

CASES AND QUERIES

WHEN THE PILL IS A MEDICINE

If a woman has heavy or irregular periods or painful periods or sometimes has none, or if she has premenstrual tension or endometriosis, bleeding between periods, excessive hairiness or pimples (caused by an excess of androgenic hormones), or is excessively fat or is approaching the change of life, is she justified to take "pills" as therapeutic means though it will render conception impossible?

Some doctors say that not all abnormal occurrences in women are pathological cases. Now, is a doctor morally justified in prescribing any treatment he likes, and that includes the pill, as therapeutic means to correct these abnormalities?

1. Actually only one problem

Although two in formulation, only one problem is involved here. That of using the progestins when these drugs are the indicated medical remedy for sickness in women.

Many more instances of organic defects or malfunctioning, with various degrees of seriousness and discomfort, could have been easily added to the list above. The expression "abnormal occurrences in women" in the second paragraph is wide enough to include all modes of disturbances, whether they are called pathological or abnormal. As all doctors know, the great variety in these disturbances of somatic or psychological bearing will call for medical intervention.

2. Nature of the progestine drugs

This consideration is of utmost importance here. The pill, as the different pharmaceutical products of this kind is usually called, possesses

by nature a rather ingent power towards influencing the female organism and its functionality due to the potent elements in its composition. We may point to a threefold virtuality:

a. As an *anovulant*, the pill is a *contraceptive*. It shall cause sterility for as long as it is used. Herein lays the serious objection against the pill from the moral viewpoint.

b. On account of what they call *rebound effect*, this pharmaceutical product may be used as a *fertility pill*. Thus considered, the pill, far from being objectionable, may bring happiness to couples who long for children.

c. In view of the above mentioned potent effectivity of its elements, the pill may be used for curative purposes as a true medicine.

From the stand of a christian conscience, the morality of either prescribing the pill by doctors or of its use by the patient is conditioned by the nature of this drug and its *healing power* as well as by the intention of both doctor and patient. Just as a gun may be rightly used in self defense or wrongly in unjust killing, the pill may be a *licit* medical remedy or, conversely, a seriously *immoral* contraceptive practice.

3. "*Da locum medico*"

From the foregoing it becomes self evident that this whole business of discerning when the pill is a true medicine and when it is a mere contraceptive falls squarely on the competence of the medical profession. As the Scripture has prescribed long ago, "*Then let the doctor take over—the Lord created him too—and do not let him leave you, for you need him*" Eccli. 38:13. This is the attitude the priest should adopt.

Two pre-requisites, however, should, of necessity, qualify the doctor here, scientific competence and a *right* moral conscience. Thus the doctor will see to it that he prescribes a true medicine in that instance, and likewise that untoward effects from to prolonged use of the drug are eliminated.

4. *Doctor's and patient's intention*

This is an all important element in the moral aspect of this problem. All *contraceptive intention* must be excluded by both the doctor and by the patient and both should aim at remedying the ailment. The temporal sterilizing effect that will ensue should only be permitted in virtue of the serious necessity of curing the sickness. As Paul VI has stated in *Humanae vitae*:

"The Church does not at all consider illicit the use of therapeutic means truly necessary to cure diseases of the organism, even if an impediment to procreation, which may be foreseen, should result therefrom, provided such impediment is not, for whatever motive, directly willed." N. 15.

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ON THE ANTICIPATED MASS

The Mass attendance on Saturday evening in parishes or on a vigil of a day of obligation is a privilege for those who cannot attend the Sunday Masses. Is it valid for those who can attend Sunday Masses but because this person or persons prefer to have free time; either to go outing, or to the movies, or to sleep most of the day? Can a person say without sinning: "I am free to select which is more convenient for me?"

First let us see what is the *purpose* of this concession.

(1) The Sacred Congregation of Rites in its *Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery*, n. 28 says: "Where permission has been granted by the Apostolic See to fulfill the Sunday obligation on the preceding Saturday evening, pastors should explain the meaning of this permission carefully to the faithful and should ensure that the significance of Sunday is not thereby dimmed. The purpose of this concession is, in fact to enable Christians today to celebrate more easily the day of the Resurrection of the Lord." (*Bol. Ecl.*, Aug. 1967, p. 573, n. 28)