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Marriage, Morals and Medical Ethics

by

F. L. GOOD, M.D., L.L.D.

REV. OTIS F. KELLY, M.D.

*Book Review by Rev. B. R. Fulkerson, S. J.,
Associate Professor of Religion, St. Louis University*

An ideal combination of authors has collaborated on a new book entitled *Marriage, Morals and Medical Ethics*. This book of 202 pages, edited by P. J. Kenedy & Sons and costing \$3.50, is co-authored by the Rev. Otis F. Kelly, M.D. and Frederick L. Good, M.D.

Just before the table of contents the authors have this introductory note: "This work is a discussion of medico-moral problems in matrimony confronting priests, physicians, nurses, social workers, hospital administrators, and all those who need responsible information. It is based on the long experience of the authors, and they have attempted to express themselves in a language that can be understood by the uninitiated in regard to medical matters and by the physician in regard to theology."

Anyone reading this book can do so with a feeling of safety and confidence, because if ever two men possessed the competence and authority to write a book and to present Catholic teaching on a subject, these authors possess it. To quote from the jacket of the book, "Father Otis F. Kelly, M.D., is a Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Boston, a doctor of medicine, and a psychiatrist. He is a member of the American Medical Association, member of the Massachusetts Medical Society, fellow and life member of the American Psychiatric Association, and the New England Society of Psychiatry, consultant in Psychiatry to the Matrimonial Bureau of the Archdiocese of Boston, and Pastor of St. Zepherin's church, Cohituate, Massachusetts. The other author, Dr. Frederick L. Good, M.D., L.L.D., is a surgeon-in-chief, Gynecological and Obstetrical service, Boston City Hospital, consultant in Gynecology and Obstetrics in the Matrimonial Tribunal of the Boston Archdiocese, Professor Emeritus of Obstetrics, Tufts College Medical School, and former instructor in Gynecology, Harvard. He is a Diplomate of the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and fellow in the American

College of Surgeons. He was awarded the Benemerenti medal in 1948, by Pope Pius XII, and given an honorary L.L.D. by Boston College in the same year." This book, by these eminently qualified men, not only has the imprimatur of Archbishop R. J. Cushing of Boston, but the Archbishop has himself written the foreword.

And now to get down to the contents of the book. The first chapter, entitled, "The Christian Concept of Matrimony," is a fairly brief presentation of some of the Catholic Church's teachings and laws on marriage. This is followed by a chapter headed, "A Few Fundamental Principles of Morality." Again, there is presented some of the principles or norms used by theologians and philosophers to decide the morality or immorality of actions that touch some of the areas of medico-moral-marriage problems.

The next chapter, called "Sexual Constitution," is a splendid piece of work. It deals with sex from the beginning of the individual's life to old age. This is followed quite naturally by a chapter headed "Normal Conception, Pregnancy, and Labor." One could not ask for a more lucid and delicate treatment of these subjects.

Chapters five and six consider "Complications of Pregnancy" and "Other Pertinent Conditions." Here is given the physical picture of the more frequent or more difficult cases on which a priest must give moral decisions. These complicated situations are explained very clearly and are couched in terms as simple as possible. So good a job is done here that I hope some few imprudent priests are not so elated by the medical information obtained that they be misled into playing the doctor and abandoning the role of theologian. But in these chapters the authors themselves did their duty well.

The next chapter takes up "The Regulation of Conception." The subjects covered deal with rhythm, fertility, and infertility, artificial insemination, the RH factor, contraceptives, abstinence, sterilization and abortions. This matter is treated well and is very up to date.

There follows then a chapter called "About Psychiatry." A great amount is attempted in a fairly small space. It would be good if the ideas were somewhat more clearly related to the problem of marriage, but this chapter contains much useful matter and is clear in the relation of Psychiatry and the Church.

Chapter nine then deals with "Medical Examination and Testimony for Ecclesiastical Matrimonial Court Procedure." Here the reader will find much worthwhile information. Particularly enlightening are the factors involved in ascertaining the physical elements that might lead to annulments and to the dissolving of the marriage bond.

The closing chapter of the book treats of "Baptism and Extreme Unction." This is a good refresher on these two vital sacraments. Owing to

the fact that pregnancies are so linked with matters of life and death, the chapter contains very necessary knowledge for those who have the care or supervision of the beginning and end of human life.

I would like now to make some suggestions and recommendations that might be considered before a new edition of the book appears, for I am sure that the sale of this fine book will demand another edition. It would be most useful if a clear summary and concise statements be given of the pertinent moral principles and the position of the Church on the matter covered in each chapter whenever that is possible. Moreover, a glossary of medical and theological and moral terms is necessary. Most of all—the book lacks an index. This makes it difficult for reference. Almost everything necessary is somewhere in the book, but what you want, here and now, is difficult to find quickly due to the very disconcerting lack of an index.

At times it seems to me that the authors take more pains to see that the medical phase of the book is made clearer than the theological. The physical case and the medical terms are very nicely spelled out, but the moral and theological angle is at times hurried over. The term Hydramnios is no more formidable to people than is the term “indirect” abortion or “indirect” sterilization. I have found this true of both clergy and laity, Catholic and non-Catholic. As one purpose of the book is to present and apply the Church’s moral teachings on medical and marital problems, the reader, lay and clerical, might find himself wishing for a fuller, more adequate and obvious explanation of such matters as the double effect principle, scandal, cooperation, etc. He might also find himself desiring at times a clearer and more cogent proof for the position of the Church’s theologians.

Undoubtedly the very important principle of the double effect (to take one example of a principle so widely used in medico-moral fields), could have been treated more fully and exemplified more diversely and minutely. For many years I have been teaching this and the other medico-moral questions to nurses, hospital nuns, premedics, doctors, married couples and priests. And I have found that these are hard, hard concepts to teach and to grasp. I’m afraid the reader would have to fall back on other books, in some cases, to get a clear understanding of things. I suggest that in the new edition the chapter called “A Few Fundamental Principles of Morality” be improved and enlarged. Then later in the book when these principles are applied to concrete cases, like fibroid tumors, etc., that they be applied more obviously and conclusively and being seen in action, can be better grasped—and used later by a smart reader.

Another instance of where a bit too much is taken for granted: On page 74 when speaking of abortions and the fifth commandment, the authors state that “No one will argue that human life does not exist in the fetus in utero.” To the contrary, many people in the medical, judicial and lay areas, do

question this fact. Moreover, many moderns deny that direct abortion (and direct sterilization) are wrong and also think that Catholics are merely quibbling and possibly hypocritical, when for serious reasons and under the fulfilled conditions of the double effect principle, they admit the legitimacy of indirect abortions (and indirect sterilizations). Today, in dealing with these controversial problems, it is necessary not only to cite the Church’s position, but also to give solid proofs, especially from reason, that the position is a sound one. And this, for the benefit of Catholic and non-Catholic.

Moreover, in the face of a critical non-Catholic world and a “show me” attitude of so many twentieth century Catholics, great care must be taken to define terms, to state not only moral principles and positions, but to establish them fully and then elaborate their valid applications.

An instance of the great need of this was shown when our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, recently spoke on marriage and its allied problems in an address—“The Apostolate of the Midwife.” Some of his statements were greatly misunderstood by the press and general public. As a result, in an address on family life, about two weeks later he wisely returned to his former speech and proceeded to minutely clarify some of his previous pronouncements, especially those concerning abortions, rhythm and so forth. When once such subjects are introduced, they must be fully treated.

Now this book, *Morals, Marriage and Medical Ethics*, is going to be carefully scrutinized. I noticed that only recently a weekly news magazine quoted this volume as the ultimate authority on a specific and delicate point. Such a book as this one, written by two such eminent authors, is going to be widely used and quoted, and so must establish its case thoroughly. Like it or not, the modern mind demands—“What do you hold and *why* do you hold it?”

In the chapter dealing with “Sexual Constitution,” there is stated on page 50 that: “Sex education in the schools, if it be given at all, should be given in conjunction with a course in physiology.” Many who are touchy about this subject of sex and the schools might be misled by this opinion. One can well agree that sex education may be given in a course on physiology, but there are actually other courses equally appropriate. An obvious course for the giving of education in sex and chastity is the religion course proper, or in college, a special ethics course, or one on marriage and matrimony. I do not think the authors would disagree, but their statement could well be misleading.

In conclusion, let me say that no one knows better than I, who have worked and taught in this field, how welcome this new book is. It is written by the ideal combination—an eminent and capable doctor and a Catholic priest, who is also a doctor. The criticism I give is looking toward the new edition and is based on my many years of teaching this type of matter, and

my struggle to put the ideas across and get the perfect book for those to whom I happen to be lecturing. Great credit is due the two men who took the time from their busy lives to turn out this very helpful, sound, and interesting volume. It will benefit many and be the cause of great good.

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