

## CASES AND QUERIES

### CONTRACEPTION AND NATURAL LAW

*If newer insights into the nature of the human person and his acts are discerned, or if there is a change in human social institutions, will this mean a change in the natural law that prohibits contraception? If it does, why can we not use this possibility of future change to exempt us now from the teaching of the Holy Father?*

### ANSWER

#### 1. The true motivation

The rational objection of those who oppose the encyclical *Humanae vitae* run mainly along two lines: the freedom of the individual conscience of the spouses and the concept of natural law. We call them rational objections, not that we do recognize in them any *rational* validity, but because the dissenters try to present their arguments with an appearance of scientific rationalization. Yet, the true motivation of all the clamours against the encyclical may be traced from two sources. One of them is an over-emphasis on sex and everything sexual in our hedonistic society. The other concerns the *capital* invested by the enterprises that manufacture not only the pill, but also all kinds of contraceptives. Thus, the papal ban on the pill and all contraceptives cannot but endanger *the gross* and *the net* profits of the millions involved in per yearly capital which backs the researches and the manufacturing of contraceptives. Hedonistic exigencies, however, and monetary speculation cannot be *rationalized* too easily.

The reader should never miss these two points when the validity of the Pope's teaching on the innate immorality of contraception is called into question.

## 2. The natural law

The question of our interrogator touches on the concept of natural law and the changing mores and institutions. Now, if there is a law which is the law of human nature, it is evident by definition, that human mores and institutions should conform to the norm of natural law. Any reversal or any attempt to change the concept of natural law with the purpose of making it agreeable to the successive changes of historical existence, will amount to the very denial of the natural law. Furthermore, natural law cannot be dispensed with simply because of men's fluctuating opinions, and still less, because its observance will impose a break on modern hedonism or monetary speculation, no matter how profitable it may be for the manufacturers and how palatable it may be for the users of contraceptives. It is for this reason that Paul VI in his Address of February 12th, 1969, said that "*many people today do not wish to hear any more of natural law*" (*L'Osservatore Romano, English Ed., Febr. 12, 1969, p. 1, 12*).

## 3. Natural law and Church's authority

a. The existence of natural law, as a basic tenet of human conduct is stressed by the Pope.

Says the Pope:

In relation to the biological processes, responsible parenthood means the knowledge and respect of their functions; human intellect discovers in the power of giving life biological laws which are part of the human person. (N. 10).

b. That the teaching authority of the Church does necessarily extend to the far ambits of natural law has been consistently upheld from Pentecost to Vatican II. In this regard all Catholics, especially the priests and the so-called "theologians", sin grievously against the most explicit Council's texts. Yet, the Church's teaching authority becomes a pressing obligation on the Pope and the bishops whenever the need of the faithful may demand a recourse to this natural source of knowledge as it is in the case of contraception, which is a sinful practice not

only for Catholics but for all men. Here again the text of the encyclical is very explicit:

"No believer will wish to deny that the teaching authority of the Church is competent to interpret even the natural moral law. It is, in fact, indisputable, as Our Predecessors have many times declared, that Jesus Christ, when communicating to Peter and to the Apostles His divine authority and sending them to teach all nations His commandments, constituted them as guardians and *authentic interpreters of all the moral law*, not only, that is, of the law of the gospel, *but also of the natural law*, which is an expression of the will of God, *the faithful fulfillment of which is equally necessary for salvation.*" (N. 4).

#### 4. Obligation to obey

From the foregoing it follows that the definite answer to our questioner is *No*. The possibility of future changes in human mores and social institutions coupled with possible future thinking on the entity of natural law cannot offer a valid exemption from the teaching of the Holy Father. Docility to the teachings of the Pope is a demand *sine qua non* for all who wish to be Catholic. To those who after the Council try to evade this sacred obligation we offer the following words of Fr. G. Chantraine, S.J., as a serious point of meditation:

"Theological procedure cannot be orthodox or apostolic without being docile. . . Now, such docility does not exist without communion with the apostles and their successors: it is a docility to the Spirit of the Church. . . And it would be vain to claim docility to the Spirit if one said: "I am docile to the Spirit, I remain in the Church, but I disobey the Pope and the bishops, or I just delay carrying out their decisions as pastors." . . . No Christian can, in fact, set himself up as judge of his own docility. . . ." (*L'Osservat. Rom.*, July 31, 1969, pp. 6-7).

QUINTIN MA. GARCIA, O.P.