The Linacre Quarterly

Volume 6 | Number 4 Article 4

October 1938

Excerpts from an Article by Rev. Arthur Vermeersch, S.J.

Arthur Vermeersch S.J.

Excerpts from an Article by Rev. Arthur Vermeersch, S.J.

1. THE USE OF MARRIAGE RESTRICTED TO THE STERILE DAYS can in no way be placed on equal footing with the neo-malthusian abuse. For, by that abuse, the intercourse itself is vitiated because it is deprived of its natural tendency and positive impediment is placed in the way of its natural fulfillment. The restricted use, on the other hand, is in accordance with nature. Wherefore the condemnation of the Holy Father in his Encyclical "Casti Connubii" hits indeed the neo-malthusian usage, while in no way does it touch the use of marriage restricted to the sterile period. These are the words of the Pope, "Any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin." (Official translation as found in the *Cath. Mind*, XXIX, No. 2, Jan. 22, 1931, p. 38. Note: In the translation, "deliberately" is chosen as the English equivalent of the Latin "de industria hominum." "By the agency of men" is a more exact rendering.) Nor should anyone say that the restricted use partakes of the spirit of neo-malthusianism. For it can be justified by many, and even the noblest, motives. (Note, e.g., self-denial as an act of mortification.)

2. AS LONG AS THE CARNAL UNION with a woman who is certainly sterile v. gr. on account of the menopause or existing pregnancy, is permitted: and all permit it, so long can no argument be found which will demonstrate that the use of matrimony, restricted to the sterile period, is *per se* sinful. For, at the time when fertilization is possible, there is no intercourse. Of what power then may an act be deprived when the act itself does not exist? And, at the sterile period, there is indeed intercourse but no effect, not on account of an impediment placed by man but due to the law of nature herself. For, God has ordained that the coitus on certain days should be void of fruit. Still, the natural tendency of the carnal act towards procreation is in no way impaired, since the act is performed as perfectly as it can possibly be done at that time.

3. IS THERE NOT A POSITIVE OBLIGATION THAT MARRIED PEOPLE SHOULD STRIVE TO BEGET CHILDREN?

ANS. The command, "Increase and multiply," affects the entire human race in general but not, *per se*, the individual married couple; at least, not today when the human race has been sufficiently propagated.

Note, too, this lesson of experience. Use of marriage during the restricted period gradually begets in the heart of the married couple a desire for children.

4. BUT, IS IT ALLOWED TO IN-

DULGE THE CARNAL ACT SO THAT THE PRIMARY PURPOSE BE AVOIDED?

ANS. If the primary were the only purpose of marriage, then such indulgence would not be allowed, but there are also secondary objectives.

BUT THE PROPER ORDER AMONG THE PURPOSES IS DISTURBED SINCE THE PRIMARY PURPOSE IS DELIBERATELY REJECTED AND ONLY SECONDARY OBJECTIVES ARE INTENDED.

ANS. The due order among the purposes of marriage is never disturbed as long as the couple performs the copula in the natural way. Thus the intercourse always retains its natural tendency towards procreation, thereby safeguarding the purpose of the act (*finis operis*).

OBJECT. THEY PERFORM THE ACT IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE ACT (FINIS OPERIS) BE NOT ATTAINED.

ANS. They perform the act under such conditions that according to the decree of God the primary purpose will not be satisfied: to that I agree. But, they do not do the act in order that the purpose may not be attained. This alone is true, that the coitus is not enjoyed precisely that it may positively satisfy the principal purpose. To that realization they do not help along as much as they can. But, from what source could they be bound to cooperate in as far as they were able to the attainment of this principal purpose? This they would be obliged to do if they would have a positive obligation of procreation.

5. THE GENERATIVE FACULTY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO MAN that by means of the carnal act, nature, operating as the principal cause, may effect conceptions whereby the human race may be preserved. But the deliberate indulgence of the copula on sterile days only hinders nature from using her procreative facilities. Therefore such conduct is an impediment to the orderly sequence in nature.

ANS. We deny the assertion. Man does not hinder, he merely permits the natural flow of events as ordained by God. From what authority can you prove that a man must give by a personal action that particular efficacy to an act which has been done lawfully? And remember, marriage is permitted with a person who is certainly sterile.

(Note: This subtle method of reasoning has been proposed by the Rev. Fr. Master Albert C. Doodkorte, O.P.; cfr, his treatise in the *R. K. Artsenblad*, July, 1935, pp. 197-205, after the excellent article of the Rev. Doctor, Prof. van de Loo, pp. 187-197. To bolster his position Fr. Doodkorte adduces several examples which are not to the point, v. gr. the use of the apparatus of mastication and deglutition without the power of assimilation; the man who brings stones and mortar when the mason is absent, but who brings nothing when the workman is on the job. Such actions are indeed simply useless; while, in the case of the restricted

use, we always have the utility of the secondary purposes of matrimony.)

OBJECT. IN WHAT WAY IS THE SUBORDINATION OF THE SECONDARY PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE TO THE PRIMARY SAFEGUARDED IF THE USE IS PERMITTED ONLY ON STERILE DAYS?

ANS. This subordination is preserved in as far as the carnal act is done in accordance with the law of nature. Carnal intercourse, correctly indulged, tends to procreation. If that does not result, it is not due to the couple copulating, but it is due to the order ordained by God, which decrees that all days are not fertile.

It is never permitted to pervert the order of nature. But when the act is performed in such a way that it is *per se* able to cause generation, then, in the entire process, due respect is had for the primary purpose. Nothing more is required. Any act against nature would pervert the natural order; it would be contrary to the primary purpose of matrimony.

6. THOSE WHO RESTRICT THE USE OF MARRIAGE TO THE STERILE PERIODS, AT THE SAME TIME WISH NOT TO USE IT AT THE FERTILE PERIOD. That determination is contrary to the natural order. For, it is repugnant both to the nature and the kind of the procreative faculty that an intercourse should be had which cannot be of use to the principal purpose (thus Rev. Fr. Doodkorte, O.P.).

ANS. Passing over the first statement, we deny the existence of any such opposition to the natural order. For, it is in no way repugnant to the nature and kind of the procreative faculty that an intercourse should take place which, by the decree of nature herself, will not attain the principal purpose of matrimony, but which will be exceedingly useful for its secondary objectives. An argument is still desired which will prove the existence of an obligation to perform the conjugal act at a fertile period, after it has been indulged at a sterile period. Moreover, the objection would prove too much. How then could we permit a union with a sterile person?

7. THE WILL OF MAN, THE CREATURE, MUST BE IN HARMONY WITH THE WILL OF GOD AND NATURE. NOW, SINCE NATURE TENDS TO PROCREATION, THE WILL WHICH PURPOSELY AVOIDS PROCREATION IS NOT IN HARMONY WITH NATURE.

ANS. I grant that the creature's will must be in harmony with the divine, in as far as it must observe the order decreed by God. But, I deny that the will of the creature in its act must always be motivated by the same purpose as the will of God. It is in harmony with the will of God, in as far as it does not indulge in the intercourse against nature.

8. IN THESE DISCUSSIONS THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF MATRIMONY IS NEGLECTED TOO MUCH: FOR THAT CAN DEMAND A FERTILE INTERCOURSE.

ANS. The objection would be true if the entire field of the duties

of spouses were under discussion. A single question was proposed to us, namely, whether the use of marriage on sterile days only was to be branded with the stigma of a moral deordination. In the same way, one who proves that a certain method of acquiring property is not against justice, does not, by that very fact, demonstrate that the property is possessed in accordance with all divine precepts, v. gr. concerning the social obligations of owners.

9. Regarding the matter in hand, we do not approve every argument brought forth to spread the Ogino-Knaus method. For this method cannot be separated from the entire set of laws which govern matrimony in accordance with the divine plan.

The circumstances of society may change to such a degree that public necessity due to an accidental cause may demand fertile marriages. In that case, there would be a grave obligation to provide such marriages on account of the circumstances.

At the present time, those are tainted with a certain selfishness and egotism who wish to partake of the delights of marriage but who do not wish to share in the burdens and the inconveniences which are *per se* connected with it. Therein we see a venial sin, unless they have cause for excuse. In vain does the Rev. Fr. Lavaux, O.P., professor of the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, try to prove that they are guilty of a mortal sin.

According to this learned man *such conduct cannot be harmonized with the primary purpose of marriage: indeed, it is rejected.*

WE ANSWER. We deny that the primary purpose of marriage is positively rejected. The positive attempt to attain that purpose is merely omitted. But, from what source might an obligation of positively striving to fulfill the primary aim of matrimony arise? It is sufficient if nothing is done contrary to that purpose.

A RESTRICTION OF RIGHTS BY AN ANTENUPTIAL AGREEMENT WOULD RENDER THE MARRIAGE NULL. THEREFORE, WHEN SUCH AN AGREEMENT IS ENTERED INTO DURING THE MARRIAGE IT MUST BE A GRAVE SIN.

ANS. Any agreement by which one party would attempt to deprive the other party of the right of using marriage would indeed be gravely sinful. That agreement would even not be binding. But, all abstinence from the use of marriage, even though it be perpetual, does not include such an agreement. Indeed, the couple is bound under grave obligation to be ready to fulfill their duties faithfully if, perchance, a child should be conceived from their union.

10. These works are worthy of high recommendation: "Les lois du mariage chretien, nouv. edition, Museum Lessianum, by Canon Dermine; by the same author, "A propos de l'onanisme conjugal," Collationes Tornacenses t. XXIX, 1924; R. D. Arendt's "De genuina ratione im-

pedimenti impotentiae," *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, 1932, pp. 28-69 and 442-450; R. D. van de Loo, "Over periodieke Onthouding," *R. K. Artsenblad*, pp. 186-197; Thesis ad Lauream Theologiae, presented on June 13, 1935 by the R. D. Hoogen: De Sensu Matrimonii (over den zin van het huwelijk) Noviomagi (Nijmegen).

Conclusion

These remarks, we think, are in accordance with the principles which we have taught and are faithful to ecclesiastical tradition. Still, since the doctrine is quite recent, we expressly state that we are entirely submissive to ecclesiastical authority. It is indeed conducive to a happier state, both of society and of the individual, that men should entrust themselves rather to God, the author of nature, and to His most benign Providence than to their own passions. Let men make duty the goal even of their earthly life and not indulgence and pleasure, if they would wish to attain to happiness.

Fleeing crafty and ignoble means of seeking the momentary and fleeting delights of the baser or even basest types, they store their hearts with a nobler satisfaction by obedience to the heavenly Father, who is at the same time the most perfect and the most happy.

It is our sincere wish that our readers should draw from our words a more determined will to strive for holiness, purity and happiness with untainted morals.

Arthur Vermeersch, S.J.

Contraceptionists Want Postal Laws Changed

Just as we have fanatic prohibitionists, so we have rabid birth controllers. Their energy is beyond all understanding. Particularly vicious is the action of the Section on Nervous and Mental Diseases at the last session of the American Medical Association. These neurologists are led by ardent Sangerites and are attempting to have the Association endorse their demand for Congressional action to amend the postal laws to read: "Standard medical and scientific journals and reprints therefrom and standard medical works which contain information regarding the prevention of conception are *not* nonmailable under this section." The A. M. A. has distinctly stated that there is no existing law to prevent a physician giving to a patient any advice which he thinks proper. If the requested change in the law should be accomplished, the word would immediately go forth that contraception had been endorsed by Congress. Whilst it is true that some minor officials have favored birth control, the record of the National Government is clean.

Linacre maintains that non-Catholic physicians on the attending staffs of Catholic hospitals should, in honor, refuse to join in the propaganda for the spread of contraception.