

THE "PILL" AS A PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

Is the "PILL" as a preventive medicine the medically indicated treatment and morally sound means?

To many of us the "contraception" issue is a "worn-out issue," to quote the words of a school paper. Overt and direct opposition in the press, from the Catholic elements of the local or national community is neither frequent nor appealing; the sympathetic response is rather weak; this fact in no way should be construed as meaning that the teaching of the Church in the "Humanae Vitae" encyclical is being complied with in a spirit of authentic religious submission to the voice of the "visible" Christ, for *indirect opposition in the form of new easy ways of eluding its observance*" (n. 17) are being "discovered" every day by priests and professionals and somewhat foisted on married couples who fear a new pregnancy too much. The following case submitted to *Boletín Eclesiástico* for comment and evaluation illustrates what I mean. The case reads as follows:

"Experience shows — doctors say — that women who live *continence* — total or partial or periodical (women under rhythm) *tend to develop a certain sickness of the uterus*. Accordingly, these doctors feel justified in allowing *Every Woman, who is practicing rhythm, to change, and To Take The "Pill" For Medical Reasons*. Even if they are *Perfectly Healthy they are given the "Pill" as a precaution: Preventive Medicine.*"

It is not the part of the moral theologians to challenge the medical judgment, when there is question of the *purely* medical aspect of a given case. The scientific verification of certain facts and laws, which some claim to be certain others hold to be debatable, we leave to the competent specialists. It is indispensable, in this specific instance, that the theologian be offered full medical information, all pertinent facts, otherwise the application of the moral principles to the case submitted for com-

ment, may turn out to be faulty, if not completely erroneous. In the absence of this desired information, it has been necessary to consult a score or so of medical men, general practitioners and gynecologists on matters related to our case, avoiding all unnecessary and misleading ambiguities which in the field of conduct abound today.

Coming down to our point, let me state that *total continence*, much less *periodical continence* (under the rhythm) *is not injurious to one's general health*. As far as we know, total continence, much less periodical continence, does *not* cause, does *not* give rise to any disease of the uterus. The prescription therefore by a doctor of the "Pill," deriving its justification in its being a "*preventive medicine*" seems to be a rather gratuitous, scientifically unsound justification, and one becomes highly suspicious that the one thing aimed at, it is not the prevention of a disease of the uterus, but a much feared pregnancy, *possible* in married women under the rhythm. It becomes instantly amusing to think what good, practical purpose the *Humanae Vitae* encyclical would serve as well as the endless theological discussions centering on its binding force — *if and when* one claims, with an air of take it or leave it, that the most effective "contraceptive" known today can be resorted to and made use of by healthy married women on the basis that — "IT IS A PREVENTIVE MEDICINE! Then think for a moment of the business perspective: the "Pill" from being the drug with the *second largest* market in the world, netting in more than 15 millions of dollars to some chemical laboratories per year then it would become *second to none*, profit increasing accordingly and *good contemplative nuns* in some places in northern Europe could without scruples, pack up "the Pill," and thus earn a decent living out of what is considered today by Catholics a morally miserable job-objectively speaking! . . .

It is well known to non-professionals, that in the some cases of *existing* diseases of the uterus, the "Pill" is medically indicated and in no way off ends moral principles (H.V., n. 15); the principles of "totality" may find valid application here; but this is not the case at present. Rather the case under study falls under n. 14 par. 2, which reads: "Equally to be excluded, . . . is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman. *Similarly Excluded is Every Action* which either in *Anticipation of the Conjugal Act, . . . Proposes, Whether As An End*

or *As A Means To Render Procreation Impossible.*" Additional pertinent literature is given in footnotes 14 and 15 (fr H.V., St. Paul's Publication's edition).

The "two-fold effect" principle has valid application frequently in medical deontology; let us see if the prescription of the so well known synthetic hormone, as a preventive medicine, can find sufficient moral justification in the light of this principle. One is allowed to perform an action that will produce *two effects*, one *Good*, the other *Bad*, if and when

- a) the action itself is good, or at least, indifferent;
- b) the *good* effect is *directly* intended, and the bad one *just permitted*;
- c) *the good effect is not produced by the evil or bad effect*, and
- d) *there is proportionate reason for permitting the foreseen evil or bad effect, to occur.*

In applying these conditions to the case under study, one readily discovers that,

- a) the taking or use of the "Pill" is an action known as *indifferent*;
- b) the *good effect*, is *directly* willed, viz. the *prevention of a disease in the uterus*; what this disease is, we are neither informed, nor have we been successful in our search for enlightenment to find it out by consulting a score of medical men, several of them outstanding gynecologists. The *bad effect is the suspension of ovulation* and thereby the *prevention of conception*.
- c) the *Bad Effect* is *certain*, and it is the *Means Whereby* the "*Supposed*" *good effect is being produced*, viz. the *prevention of a disease in the uterus*. The end does not justify the means'... (Rom. 3:8)
- d) There is *no proportionate reason*, in fact, we see *no reason*, at all, as stated above. We have invited gynecologists to supplement this brief medico-moral evaluation of this case our consultant has submitted for comment, but they politely declined the invi-

tation: there is no medical indication calling for the administration of the drug in question, as a *preventive medicine*, they said. Interference with the natural physiological processes in women is sure to be followed by manifold side effects, which are being discovered from day to day, and which no sensible physician can *afford to ignore*; it is in the interest both physical, mental as well as moral, that medical men should inform their women patients about these side effects, in order that women may know the right course of action. Half-truths are often times worse than plain errors! One must appeal to physicians, who are Catholic in name and in deed to listen attentively to the paternal words of Paul VI: "We hold those physicians and medical personnel in the highest esteem who, in the exercise of their profession, *value above every human interest, the superior demands of their Christian vocations*. Let them persevere therefore in promoting on every occasion the discovery of solutions inspired by faith and right reason, let them strive to arouse this conviction and this respect in their associates. Let them also consider *as their proper professional duty the task of acquiring all the knowledge needed in his delicate sector*, so as to be able to give to those married persons who consult them *wise counsel and healthy direction*, such as they have the right to expect" (H.V., n. 27)

We are facing a law of God which to men and women in today's world easily appears to be difficult, and even impossible of actuation, but one must remember that when our actions conflict with our ethical principles oftentimes we seek for specious reasons which will enable us to regard the actions in question as a peculiar case altogether justified by the circumstances in which they are carried out. The so-called, mechanism of *rationalization* no where is so evident as *in the field of moral conduct*. When the ethical principle and the action do not entirely accord with each other, writes psychiatrist B. Hart, *we amend the former by a "series of rationalizations," until it is capable of posing as the explanation of the latter, and in this way to preserve our ideal of rationality.*"¹ Too

¹ The Psychology of Insanity by B. Hart, M.D. N.Y., 1938, pp. 83, 101

much rationalization is taking place on this matter of contraception, in clerical and professional circles, which in no way leads to enlarge or enlighten our knowledge of the objective problem, but rather paves the way to down right moral degeneration. In "The Linacre Quarterly" August, 1969, p. 202, G.C. Tom Nabore, M.D., writes: When will the American Catholic ever learn to stop trying to sneak in the back door like a dog, with his tail tucked between his hind legs when it comes to moral principles that are inconvenient?" These are strong words, indeed. Catholics through-out the world may well take time out and ponder — what they are doing...

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