

CONTRACEPTION AND REALITY

GERMAIN G. GRISEZ

Catholics have heard a great many arguments during the past three years about contraception. Most of them have tried to show why the Church should abandon its traditional teaching that contraception is always wrong. Perhaps the most forceful case for contraception is one seldom stated in so many words. The argument goes something like this.

Contraception is necessary. Its use is inevitable. It is being practiced by increasing numbers of Catholics, and no matter what the Pope says, it will continue to be practiced. To continue to condemn contraception will only alienate many from the Church who would otherwise wish to remain faithful Catholics. In today's world, with sexual stimuli all around us, continence is out of the question. Moreover, the present rate of population increase simply cannot be maintained much longer. Eventually, the Catholic Church will have to abandon its traditional position on the morality of contraception. The counsel of common sense realism is to evacuate this untenable position now—thus cutting the Church's losses.

I do not think we can deny that this argument has a certain validity. Contraception appears desirable because it offers an apparently effective solution to a real difficulty. There is no use denying the reality of the difficulty, nor is there any use in imagining that moral condemnation of the practice of contraception will by itself help to alleviate the difficulty.

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The difficulty is easily sketched. Catholic couples feel cornered, or caught between the two jaws of a pincers. The one side is the tremendous increase in potential family size. If *nothing* is done to limit births, with modern medicine an average couple could easily find itself with twenty or more children. In the old days, some couples experienced twenty or more conceptions, but perhaps only three or four children survived to adulthood. Even if large families are better than small ones, families of twenty and more are economically and psychologically absurd.

Traditional Teaching

On the other side is the traditional teaching of the Church, condemning every means of limiting births except abstinence—although permitting intercourse during the infertile period if abstinence is practiced. Sexual abstinence is not easy for many people. Those for whom it is very easy are probably abnormal! Still, one can put

up with what is hard and painful if the reason for enduring is clear. But that is not the case here.

Catholics who try to abide by the teaching of the Church find themselves increasingly isolated. Not only non-Catholic friends and neighbors, but many fellow Catholics — including even priests, theologians, and some bishops—consider the traditional position false. Catholics with a sense of civic responsibility wonder if the re-

jection of contraception does not sabotage the general welfare by threatening the world with misery and starvation. And it is only human to think that one should enjoy what everyone else is enjoying. What difference does a little pill make? How can a bit of rubber send me to hell?

The predicament in which Catholic couples find themselves is only accentuated by their sincerity and desire to live good Christian lives. The ideal that marriage should provide an intimate union of love has been widely adopted. Each partner is more responsive to the other's feelings and desires, more eager to satisfy and to please. At the same time, few Catholics are willing to live continuously in a state of sin; most wish to draw closer to Christ by receiving Him more frequently in the Eucharist. Thus the old solution—sin during most of the year, timely penance at Easter—is no longer applicable.

I think that the first thing to be said about the argument based on common sense realism is that such realism is not always wisdom. "Reality" is a tricky concept. We imagine reality to *be there*, just itself, regardless of what we make of it. But our notions of reality actually vary depending upon what we care about. A false face is a real mask, a false friend is a real traitor, a false statement is a real assertion. A realistic solution to the Jewish problem—according to Hitler—was genocide; a realistic solution to racial tensions in the U.S.—according to the Supreme Court of the late nineteenth century—was "separate but equal"; a realistic way to meet standards of quality in production is to lower the standards. This last is verified almost every time one buys a new appliance or an automobile.

Believing Christians were not the first to promote the practice of contraception. Of course, almost every society and culture has known some means of contraception, abortion or both. But the modern effort to *promote* contraception was launched by non-believing humanists in the nineteenth century. Secular culture in the West for over a century had been losing more and more of its previous Christian character. The dominant value systems among the intellectual elite were no longer Christian. Thinkers like Mill and Spencer viewed man as an accidental result of evolutionary process. Man had been thrown up out of the pit of nature by one of

its periodic, senseless eruptions. Standing on the slippery rim, it was man's business to take control, to dominate and master nature with technology, to see to it that the pit from which he had been cast up did not swallow him again.

In this perspective, fertility is a *natural* phenomenon, much as disease is a *natural phenomenon*. Man's business is to find the simplest and most effective way of controlling such natural phenomena, so that they will not interfere with man's ability to satisfy his wants, to gain mastery over nature, and to save himself from being mastered by it. Contraception is the obvious, realistic technique.

"New Insights" — Again

It was only after the Protestant faithful had learned the practice of contraception from its non-Christian promoters that the Protestant churches and theologians asked themselves what to do about it. Previously they had been maintaining the common Christian tradition. Now, a change seemed necessary. In order to bring about the change in official position, Protestant theologians rethought the traditional doctrine of marriage and developed some "new insights" into marriage and sexuality. Many of these "new insights" have reappeared in the works of Catholics arguing in favor of contraception.

But if we look at the record of history "realistically," we must wonder whether the Protestant approval of contraception was as wise a move as it appeared to be at the time. Then it seemed that the moral judgment on contraception could be detached from the whole body of Christian moral teaching concerning sexual conduct and the immunity of innocent life to direct attack. Now it is clear that the approval of contraception implies a relaxation of standards of sexual morality in general, and a weakening of the ground on which the battle must be fought in defense of innocent life. More and more Protestant moralists embrace a "new morality" that permits—at least in certain circumstances—fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and abortion.

When Protestant churchmen approved contraception, they thought their people would have less reason to part company with the Christian Church if this obstacle were removed. But, on the whole, their churches have

not gained ground. The Protestant search for relevance to the present has only caused the loss of the real relevance Christianity always has to the world: that it offers salvation, reconciliation of sinful man to God, the coming of His kingdom, the transformation of all human things to a divine meaning and value. Those who "progressed to" secular standards of morality found very soon that they had left behind that supernaturalism that is the whole meaning and value of the Gospel.

The Catholic Church condemns contraception on the basis of an unbroken tradition that extends back to its very beginning. Of course, one does not find an explicit condemnation of contraception in sacred scripture. But, then, one does not find an explicit statement of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption there either. What one does find in sacred scripture is a complete, integrated view of sexual behavior and of the rights of innocent life.

Those who favor contraception say that the Church Fathers who rejected it were influenced by pagan philosophy. John Noonan has developed this argument at length in his book, *Contraception*. Moreover, according to Noonan, the condemnation became ingrained because procreation was repeatedly attacked by heretics; the great Catholic theologians—such as Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure—could not see their way around the old position because they had the erroneous idea that sexual intercourse is only completely cleared of guilt when it is done with procreative purpose.

While one must give Noonan credit for his scholarly work, this historical framework for understanding the problem does seem rather questionable considered from a Catholic point of view. Doesn't it seem more plausible to conclude that the Church Fathers rejected contraception precisely *because* they found it to be in conflict with the spirit and the teaching of the Gospel? After all, the Fathers who condemned contraception were both Latin and Greek; they made use of different philosophic instruments in their theological work; and they all made very selective use of pagan sources, approving what seemed to them in consonance with the Gospel, and rejecting the rest. For Saint Augustine and Saint Jerome, for Saint John Chrysostom and Saint

Ambrose, Christian teaching provided a criterion for judging the pagan doctrine that passed for science and philosophy in their day. They did not have such an inferiority complex about their Christianity that they felt bound to cut and stretch it to fit some other "wisdom."

Moreover, Noonan is mistaken when he claims that Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure consider procreation the only valid purpose for sexual intercourse. Both of these great theologians explicitly state that for married couples intercourse for the sake of fidelity is good. Saint Thomas states the position as follows:

When the spouses come together for the sake of procreating an offspring, or so that they may fulfill for each other the mutual commitment of their marriage vow, which pertains to fidelity, then they are completely cleared of sin.

Note that here Aquinas is speaking of the couple together: "then *they* are completely cleared of sin." Noonan persistently confuses this with the case in which one partner extorts intercourse from the other by using the threat that otherwise he will go elsewhere for his sex. Aquinas rather understandably holds that in such cases the demanding partner is guilty at least of some sin.

Preventing a New Person

Turning to the population question, the first thing to remark is that the Catholic Church never condemned contraception on demographic grounds. Contraception was not rejected as if it were a violation of the injunction, "Increase and multiply," but because it is a violation of a prohibition: "Do not prevent the beginning of the life of a new person." This prohibition, expressed in various verbal formulae, always has been considered analogous to the prohibition of abortion, though distinct from it.

If we are going to be realistic, we must recognize that when excessive rates of population growth occur, they are limited in various ways: by euthanasia and infanticide, by abortion and sterilization, by methods whose mode of action is still unknown (*e.g.*, the IUD), by contraception, by disease, starvation, and war, by delayed marriage, by restraint within marriage. In diverse combinations in various situations these factors have limited population growth and will continue to limit it. However, these

facts by themselves are not adequate basis for determining the Christian attitude toward any one of these limiting factors.

Vatican II has made clear the Catholic Church's stand against abortion, even from the moment of conception. The Council also took a very firm stand against governmental pressure to compel couples to limit their families. Yet abortion and methods which are possibly, even probably, abortifacient—for example, the IUD—are being widely used to control births. Indeed, most demographers, including even some Catholics who favor contraception, claim that effective results cannot be obtained without these methods which the Church has condemned as recently as the Council, and without government "persuasion" of a type that the Church has rejected. Thus the Church's stand on contraception is probably going to have little effect on the population problem. Certainly the Catholic Church is not going to promote contraception actively; the strongest imaginable approval of it would only put it in the category of "practically doubtful."

There is something the Church can do that would help, however. That is to support research to perfect the rhythm method of using the infertile period. The Church can also provide better psychological education and moral formation so that couples could abstain more joyously and in a way that promotes real conjugal love. Further, the Church can realistically encourage planning within its proper sphere: the production of food, the rectification of injustices in the distribution of the world's goods, the applications of technology to serve the family rather than the perversion of the family to the demands of a mindlessly developing technology.

Yet the heart of the argument based on common sense realism does not seem so much concerned with the actual problems presented by population growth as with using these problems as a vehicle for whipping up public hysteria. Sometimes Catholic proponents of contraception give the very clear impression that they would be loath to see anything done that would effectively aid couples in real difficulties, because then there would be less excuse for abandoning the Church's traditional teaching on contraception. Thus "population explosion" is a slogan and a symbol, and the

very persons who use it do nothing to support efforts to establish clinics to help couples learn what is known about the use of the infertile period—the rhythm method which the Church approves.

The movement in favor of contraception is pointed to by its proponents as evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit who established the *sensus fidelium*, which the *magisterium* of the Church (that is, the Pope and bishops as teachers of Catholic doctrine) must rather follow than guide.

Whose Spirit?

The hysteria in favor of contraception does evidence the working of a spirit, but one may doubt that it is the Holy Spirit. The spirit seems more that of a mob, of a mass movement. In our time we have seen public opinion too often stirred to a fever pitch to place much confidence in it. One example can illustrate the point. During World War II, the British and American air forces—at first in reaction to German excesses—adopted a policy of strategic, saturation bombing. Non-military objectives were obliterated along with military targets. Almost all the public in Britain and America knew of this policy and supported it without reservation. Nevertheless, a strategic bombing survey carried out after the war revealed that this policy, adopted on the grounds of "military necessity," was not even very effective from a strictly military viewpoint. The pinpoint bombing of targets very carefully selected for their technological importance (something done only toward the end of the war) was much more effective.

Where were Catholics and other Christians while the innocent were being obliterated uselessly? Where were the priests, moral theologians, bishops? For the most part they were with the government, blindly approving whatever was claimed to be militarily expedient. They were cheerleading in the gigantic "patriotic" rally of wartime public opinion. One moral theologian, John C. Ford, S. J., published an article while the war was still going on, while the bombs were still falling, pointing to the immorality of obliteration bombing as it was being practiced. The Catholic "liberals" of the day gave him little support.

Those who think of themselves as Catholic "liberals" today recognize that his position was right, but they

hate to give him credit for it, because Fr. John Ford happens to be one of the staunchest opponents of contraception in the whole world of Catholic theology. Then Fr. Ford was defending the lives of innocent human persons against direct attack; today he is defending the beginning of the life of human persons against contraceptive prevention. He saw beyond the hysterical mob then, because he stood taller and straighter and on higher ground. He sees beyond the hysterical mob now, because he favors life and openness to it, and because he sees the implications of a will set against human life, even in its very beginning.

Those who point to public opinion polls, and call these the *sensus fidelium*, often argue that the *magisterium* should bow to this opinion as an authentic expression of the will of God. The argument would not be surprising if it were offered only by Protestants; what is amazing is that it is presented by theologians who still claim to be Catholics. They seem to forget that while we share the same Holy Writ, the same reason, and the same experience as our separated brethren, who are genuine and devout Christians, Catholics do have a peculiar commitment: we submit to the *magisterium*, which guarantees that the integrity of the Christian tradition shall be maintained.

Christ revealed Himself to a few, who were sent to others, and ultimately to us. And it is only *by hearing* that we believe. Christ assured the Church He would remain with her until the end of time. The Pope and the other bishops, in their official capacity as teachers of Catholic doctrine, embody this assurance in an effective way, and put it into practice in the world today. Thus it is absurd to ask the *magisterium* itself to determine what is required by Catholic moral doctrine on the basis of factors common to us and to other Christians—on the basis of factors common, in great part, even to unbelievers.

In a system of values acceptable to unbelievers, the rejection of contraception may seem absurd. After all, this rejection implies the necessity of abstinence and hence one who refuses contraception is choosing the difficult and uncertain in preference to the painless and efficient.

But Christians should not be scandalized at the necessity of accepting as the will of God what seems absurd. Christ crucified was and remains an

absurdity to the Greeks. We also see in Saint Paul's epistles how totally unrealistic Christian morality was in the context of the pagan world. The Corinthians, the Galatians, the Ephesians, and the others to whom Saint Paul addressed his letters were, after all, Christian communities. Yet the apostle found it necessary to warn repeatedly against a list of sins that might make up a good "action program" for the advocates of the "new morality." "Do not live as unbelievers who know not God," Saint Paul had to warn. The Christian was to be different. Christian morality truly was a new morality for men renewed in Christ. And it was first preached to a world in which only a handful of people did not immediately see it as ridiculous.

Those Absurd Christians

Christian life was to be marked both by love and by respect for the body, especially for the sexual power. The pagan world had never hit the proper balance. Saint Paul found it "without compassion, without restraint." The pagan world soon began to persecute Christians who would not put a pinch of incense upon a pagan altar, and some Christians then asked themselves what difference a pinch of incense would make. After all, God would not send anyone to hell for a little thing like that. The world of today is not so different from the pagan world of which he was speaking. The Christian today who wishes to live according to his vocation to divinity also faces persecution, though of a more subtle sort. He is made to feel silly.

The Christian life of love and respect for the body implies the whole Christian sexual morality. An attitude of respect for bodily life, even for the very beginning of life, is central to this morality. Contraception is not wrong because it involves a bit of rubber or a pill. It is wrong because it implies a will to prevent the beginning of life.

Abstinence, rejected by the world as inhuman because it is hard, allows one to respect what he would not prevent. Of course, there is a sense in which sexual abstinence is inhuman. It is hardly possible to us fallen men without severe consequences unless we develop the virtue of chastity with the help of divine grace. If we consider all that would be implied in under-

taking the development of this virtue, it is indeed easier for the individual couple to use contraceptives. It is easier for physicians and counselors to promote their use. It is easier to believe that the technique will work than that the Christian ideal can be realized. The issue is one of faith: Is grace really sufficient?

In continually reaffirming the traditional Christian teaching on the inviolability of the beginning of life and the value of marital chastity, the *magisterium* of the Church has been right. But in presenting the Church's teaching, theologians have sometimes put too much reliance on inadequate rational arguments. Moreover, the theologians have not explained the Church's mind sufficiently by putting the precept forbidding contraception into its full doctrinal context: the context of love and respect for the body.

Nevertheless, Christian marriage has made progress. *Casti Connubii* rejected egoism and pointed toward a more interpersonal and sacramental concept of marriage. Today, more couples pursue sanctity together, and find their love a help, rather than an obstacle, as they reach toward God.

Certainly the Catholic Church cannot now merely reaffirm the traditional condemnation of contraception. She must add new, affirmative teaching. She can draw on the resources of modern psychology to develop more effective formation in virtue aiming toward new heights of holiness in Christian marriage. This aspect of the work of the Redemption apparently has not yet reached the perfection God wishes. The present crisis is salutary, because it awakens us and forces us to become clearer in our understanding of the Christian ideal, so that we can move forward toward its more perfect fulfillment.

The Catholic reaffirmation of faith in the Christian ideals of conjugal love and chastity will encounter the ridicule of the world. Moreover, it almost certainly will provoke the apostasy from the Church of those who thought they were Catholics, but who came to accept the world's standards of reality, of truth, and of love. Those who live by the realism of this world always will find Christianity irrelevant. But if the Church of Christ were to concur in the realism of the world it would become nothing but salt that had lost its savor.

(To Be Continued)

Part II

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“Chastity is not the suppression of sexual impulses. Chastity is the curbing of the erotic spirit . . . the clear vision that pierces the clouds of bad faith by which we blind ourselves to our own weakness.”

The argument about the morality of contraception cannot really get anywhere until the problem of the Catholic family is considered in the concrete. But as soon as one tries to be concrete and realistic, it is clear that there is no one problem, but many problems, perhaps as many as there are families.

Take the young couple with no children, the wife working, the husband trying to finish his higher education. Here are two persons, very much in love, full of natural vitality, who find great satisfaction, consolation, and an important stimulus to affection in their sexual relationship. They want children, and they want to bring them up well.

But not just now. Later, please. A baby now would be a real disaster. How would Joe ever finish his degree if Anne had to quit working? His fellowship wouldn't provide enough for the three of them. His own expenses are about all he can carry.

Then there is Beatrice and Bob. They began married life with a spirit of generosity and reliance on Providence. They had a child, then another. They tried rhythm. Somehow it didn't work. Maybe they didn't understand quite how it worked. Or maybe it was that night after the party when . . . Now they have been married three years, or five, or eight. They have four children (or so) and feel it is time to stop. The car seats six comfortably. The bedrooms are all occupied. The budget is already balanced, and raises are not going to keep coming indefinitely. But as the kids grow they seem to get more and more expensive.

Continued overleaf

Beatrice says she has her hands full now. Her varicose veins bulge, but more important, her nerves are bulging too. The children are about all she can manage without some help. She is cross with them all the time as it is. She doesn't have much time for herself anymore. She used to like to play piano, but when can she practice? The baby is fed at six; after the other children are in bed she talks with her eldest, a girl, who is just going into what seems a rather unbalanced stage of adolescence. Bob tries to help with the children. But his work keeps him tied up a good part of the time. Besides, he feels he needs a little time for recreation; so he goes golfing or bowling once in a while.

Beatrice and Bob don't look at sex as just-marrieds do. For them it is more an ordinary part of life and of their relationship. It has clicked into place, like a lot of other things. No problems. Unless they don't have intercourse on the regular schedule. When Beatrice was sick for a month a couple of years back, Bob found it mighty tough. He is a faithful type, but by the end of that month he found himself looking at other women in a more than esthetic way. He was certainly glad when she was better—for all kinds of reasons, of course, but that night-life got back to normal was not the least of them.

More Serious Problems

There is another couple, with more serious problems. Perhaps they have nine children and are expecting the tenth. Everything is just about at the breaking point. The budget is exhausted and so are they. The house is bursting at the seams, and so are everyone's clothes. Life is a constant struggle to keep abreast of the tide of absolutely urgent problems. Any illness or accident, any special trouble with one of the children just about puts Bonnie out of her mind. Bill gave up thinking about college for the children years ago. Now he is worried only about next month's bills.

Or perhaps, to make things worse, one of the children is seriously defective, and requires much more time and attention than a normal child would. Perhaps one of the couple is chronically ill or psychologically unstable.

Many a couple such as Bonnie and Bill love each other deeply and ten-

derly—but they hardly ever have time to be together. Others never seem to find real satisfaction and peace except when they embrace each other in sexual intercourse. In such cases it may be really wrong—*morally* irresponsible—to have a baby (or, another baby). Yet such couples find it very hard to face the prospect of abstaining from sexual intercourse for a long time. And many of them have tried what they thought was rhythm and found that it did not work.

The Alchemy of Bad Faith

The worst effects are psychological. Both husband and wife are frustrated, so they fight with each other and take out their bad temper on the children. They are afraid of pregnancy, so they worry, and their nervousness takes the fun out of what sex the schedule allows. They may even feel somewhat guilty about practicing rhythm, and wonder why it would be any worse to use a simpler, more efficient method.

From data like these, from weighing the actual experiences of Catholic couples, a widespread opinion has arisen that sexual intercourse is necessary for conjugal love and that contraception is necessary to make this intercourse possible. This opinion seems to some almost a self-evident truth. It is *assumed* to be so, without question.

Now, even if the assumption were true, I do not believe it would justify contraception. But it seems to me that the assumption is, itself, false.

Jean Paul Sartre has made at least one genuine contribution to our understanding of human behavior. It is his clarification of the concept of "bad faith." Usually, we think of bad faith as the opposite of good faith. If I cash a check, thinking it is valid, and am afterwards told it is a forgery, I may say: "But I gave it to you in good faith." "Good faith" here evidently means, merely, "honest intent"; "bad faith" is dishonest intent. But by "bad faith" Sartre means more than this.

Suppose a young lady is having lunch with her employer, a married man. She does not *intend* with full deliberation and consent to have an affair with him. Still, she accepts the invitation, although it is not strictly necessary for business reasons. She doesn't really think very clearly about the meaning of what she is doing. During the lunch, the host suggests a

bottle of champagne—"to celebrate," he says smilingly. What is being celebrated is not clear at all, but the young lady thinks to herself that there is nothing wrong in having a glass of wine with lunch. Toward the end of the luncheon, her companion places his hand over hers, on top of the table. She doesn't pull her hand away. Of course she still does not intend to have an affair with this man. But he might take it badly if she reacted to his "friendly gesture."

The young lady in this typical episode is acting in "bad faith." The bad faith does not consist in her deceiving *another*, but at a certain level in deceiving herself. At one level she is an honest woman. Though on the road toward adultery, she would vigorously deny that she intends the episode to end that way. At this other level, however, her intelligence, her will, her feelings, her imagination are shaping her conduct so as to give it an unmistakable significance and direction. Thus there is a certain division of the mind; one part is, in fact, deceiving the other.

We all do this kind of thing constantly. If we have done something we know and admit to have been wrong, we are likely to say that we could not help ourselves, that the act was the only alternative, that it was "necessary," that we were, somehow, forced to do what we did. All of these excuses, if valid, would mean that we literally had no choice at all. In that case, however, we would not have acted; rather, something would have acted upon us. We feel much better, in other words, if our unreadiness to make a sacrifice is transformed by the alchemy of bad faith into the sheer impossibility of doing other than we did.

An Unfree Gift

Is sexual intercourse *necessary* for conjugal love? One thing is certain: marital intercourse does not always express and cultivate love, though that is the ideal. For many couples, even happily married ones, marital intercourse is simply a function that is taken for granted. In other cases the husband and wife may still engage in intercourse after they have begun to hate each other. Couples who arrive at a good sexual adjustment may find other obstacles to unity. They may find they are good partners in bed, but not good companions for life.

Divorce rates do not seem to be lower among those who practice contraception.

If sexual intercourse is going to express and foster true conjugal love, it must be chosen with the utmost freedom for the sake of love. If a person desires sexual release in such a way that foregoing the release leads to trouble, then coitus can hardly be a free and generous gift of self. If one were giving himself in full freedom, one also would have the freedom of self-mastery.

Whence, then, the plausibility of the opinion that conjugal intercourse is necessary for the maintenance of conjugal love? The impression of necessity arises from experiences such as those briefly described above. Couples claim that abstinence would ruin their marriages. Many believe that "science has proven" that sexual abstinence will cause psychological illness. The myth is seldom questioned, but in psychological literature there is next to nothing on the topic.

The Ambiguous Lover

The ideal of conjugal love, on the other hand, is not simply drawn from experience. It is an ideal constructed by imagination and by reflection. It draws on Hollywood, the Bible, the marriage manual from the lending library, and a pre-Cana conference. How sound the idea is—that all depends. But that is not our concern at the moment. Rather, we are asking what relation there is between conjugal love, defined by an ideal, and the felt "necessity" for sexual intercourse.

I contend that if one's ideal of conjugal love is at all Christian, the felt "necessity" is not consonant with such love, but, rather, is at odds with it. Love cannot be a compulsion upon the self and thus a restriction of freedom; rather, it must be an act of the self in full expression of its freedom.

Contraceptive intercourse, so often proclaimed *necessary* for the sake of genuine conjugal love, is at best an ambiguous act of love. Is it the person saying, "I love you"? Or is it a conditioned reflex saying, "I demand release"? The force of an animal impulse that cannot be curbed by reason is something quite different from free self-donation in authentic conjugal love.

Marriage is a communion of fidelity in which a man and woman bind

themselves together with an openness to the possibility of transcending themselves in the creation of new life. Not every marriage need be fertile to have this meaning. But this meaning must be respected in every marriage. Otherwise, the difference between communion and exploitation vanishes: to lose oneself in another, except to co-create something beyond oneself, is to seek one's own destruction; to take another to oneself, except to help the other to give, is to absorb the other into oneself.

Because man is complex, human love is complex. All true human love has a bodily aspect, because the human person *is* a body. The difference between false love and true love is not the difference between physical love and spiritual love. "Eroticism" can be used in a good sense; I prefer to reserve it for false love. Erotic love, in the sense in which I use the term, is primarily an impulse of the spirit. It is the impulse to obliterate distinction, to assimilate and absorb the other—or to melt oneself into the other, and so be absorbed and assimilated. This process is, obviously, destructive rather than creative. Such an impulse informs a certain understanding of sexual intercourse, and makes that intercourse seem necessary for love. This spirit of eroticism joins forces with a conditioned physical and mental disposition that all too many couples bring to marriage.

Automatism Pursued

Human sexuality is very plastic. It can easily be used as a channel to release other frustrated desires. The child often finds it easier to secure some gratification from the genitals than to pursue more human, but more difficult goods. Thus, mature self-mastery, which belongs to freedom, is very often blocked by a genital automatism which, in man's wounded nature, arises from wrong conditioning. The pseudo-sexual drive often begins, then, with habitual masturbation. But it persists (or, sometimes, begins) in premarital unchastity. This same perversion of genuine sexual love finally becomes a habit of regular, almost automatic acts of coitus—and it is this habit, informed by the erotic spirit, that makes contraception seem necessary.

I think that couples realize, at a certain level of consciousness, that true conjugal love and the necessity

of intercourse have very little to do with one another. But the two are linked in a certain confusion that seems to evidence "bad faith" in Sartre's sense. Many who defend contraception are emotional on the subject because they are protecting themselves from seeing this, but they do not know that they are doing so.

Beyond Eroticism

Ideally, a married couple should not feel that sexual intercourse is necessary. They should not feel compelled to engage in it. It should be an available option, a way of communicating with each other, a way of celebrating the pervasive communion of fidelity in which they live, a means of cooperating in the initiation of new life. Sexual intercourse need not be all of these every time, but it should be freely chosen for one or more of these reasons. If a particular conjugal act is not chosen precisely to give life, still it must be a true conjugal act. Since marriage is not an erotic merger but a cooperation in self-transcendent creativity, each act that celebrates the unity of marriage and communicates the affection peculiar to it must keep the form of the act destined for creation. A true conjugal act must be open to procreation, so far as the couple is concerned, not closed against it.

The remarks of Vatican Council II (*Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, No. 51) must be understood in this context. "The faithful exercise of love and the full intimacy of life is hard to maintain" if abstinence is necessary. Hard—but possible; and the more perfect the couple's love, the more perfectly it will be maintained. The intimacy of married life need not be "broken off." A married couple need not live like brother and sister. A married couple may kiss and embrace, touch and be touched, perceive and be perceived in the most intimate conjugal way without engaging in genital stimulation. We must be perfectly frank with ourselves, and not fall into "bad faith." The whole issue is whether we are prepared to *forego* the experience of orgasm, and this issue would never arise if we were not moved by an impulse quite different from the freedom of love.

That is why the Council Fathers state in the same paragraph that the problems of married couples cannot be solved "unless the virtue of con-

jugal chastity is sincerely cultivated." The suggestion that the virtue of chastity can contribute to a generally acceptable solution to the problems of married couples is likely to draw ridicule from the "realists." That chastity is possible to the average man—this seems to run counter to the facts of experience. However, experience also makes war seem inevitable, yet every humane person hopes that the words of Pope Paul, "No more war! War never again!" will come true.

If we are going to imagine that contraception is *necessary* for married couples, we must remember that married couples sometimes must be separated, or must abstain from sex for reasons of health, or for psychological reasons, or around the time of childbirth, or sometimes for a long time during pregnancy. What is "necessary" for them? Sometimes a woman finds herself pregnant due to contraceptive failure. What is necessary for her?

Love Requires Chastity

In all these cases, what is necessary is the sincere cultivation of the virtue of conjugal chastity. In most cases, the virtue should have been cultivated long before marriage.

Chastity is not the suppression of sexual impulses. It is not the separation of love from its bodily expression. It is not simply the avoidance of sexual acts. Chastity is the curbing of the erotic spirit and the overcoming of the automatism that serves that spirit. It is the clear vision that pierces the clouds of bad faith by which we blind ourselves to our own weakness.

For the sake of love, the virtue of chastity is necessary, and for the sake of love it can develop. Not without some lapses, perhaps, not without effort, not without education. Certainly not without grace and confidence in God. Here is the true issue: do we truly believe that divine grace is sufficient to free us for genuine love? It is a question of faith.

I expect two objections to be raised to this view of the relationship between contraception and conjugal love. The first will be that rhythm also prevents conception, but it is permitted as moral, while contraception is rejected as immoral. Why the distinction between two diverse techniques for attaining the same result?

For someone who already has accepted contraception, clearly there

will be little moral difference between it and rhythm. But the matter seems quite different if one rejects contraception, and views marital intercourse in the way outlined above. In this framework, an act of sexual intercourse will be a genuine conjugal act only to the extent that it is chosen with full freedom as an expression of love open to self-transcending creativity.

Imitation of Sex

The practice of rhythm must be viewed primarily as a life of abstinence, required of a couple by their moral obligations toward each other and their children—those born and those to be born. If the times of infertility can be recognized with sufficient accuracy to permit intercourse without irresponsibility creeping in, then there seems to be no reason why such a couple should not choose intercourse during these times.

For someone who views sexual intercourse as necessary the problem is simply one of suppressing its potential fertility; then contraception and rhythm become different means for attaining the same end. For someone who views intercourse as a free option, the question concerns the value of choosing intercourse or omitting it. There is no question then of engaging in contraceptive intercourse, for that would not be a marital act, but only an imitation of it. This truth is implicitly admitted even by proponents of contraception, since its most ardent promoters have worked untiringly to make contraceptive intercourse approximate true marital intercourse ever more closely—thus making the work of "bad faith" a little easier.

Another objection bound to be raised at this point is that contraception does not really attack anything of value anyway. Thus it is silly to argue against it as if something important were at stake. We must face the question: what does contraception really attack?

When a couple begins to fear that they may be sterile, what do they want? Do they want examinations and tests? To answer the question, one need only consider what they say to their physician: "We want to have a baby, but something is wrong. We have been trying, but with no success."

When someone practices contraception, what does he want? Is it merely to interfere with an insignificant physiological process? What such a person

says to his physician is: "I certainly am not going to stop having intercourse, but I don't want to have a baby (another baby) if I can help it."

Of course, a person who wishes to prevent the beginning of the life of a new person must interfere in some way with the normal generative process. But the whole *meaning* of the interference is simply to prevent conception, to deprive the conjugal act of its power of generating a new life, to prevent a new person from coming to be. Far from being necessary for conjugal love, the attitude that informs such an act is altogether incompatible with the communion of fidelity. The two co-exist only at the cost to some degree of the self-deception of "bad faith."

The initiation of a person's life is one with his living, just as a departure on a journey is one with the traveling. For this reason, contraception does attack human life—not of course life already existing—but life in its very beginning. Even this attack is a violation of what is sacred, a profanation of conjugal love, and the first step toward its total obliteration.

The will to prevent conception is a will turned against human life in advance, a will so opposed to life that it chooses to anticipate and effectively prevent a new person from coming to be. That is why St. John Chrysostom thought this sin even worse than murder.

The Finger of God

One's conception is his origin, the beginning of his life, his link to the community of men before him, the first of all the gifts he receives from his parents, his first relationships with God, who stretches forth His creative hand and (as in the creation of Adam) gives both life and an eternal destiny with the touch of His omnipotent finger. This is what contraception attacks.

Thus the issue involved in the argument about contraception is not whether a pill or a bit of rubber will send one to hell. It is whether a mechanical impulse informed by the spirit of eroticism will overcome genuine conjugal love to such an extent that the creativity implied in every true marriage's communion of fidelity shall be denied and belied. Can love express itself while it pushes away the finger of God lest His touch give life?

(To Be Continued)

Part III

CONTRACEPTION AND REALITY

GERMAIN G. GRISEZ

This is the last of a three-part series of articles by Dr. Grisez. Germain G. Grisez is a professor at Georgetown University and author of Contraception and the Natural Law.

“ . . . the familiar personalist arguments for contraception are, in fact, an expression of a basically anti-Christian dualism that separates body from spirit and despises and denigrates the former in favor of the latter.”

Advocates of contraception often style themselves as *personalists*. They claim that the condemnation of contraception rests on a faulty understanding of human nature.

According to these “personalists,” traditional Christian theology was guilty of three important errors: 1) it idolized the physiologically normal process of insemination by making a moral standard of the process; 2) it divided man dualistically into body and spirit, consigning sex to the body and thereby limiting conjugal love to a merely “legal” relationship of marital fidelity; and 3) it abstracted the sexual act from the concrete context of the whole of marital life.

The personalist argument on the first point is that the morality of human acts cannot be judged by their conformity to the merely physiological patterns of human nature. An authentic concept of human nature, the argument goes, embraces the whole being of the person and his interpersonal relationships. In acting for the good of the person, one often must interfere with the integrity of some

bodily function. No one calls this immoral, except when the function in question is sex. Then an almost neurotic fascination can cause this function, and the pattern of its normal physiology, to be isolated from the whole person. Considered in isolation, it is set up as an absolute standard—something never to be violated. Thus the prohibition of contraception.

Moving to the second point, the personalists argue that man is an incarnate spirit. Human love must be at once bodily and spiritual. To think of conjugal love is to think—not exclusively to be sure, but nonetheless certainly—of sexual intercourse. In the past, few appreciated the unity between the bond of married love and the sexual act. The early Christian

theologians, imbued with a dualism that divided body from soul, erroneously believed that sexual intercourse has no good purpose but procreation. Now, however, we have come to appreciate that conjugal intercourse is integral to conjugal love. Conjugal intercourse is thus essentially different from what it used to be. Contraception, accordingly, is not wrong now, although it may have been wrong in the light of the limited understanding of the past.

The third personalist argument calls attention to the meaning of marriage itself. Marriage exists for the perfection of the couple, and for the procreation and raising of children. Everyone agrees that sexual intercourse has a place in marriage even when conception is impossible. It is clear, however, that the welfare of the couple, and the good of the children themselves, sometimes requires a couple to avoid having a child (or another child). It follows that the contraceptive act must be viewed in its whole context, that it cannot be abstracted from the concrete totality of conjugal life and familial values.

More Than Fun

These arguments impress many Catholics because they simulate some genuine Christian points of view. With arguments of this kind, one is not on the brutal terrain of the hedonist who simply says that sex is for fun, and resents any interference with it. The personalists go beyond even the position that marriage is for the couple themselves. Precisely the good of the children is at stake—that is what justifies contraception. (Of course, the personalist does not add that once he has justified contraception on this ground, he will find that many other important considerations—the need for a vacation in the Mediterranean or for a cabin in the mountains or for a boat at the bay—will also justify it.)

The first thing to be said about such personalist arguments is that they are infested with a curious ambivalence. At one moment, traditional theology is accused of “biologism” for insisting that the natural structure of the conjugal act should not be violated. Here the personalist seems to be standing above “mere physiology,” looking down upon the human body from an almost angelic height. He regards the physiological process detachedly, and contemptuously de-

spises it; “personalistically” he rejects it as a relevant moral norm. What is this mere physiological process that it should bind *me*?

No Angel After All

Yet at the very next moment, traditional theology is accused of “dualism” for distinguishing between the marital bond and the sexual act. Now the personalist suddenly discovers he is not an angel at all. He is an incarnate spirit. He cannot love without the appropriate physical act of love. Fixedly he regards the physical act of love; raptly he admires it; “personalistically” he declares that its inherent meaning as an expression of mutual self-donation is sufficient justification of contraception. Who am I to try to deny the normal need for the bodily expression of love?

I do not think we should be too surprised at this ambivalence. “Personalism” that argues in this manner is not a coherent theory of man. Rather, it is an unstable coalition of positions and attitudes that are unified only by their common service to the cause of rationalizing the contraceptive way of life. A consistent personalism compatible with contraception would require a more straightforward dualism. If man is merely a free subject; if his body, although inescapable, is valueless and meaningless in itself; if his bodily acts acquire meaning only as he freely determines them—then bodily acts may be evaluated exclusively to the extent to which they fulfill man’s desires. And if this is true, contraception, clearly, is justified. But in this case man will be only a spirit that *has* a body. His personhood will be his free subjectivity. His body will be a mere *thing*. The act of sexual intercourse will not have any inherent meaning. Neither will it have any inherent justification. Its less-than-human character will liberate it from moral sanction, for it will be too insignificant to worry about one way or another.

What I am suggesting is that the familiar personalist arguments for contraception are, in fact, an expression of a basically anti-Christian dualism that separates body from spirit and despises and denigrates the former in favor of the latter. This dualism is nothing new. It has turned up again and again as Gnosticism, as Manichaeism, as Catharism, as Puritanism.

As Puritanism? Yes. This heresy—for heresy is what it is—always reveals the same ambivalence. Man’s intelligence, meaningfulness, creativity, dialogue, freedom, love, spirit—all this is supposed to be good and admirable. It is pure in itself, and would never know evil but for the fact that it is enmeshed in nature, in necessary requirements, in institutions, in objective realities. Philosophically, one finds clear expression of this dualism in Kant’s ethical theory. From Kant it has come down to most continental European philosophers of the present day. The “new personalism” of existential phenomenology has not progressed much beyond the Kantian heritage.

One whose view is limited by such dualism can react in either of two ways. Thus, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Catharism have always had their “right wing” and “left wing,” two extreme positions with a common source. On the one extreme, and usually first in time, is the horrified withdrawal from “baseness,” “vileness,” “vulgarity”—from the fleshiness and smelliness of sex. This phase was dominant in the nineteenth century. Victorianism was not merely a style derived from the imitation of a queen. It was a whole ideology about man. It is found in Hegel, who thought that only because marriage is a contract can it make sex human. It is found in John Stuart Mill, an early proponent of feminism, who, having fallen in love with a married woman, carried on a platonic relationship with her for years—even long after her husband died.

Clean Dirt

But the shift to the other extreme quickly follows. If sex is dirty, it is not sacred. Therefore, why not play in the dirt? One can always clean up afterwards. Wear suitable protection and you can even play in the dirt without getting dirty. This is the attitude of the twentieth century, and its consequent approval of contraception is perfectly logical.

Let us now examine more closely the charges the modern personalist levels against Christianity’s traditional teaching. First, did traditional moral theology idolize the normal physiological process by making it an absolute standard for judging the morality of sexual acts? I think the proper answer is that it did nothing of the

sort, and that its concern for the integrity of conjugal intercourse was a result of the authentic personalism of a sound Christian understanding of man.

Precisely because it has maintained the Christian position that man is *one*—not *a* body housing *a* spirit—Catholic theology has never separated the biological from the personal. The morality of sexual acts depends on right intention; one who looks at a woman with adultery in his heart already is guilty of the sin. But right intention must be realistically based on the facts: one who commits adultery does not avoid his guilt by intending mutual enrichment. To violate the biological integrity of the marital act, therefore, is to violate its human integrity. This has been clear to theologians precisely because dualism is *rejected* in the Christian concept of man.

Moreover, Catholic theology proceeded until the last few centuries with a very clear appreciation of the unity of mankind, the continuity of the human community, the unbroken whole extending from our first parents to ourselves and embracing all men in a single stream of life. But the individualism thrown up by modern thought infected Catholic theology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and displaced the idea of continuous community with that of a society of individuals linked together by extrinsic relationships. That is why Catholic theologians began having difficulty with the notion that original sin is transmitted by inheritance. It is also why contraception ceased being obviously evil.

The Finger of God

In former ages, the contraceptive act was clearly seen to be an obstruction to the continuity of human life at the moment life is transmitted from one generation to another. With the impact of modern individualism, however, it seemed that there was no human life to attack, except when an individual had actually begun to live. Thus modern Catholic theology invented the “perverted-faculty” argument, which is a comparatively inept explanation of why contraception attacks human life at its very origin, at the point it is passed from existing persons to new ones.

The matter may be put differently. In an authentic Christian personalism,

the biological relationships between husband and wife and between parent and child do not become human by virtue of having been initiated in a free act. They *are* human and personal in and of themselves; the human person *is* a body. Man’s sexuality does not exceed in dignity the generative power of animals merely because of the meaning man chooses to give it. It has a superior dignity because it *is* man’s, because its exercise is always touched by the finger of God (whether or not the couple believes in Him); because this power can lead to a new person; because it is the act of “two in one flesh.” Thus if man fails to respect the dignity of his sexual capacity, his act is not merely bestial. It is sinful, for it violates a good which is not of man’s making and which he is therefore not at liberty—is not able—to take away.

There is a corollary to this. When a couple marries, the first conjugal act consummates the marriage, because it begins to carry out in deed the special covenant of the marriage vow. Each time a married couple engage in intercourse after that first act, the union in flesh is only a re-enactment and confirmation of the first act that sealed the marriage.

What is a Conjugal Act?

The advocate of contraception is therefore driven to one of two positions. He can say that acts involving contraceptive intervention are justifiable, because they are not conjugal acts. Or, if he maintains they are conjugal acts, he must deny the existence of any *a priori* principle capable of determining what a truly conjugal sex act *is*. And in the latter case must he not hold that every kind of sex act between spouses is implied in the marital consent and is thus capable of consummating a Christian marriage?

Traditional Catholic theology, to repeat, sees the biological integrity of the conjugal act as an essential condition of its personal meaning precisely because the biological is of itself human and is the ground of the personal relationship of married love. Why? Because this love is a unity that must be open to the possibility of self-transcendence in creative love. The modern personalist, by contrast, can offer no such limiting criterion for determining the legitimacy of con-

jugal sex. This is why I think it reasonable to say that proponents of contraception, if they are consistent, must refrain from condemning other kinds of perversion. For instance, they cannot insist that a sterile couple respect the integrity of the conjugal act. Indeed, most personalists quite plainly suggest that any mode of shared sexual activity agreeable to both parties is morally acceptable provided they respect mutual “personal dignity.” But, unfortunately, any definition of “personal dignity” that permits contraception does not clearly rule out mutual masturbation, sodomistic intercourse, and related perversions.

What is Perversion?

Now, of course, Catholic morality has always forbidden not only contraception but all other attacks on the integrity of the conjugal act. Is this broader judgment, historically, also a mere biologism? Is it traceable to a fixation on procreation? Was it a reaction to heresy? Was it due to a lack of physiological information, psychological sophistication, and demographic consternation? Hardly. The traditional teaching rested on the clear insight that there is a difference between sexual intercourse and sexual perversion. Conjugal intercourse has a personal, interpersonal, expressive, celebratory meaning. Perversion does not. And the two must differ by some objective criterion.

That criterion is found in the conjugal covenant which is a mutual self-donation in mind, will, and affection. The covenant presupposes a willingness to unite in one flesh—that is, to unite in a cooperative act *suited by its own integral design* to begin the generation of a new person. Two bodies do not become one flesh simply by skin contact, no matter how penetrating. Such contact is mere juxtaposition. It is static unity. Two become one either by destruction and absorption—and that is the viciousness of sado-masochism and every other expression of the erotic spirit—or by cooperation. A couple blessed with a child are able to behold in the flesh their real love, their real unity now expressed in a single, new person.

The significance of the conjugal act as an expression of love is therefore most emphatically *not* established by human convention. If it were, any form of behavior generally ac-

ceptable to married couples would serve as well. The personal and interpersonal meaning of the conjugal act is established by God and written into nature. The couple can engage in a conjugal act as an expression of love only by respecting its design, a design that has an inherent and objective relation to the beginning of new life.

The second personalist argument—that the meaning of intercourse as an expression of love is a recent discovery—is completely false. Christian thinkers always read the Bible; the Fathers of the Church and the great theologians were all familiar with the Old Testament. They were therefore familiar with many accounts of sexual love—that of Isaac and Rebecca, of Jacob and Rachel, of Boaz and Ruth, of Tobias and Sara. They also read the *Canticle of Canticles*, a story of human sexual love, which they understood to represent the communion between God and man, between Christ and His Church.

Clouds of Puritanism

True, the steady, sound appreciation of the role of sexual love in Christian marriage was clouded by the individualism of the last few centuries, and especially by the Puritanism of the Victorian age. But it is ludicrous to read back into the whole Christian tradition a set of attitudes that are characteristic only of the textbooks of the last century.

Finally, the personalist argument that contraception is necessary for the good of the marriage as a whole, and even for the good of the children, really depends on the supposition that intercourse is necessary for conjugal love. And that contention has been dealt with in a previous article.*

One further point should be made, however. If advocates of contraception admit that the isolated act may be wrong, but claim that it is justified by its contribution to the good of the marriage as a whole, they are implicitly endorsing very dangerous principles. Any act, no matter how evil, could then be justified simply by finding some group of acts to which it belongs. The only requirements would be that the whole group of acts lead to a good end, and that each single act fit into the group and promote the common purpose. Yet it is a frequent conclusion in all branches of

Christian morality that a proposed policy is objectionable because its success is impossible without the commission of a single, evil act. The end does not justify the means in such cases.

The Atheistic Teaching

In concluding these articles, it may be appropriate to review the most recent, authoritative statement of the Catholic Church concerning contraception. While I have not been concerned so much with restating the teaching of the Church as with answering objections to it from philosophical points of view that condemn it as unrealistic, I think those who ignore or even reject the Church's actual teaching on this question are themselves unrealistic. Of course, I speak as a Catholic for whom the authentic teaching of the Church, even if it is not infallible, carries the assurance of Christ that it is a safe guide to the way of salvation.

On October 29, 1966, Pope Paul spoke before a meeting of Italian obstetricians and gynecologists. In this address, he made some clear statements relative to the question of contraception. I see five major points in his address.

1) The decision is not for the experts, not for the Church at large, not for the theologians, not for the rest of the bishops. The Holy Father himself, and he alone, will speak authoritatively for the Church on this question: "It is a question on which We have the right and indeed the duty to speak because of its religious and moral implications."

2) The traditional teaching of the Church has not changed; the discussions in the Council and its documents do not involve a change: "... the thought and the norm of the Church have not changed. They are those contained in the traditional teaching of the Church." Pope Paul's reference to "traditional teaching" is very important, because Pius XI, in his very solemn condemnation of contraception, spoke in the name of "unbroken, Christian tradition."

3) Pope Paul implied that the Commission that met last year had suggested a change. Very politely, he rejected the conclusions of the Commission: "... these conclusions cannot be considered definitive since they present grave implications as well as not a few questions of a doctrinal,

pastoral, and social nature which cannot be isolated and set aside."

4) The condemnation of contraception still binds in conscience: "It cannot be considered not binding as if the magisterium of the Church were in a state of doubt at the present time when in fact the magisterium is in a period of study and reflection on what has been presented to it as worthy of most attentive consideration."

5) The condemnation of contraception is not a precept of the Church, but a law of God: "... a norm which is the best and most sacred for all by the law of God much more than by Our authority, by a supreme concern for human life considered in its integral fullness, dignity and destiny, much more than by any partial interest." In effect, the Holy Father here declares that true personalism is not on the side of contraception.

The part of the Pope's statement that evoked the greatest negative reaction is his assertion that the magisterium is not in a state of doubt. The Pope's point, of course, was not that there is not doubt and argument in the Church. But the magisterium is not the Church. The magisterium is the teaching authority—the Holy Father himself, together with the bishops, to the extent he sees fit to rely on their consensus. That being the case, the Holy Father is perfectly capable of determining whether or not the magisterium is in a state of doubt simply by reflecting on the question at issue. He is Peter; he confirms his brother bishops and the rest of the People of God.

God-or Man-Centered

The longer the controversy about contraception has continued, the clearer it has become that contraception as such is not the real issue. The real issue is much more profound. It is whether there will be progress or retreat in the realization of the Christian ideal of married love. It is whether there will be a clear assertion of the fundamental outlook of Christian morality in the modern world, or whether that outlook will be clouded by secular humanism, with its utilitarian compromises and its false personalism. It is whether the Catholic Church will continue to teach the Gospel, which ever remains God-centered, or will be silenced by the ridicule of those whose only reality is man-centered.

*TRIUMPH, *March 1967*