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Letters to the Editor ...

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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Letters To The Editor . . .

Dear Rev. Reich:

I have read your article entitled "Personal Growth: Up-Dating the Natural Law", in the February, 1970 issue of *Linacre Quarterly*.

As a physician, I would be expected to read many articles, particularly those pertaining to my profession, and I do. Therefore, at this time, I wish to tell you that I think that your article can be classified as most ridiculous and absurd play on words that I have ever read. It is without a doubt the worst display of nonsensical rhetoric and jumprope semantics that I have ever seen.

What in the world are you attempting to do Reverend Reich? Is it possible that you so dislike the Natural Law, that you would like to kill it, in principle and practice, but do not have the "guts" to say so in so many words? As an alternative, it seems to me that you are trying to "talk it to death" with articles such as you have written. It would appear to me that you are doing your level best to make any concept of the Natural Law, so confusing, so non understandable, so unusable and so complex that it could never be applied to even the simplest of human events without being subjected to scorn and condemnation and complete ridicule. If it is your desire and intention to so muddy the waters in the understanding and application of the Natural Law, and if you do it with malice and forethought, all I can say is "May the good Lord be merciful to your soul!"

It is obvious that the attacks on the Natural Law have been stimulated by the fact that the Natural Law is, and remains to be, the real road block to the Catholic Church's acceptance of deliberate contraception as permissible. Pope Paul expressly referred to the Natural Law as a strong factor in his reasoning. Yet you and many others would like to remove, eliminate or by pass this road block and thus make the use of contraceptives morally acceptable. (Please do not think that I would not find it easier to practice medicine and Gynecology if I could morally prescribe contraceptives). And so you argue and debate at ethereal levels in an effort to evade the obstacle.

But let me reduce the problem to a simple statement of every day facts.

1. God created everything for a purpose, (His purpose.)
2. When humans, with our finite minds, can determine God's purpose, when creating a specific act or organ - then we are obliged to use that act or organ in the way God desired when he created it. (This is so simple, it actually makes sense.)
3. The sex organs and the sex act were created by God to make procreation possible. This is a prime end of these organs and acts. It may not be the only *prime* end in humans, but it is not out ranked by any other end anywhere.
4. Therefore, when human beings deliberately thwart the sex organ or acts and prevent them from achieving the end for which they were created, (if pregnancy is possible in any given situation) then a human is simply telling God - "I'm not going to let you achieve your desired end!"
5. Therefore, deliberate contraception is always morally wrong, because it deliberately thwarts Gods specific desire!

This may seem to be terribly dull to you, but believe me, Rev. Reich, it is basically sound. It outlines the whole problem that you are trying to eliminate or discolor beyond recognition by articles such as yours.

I cannot get over the flights of forceful thinking outlined in your presentation. I can almost hear some of your colleagues when they read your presentation, saying to themselves, "Poor ol' Warren is off again in a flight to the wild blue yonder!". Come on Rev. Reich, get down to earth and act like a rational human being.

Truly,

Walter A. Reiling, M.D.
Dayton, Ohio

Dear Dr. Reiling:

I received your letter of April 2 and was pleased that you were interested enough in my article on "Personal Growth: Up-Dating the Natural Law" (*Linacre Quarterly*, Feb., 1970) to respond.

It is difficult to know where to begin my reply, when corresponding with a reader who has already classified my article as "most ridiculous and absurd play on words" and "the worst display of nonsensical rhetoric and jump-rope semantics." Without going into a lengthy correction of your explanation of the meaning of the natural law, I would like to point out some fundamental indications why you might need to do some further study on the "law of reason":

1. Your five-point presentation of the natural law is not in agreement with the official teachings of the Catholic Church on this point. The Popes, in their teachings, have deliberately avoided the blatant biologism which you espouse.

2. Catholic tradition on the natural law has never known one, univocal explanation of the natural law to the exclusion of all others. Because the natural law is a law of reason, and since it is a major task of very complex proportions to try to understand properly all the dimensions of human existence, the Church's understanding of the natural law has experienced many significant developments and changes throughout the centuries. I think you would find a study of the history of this question very fascinating in its diversity. And you would find that changes in the conclusions of the natural law theory in our Catholic tradition have frequently been brought about by the discovery of new scientific and medical facts and the rejection of older, mistaken information.

3. In attempting to explain what is God's purpose, you turned to the specific act and organ, and then you find God's purpose, simply speaking, in that act or organic function itself. Your approach was more common in the Middle Ages. But today we are asking: How can God's purposes, in such an important matter, be known from the body alone? Is man not more than body? And in the whole area of man's inter-sexual, inter-personal life, are there not other extremely important dimensions? I don't

think you do justice to the seriousness of the question which has been the object of serious philosophical, theological, and ecclesiastical reflection for centuries, by saying the answer is "so simple."

4. Concerning the implications of the natural law being "simple", I do not know of any serious philosopher, theologian or pope who has ever considered it "simple". On the contrary, they have spent some considerable energies of a lifetime studying and agonizing over the question. Thomas Aquinas, for example, proposed an extremely complex and well thought-out theory of the natural law (which was later adopted, for the most part, by the Church's magisterial teaching), employing the biological and philosophical knowledge of his day. Pope Paul certainly has never considered this a "simple" thing to understand. You may recall that in recent years, after innumerable serious (and intelligent) cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, theologians, and laity raised serious doubts about the Catholic Church's natural law teachings (and specifically some of its questionable presuppositions), Pope John initiated a serious study of the question of birth control and the natural law. In a number of public statements over a period exceeding four years (1964-1968), Pope Paul expressed his agony over the question, made many appeals for assistance, admitted the advent of newer knowledge, the complexities of competence in assessing these purposes of nature, urged his Commission of experts to listen to their studies so that the uncertainty of the faithful would not be left without assistance, and continually stated that he was not yet prepared to give a definitive answer. He hardly considered the natural law "simple".

When he finally decided what his answer to the question should be, he stated it clearly in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. But even in that document, he did not call the question "simple", instead he showed great sympathy for the complexity of the problem; and he did not say that his answer was absolutely definitive.

I elaborate this point, Dr. Reiling, because I am very concerned about trying to avoid seeing the Church, the Pope, the serious scholarly work of present-day Catholic philosophers and theologians, and

Christian medical scientists subjected to ridicule because of an assertion that it is all quite "simple".

5. Finally, the major difficulty in your five-point explanation is the perennial one: How do you justify intervention in the use and/or function of some acts and organs, and not in others? We all agree that we are not given unlimited dominion over life, the body and its functions; but you have not explained why reasonable human control stops where you say it does.

I will not even comment on the many and offensive implications you direct against my motivation. They do not deserve a reply. But I would like to add that your humorous guess as to the probable reaction of my colleagues is really off the wall. I can assure you that, far from seeing my views as novel or as "a flight to the wild blue yonder," I can expect them to say, almost to a man: "Warren has reported on something we all know about. Why doesn't he make a more original contribution?"

Sincerely yours,

Warren T. Reich, S.T.

To The Editor:

The last issue of the *Linacre*, February, 1970, (Vol. 37, No. 1) is the only issue I have read cover to cover in 15 years with one exception, an issue compiled through Creighton University Medical School about 3 years ago.

Congratulations! If I had 10 issues I would distribute them to priests, non-Catholic chaplains, and a few archbishops!

I certainly like the article on Natural Law. - I have never believed it was a static concept - but this is the first article I have read that has given me a better understanding of a subject which for me has been used too often to answer a dilemma.

Sincerely,

Joseph Connor, M.D.
Arcadia, California 91006

Dear Sir:

The annual meeting of the Federation of Catholic Physicians Guild held in Denver on November, 1969, has received considerable comment in various Catholic newspapers but has not received any comment that I know of in our publication. It seems to me that the program on Sex Education certainly should be commented upon. The program was provocative, to say the least. The three principal speakers, Drs. Calderone, Semmens and Levin, had a lively and controversial discussion. Doctor Calderone was the most controversial even though it was difficult to interpret her discussion since she reacted with so much emotion. It seemed that any effort to inject morality into the subject caused considerable aggravation. She seemingly spent more time attacking Doctor Max Levin, who preceded her as a speaker, than she did in presenting material. Doctor Levin made the suggestion that some sex educators are dangerously advocating a fun philosophy concerning sex. This supposition seemed to irritate Doctor Calderone; however, she said little to refute this idea neither did she present any convincing evidence that "Siecus" does much to refute this type of philosophy. Doctor Semmens announced himself as a Catholic physician, but Doctor Levin was certainly more Catholic in his approach to the problems of sex education. The most surprising material presented in the afternoon session was probably given by Doctor Semmens, who, as a Catholic physician, stated that he could not object to premarital sex under proper circumstances, and the proper circumstances were not well defined. In answer to question, he did not think that it was necessary or helpful to bring spirituality or morality into discussions related to sex.

Doctor Levin was quite concerned with morality in sex education and seemed to be the only one of the three who could seem to place some value on chastity. Fortunately, Doctor Lynch, who discussed the program, presented a very strong argument for the viewpoint of the Catholic parent in sex. He also put up strong arguments for family responsibility in sex education. The Jewish Doctor Levin gave a strong defense for morality. He recalled that the Rabbies of the ancient Talmud, considering the question of why God chose to liberate the Jews from bondage replied, "it was because they (the Jews) did not go to prostitutes". Thus, explained Doctor Levin, the Rabbies recog-

nized that chastity served the national interest. The implication he gave, of course, was that modern day sex experts do not recognize the same truth at all.

It seems to me too bad that the Catholic Physicians Guild had to have as its headliners Doctor Calderone, who obviously has no regard for the Catholic position on morality and sex and Doctor Semmens, who identified himself as a Catholic physician and took a viewpoint that certainly is not Catholic in its context. I do not object to having open discussion, and having both sides of an issue, but it seemed to me that a meeting of the Catholic Physicians Guild should have presented a little stronger reaction to the amoral approach presented by Doctor Calderone and her cohort. It was delightful to hear Doctor Levin, and it was good that Doctor Lynch had the opportunity to present a strong case for morality in sex education, even though he had little time at the end of the day.

Very truly yours,

Frank B. McGlone, M.D.
Denver, Colorado