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Letters to the Editor ...

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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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 not 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 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 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. It is not your desire and attention to so muddy the waters in the understanding and application of the Natural Law, and if you do it with malice aforethought, all I can say is “May the 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 roadblock 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 you this roadblock and thus make the use of contraceptives morally acceptable. (Please do not think that I would not find it wise to practice medicine and Gynecology if I could morally prescribe contraceptives). And so you argue and debate at ethical 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 God’s 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 of 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" (Lucare Quarterly, Feb., 1970) to respond.

It is difficult to know where to begin my response 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-pee-e semantics." Without going into a lengthy correction of your explanation of the meaning of the natural law, I would like to point out the following 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 biologicalism 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 feature 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 operation of 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 purpose, in such an important matter, be known from the body alone? Is man not more than body? I think you should recognize the whole area of man's inter-sexual, inter-personal life. Are there not other equally important dimensions? I don't think you do justice to the question which has been the subject 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 have any serious philosopher, theologian or pope who has ever considered it "simple." On the contrary, they have seen some complex and well-documented indications of natural law (which has been adopted, for the most part, by the Church's magisterial teaching), employing both biological and philosophical knowledge of the day. Pope Paul certainly has new considered this a "simple" thing to understand. You may recall the new cardinal, for instance, after innumerable serious and legitimate cardinals, bishops, priests, theologians, and laity who has ever considered the natural law (which has been adopted, for the most part, by the Church's magisterial teaching), employing both biological and philosophical knowledge of the day. Pope Paul certainly has not considered this a "simple" thing to understand. You may recall the new cardinal, for instance, after innumerable serious and legitimate cardinals, bishops, priests, theologians, and laity who have considered the Catholic Church's natural law teachings (and specifically some of the tenets of its teaching). Pope John Paul I, for example, a serious study on the relation of birth control and the natural law, in a number of public statements in a period exceeding four years (1964-1968), Pope Paul expressed his agreement that the question of assistance to the advance of new knowledge and to the understanding of the complexities of the natural law can be solved by experts in the Commission of experts to listen to the studies so that the uncertainties of the faithful would be properly assisted, and continually stated that it 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, it was stated clearly in his encyclical Humanae Vitae. 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 the answer was absolutely definitive.

5. Finally, the major difficulty in your five-point explanation is the perennial one: How do you justify intervention in the use 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 intention. They do not deserve a reply, but I would like to add that you bring about your humorous passage as to the probable reaction of my colleagues is really off the wall. I can assure you that, from seeing my views as novel as "a flight to the wild blue yonder," I cannot expect them to say, almost to a man: "Waren 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 Lucare, February, 1970, (Vol. 37, No. 1) is the only issue I have read cover to cover in 15 years with the exception, an issue compiled through Temple University Medical School about 30 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 why God chose to liberate the Jews from bondage, a reply, "it was because only (the Jews) did not go to prostitutes." Thus, explained Doctor Levin, the Rabbis recog-
nized that charity 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

Dr. Hanlon, Director ACS
To Give Gerald Kelly Lecture

Dr. C. Rollins Hanlon will give the annual Gerald Kelly Lecture at the NFCG dinner in Chicago, Illinois, Sunday, June 21, 1970.

Dr. Hanlon is the Director of the American College of Surgeons, a post he has held since October 15, 1969. The Gerald Kelly Lecture Dinner will be held at 6:15 p.m. in the Beverly Room of the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago. All physicians, wives and guests are invited to attend. The dinner will be preceded by the celebration of Mass in the Astoria Room of the hotel at 4:30 p.m., and by a cocktail reception in the Bel Air Room at 5:15 p.m.

The dinner is again being held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Medical Association in Chicago from June 21-26.

The dinner is held in memory of Fr. Gerald Kelly, S.J., eminent Jesuit theologian, friend and advisor to many Catholic physicians throughout the country. This is the sixth consecutive year the dinner has been held.

Dr. Hanlon received his M.D. degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1938. He was on the faculty of Johns Hopkins from 1946 to 1950, when he was appointed Professor of Surgery and Chairman of the Department at St. Louis University Medical School, a post he held until he was appointed Director of the ACS. He is a member of several medical and surgical societies, and has served as President of the International Cardiovascular Society, St. Louis Surgical Society, St. Louis Cardiac Club, Society of Clinical Surgery, Society of University Surgeons, and Society for Vascular Surgery.