natural prudence guided by science, but the doctor must have a richness of Faith, Hope and Charity. Human prudence might advise a woman not to have any more children, but Faith and Hope advise a trust in God to take care of His children. Charity prompts the doctor to increase his skill and care to bring the mother and child through safely. The doctor who sees

so much of life and death, must himself appreciate and by word and deed teach the importance of a life of friendship with God. When he talks to a couple about difficulties in their lives, he must use and recommend prayer as an aid to the solution of their difficulties. A life that is not ordered toward God is useless and unhappy. The doctor must attain a deep realization of this, and let his principles prevade all the advice he gives, all the discussions he carries on. The importance of liturgical worship, the use of external devotion, is based on the very nature and make-up of man. The doctor must realize this and take part in and encourage the participation of the laity in the liturgical life of the Church. But the doctor cannot and will not do any of these things to help married couples unless he has a sublime appreciation of his role as a Catholic doctor. If he is concerned more with money, popularity, and ease than with saving souls, he will not spend time trying to dissuade people from the use of contraceptives. He will not try to persuade a woman that she has a duty to make love to her husband. He will not try to persuade an erring spouse to be faithful.

Cana needs the doctor in the Cana Conferences, but even more behind the Conferences, helping to make bad marriages good, good marriages better, and all marriages holier.