

CHAPTER IX

A MORAL NECESSITY

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And Thou shalt not writ over the door
So I turned to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore

And I saw it was filled with graves
And tombstones where flowers should be
And priests in black gowns were walking their
rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and
desires

William Blake

ORTHODOX opposition to Birth Control is formulated in the official protest of the National Council of Catholic Women against the resolution passed by the New York State

Federation of Women's Clubs which favored the removal of all obstacles to the spread of information regarding practical methods of Birth Control. The Catholic statement completely embodies traditional opposition to Birth Control. It affords a striking contrast by which we may clarify and justify the ethical necessity for this new instrument of civilization as the most effective basis for practical and scientific morality. The authorities at Rome have again and again declared that all positive methods of this nature are immoral and forbidden. states the National Council of Catholic Women. 'There is no question of the lawfulness of birth restriction through abstinence from the relations which result in conception. The immorality of Birth Control as it is practised and commonly understood, consists in the evils of the particular method employed. These are all contrary to the moral law because they are unnatural, being a perversion of a natural function. Human faculties are used in such a way as to frustrate the natural end for which these faculties were created. This is always intrinsically wrong—as wrong as lying and blas-

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phemy No supposed beneficial consequence can make good a practice which is, in itself, immoral

The evil results of the practice of Birth Control are numerous Attention will be called here to only three The first is the degradation of the marital relation itself since the husband and wife who indulge in any form of this practice come to have a lower idea of married life They cannot help coming to regard each other to a great extent as mutual instruments of sensual gratification, rather than as cooperators with the Creator in bringing children into the world This consideration may be subtle but it undoubtedly represents the facts

In the second place the deliberate restriction of the family through these immoral practices deliberately weakens self control and the capacity for self denial and increases the love of ease and luxury The best indication of this is that the small family is much more prevalent in the classes that are comfortable and well to do than among those whose material advantages are moderate or small The theory of the advocates of Birth Control is

that those parents who are comfortably situated should have a large number of children (*sic!*) while the poor should restrict their offspring to a much smaller number. This theory does not work, for the reason that each married couple have their own idea of what constitutes unreasonable hardship in the matter of bearing and rearing children. A large proportion of the parents who are addicted to Birth Control practices are sufficiently provided with worldly goods to be free from apprehension on the economic side. nevertheless, they have small families because they are disinclined to undertake the other burdens involved in bringing up a more numerous family. A practice which tends to produce such exaggerated notions of what constitutes hardship which leads men and women to cherish such a degree of ease, makes inevitably for inefficiency a decline in the capacity to endure and to achieve, and for a general social decadence.

Finally, Birth Control leads sooner or later to a decline in population. (The case of France is instanced.) But it is essentially the moral question that alarms the Catholic women, for the statement concludes

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'The further effect of such proposed legislation will inevitably be a lowering both of public and private morals. What the fathers of this country termed indecent and forbade the mails to carry will if such legislation is carried through, be legally decent. The purveyors of sexual license and immorality will have the opportunity to send almost anything they care to write through the mails on the plea that it is sex information. Not only the married but also the unmarried will be thus affected the ideals of the young contaminated and lowered. The morals of the entire nation will suffer.

The proper attitude of Catholics is clear. They should watch and oppose all attempts in state legislatures and in Congress to repeal the laws which now prohibit the dissemination of information concerning Birth Control. Such information will be spread only too rapidly despite existing laws. To repeal these would greatly accelerate this deplorable movement.¹

The Catholic position has been stated in an even more extreme form by Archbishop

¹ Quoted in the National Catholic Welfare Council Bulletin Vol II No 5 p 21 (January 1921)

Patrick J Hayes of the archdiocese of New York In a Christmas Pastoral this dignitary even went to the extent of declaring that even though some little angels in the flesh through the physical or mental deformities of their parents, may appear to human eyes hideous misshapen a blot on civilized society, we must not lose sight of this Christian thought that under and within such visible malformation, lives an immortal soul to be saved and glorified for all eternity among the blessed in heaven " 2

With the type of moral philosophy expressed in this utterance we need not argue It is based upon traditional ideas that have had the practical effect of making this world a vale of tears Fortunately such words carry no weight with those who can bring free and keen as well as noble minds to the consideration of the matter To them the idealism of such an utterance appears crude and cruel The menace to civilization of such orthodoxy, if it be orthodoxy, lies in the fact that its powerful exponents may be for a time successful not merely in influencing the con-

² Quoted in daily press December 19 1921

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duct of their adherents but in checking freedom of thought and discussion To this with all the vehemence of emphasis at our command, we object From what Archbishop Hayes believes concerning the future blessedness in Heaven of the souls of those who are born into this world as hideous and misshapen beings he has a right to seek such consolation as may be obtained but we who are trying to better the conditions of this world believe that a healthy happy human race is more in keeping with the laws of God than disease, misery and poverty perpetuating itself generation after generation Furthermore while conceding to Catholic or other churchmen full freedom to preach their own doctrines whether of theology or morals, nevertheless when they attempt to carry these ideas into legislative acts and force their opinions and codes upon the non Catholics, we consider such action an interference with the principles of democracy and we have a right to protest

Religious propaganda against Birth Control is crammed with contradiction and fallacy It refutes itself Yet it brings the opposing views into vivid contrast In stating these

differences we should make clear that advocates of Birth Control are not seeking to attack the Catholic church. We quarrel with that church, however, when it seeks to assume authority over non Catholics and to dub their behavior immoral because they do not conform to the dictatorship of Rome. The question of bearing and rearing children we hold is the concern of the mother and the potential mother. If she delegates the responsibility the ethical education, to an external authority, that is her affair. We object, however to the State or the Church which appoints itself as arbiter and dictator in this sphere and attempts to force unwilling women into compulsory maternity.

When Catholics declare that the authorities at Rome have again and again declared that all positive methods of this nature are *immoral and forbidden* they do so upon the assumption that morality consists in conforming to laws laid down and enforced by external authority in submission to decrees and dicta imposed from without. In this case, they decide in a wholesale manner the conduct of millions, demanding of them not the intelli

gent exercise of their own individual judgment and discrimination, but unquestioning submission and conformity to dogma. The Church thus takes the place of all powerful parents, and demands of its children merely that they should obey. In my belief such a philosophy hampers the development of individual intelligence. Morality then becomes a more or less successful attempt to conform to a code, instead of an attempt to bring reason and intelligence to bear upon the solution of each individual human problem.

But, we read on Birth Control methods are not merely contrary to moral law, but forbidden because they are 'unnatural' being 'the perversion of a natural function'. This, of course, is the weakest link in the whole chain. Yet there is no question of the lawfulness of birth restriction through abstinence —as though abstinence itself were not unnatural! For more than a thousand years the Church was occupied with the problem of imposing abstinence on its priesthood its most educated and trained body of men, educated to look upon asceticism as the finest ideal, it took one thousand years to convince the

Catholic priesthood that abstinence was 'natural or practicable'³ Nevertheless, there is still this talk of abstinence, self control, and self denial, almost in the same breath with the condemnation of Birth Control as unnatural

If it is our duty to act as cooperators with the Creator to bring children into the world, it is difficult to say at what point our behavior is unnatural If it is immoral and unnatural to prevent an unwanted life from coming into existence is it not immoral and unnatural to remain unmarried from the age of puberty? Such casuistry is unconvincing and feeble We need only point out that rational intelligence is also a 'natural' function, and that it is as imperative for us to use the faculties of judgment, criticism discrimination of choice, selection and control, all the faculties of the intelligence as it is to use those of reproduction It is certainly dangerous to frustrate the natural ends for which these faculties were created' This, also is always intrinsically wrong—as wrong as lying and blasphemy—and infinitely more devastating Intelligence is as natural to us as any other faculty,

³ H C Lea History of Sacerdotal Celibacy (Philadelphia 1867)

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and it is fatal to moral development and growth to refuse to use it and to delegate to others the solution of our individual problems. The evil will not be that one's conduct is divergent from current and conventional moral codes. There may be every outward evidence of conformity, but this agreement may be arrived at, by the restriction and suppression of subjective desires, and the more or less successful attempt at mere conformity. Such morality would conceal an inner conflict. The fruits of this conflict would be neurosis and hysteria on the one hand or concealed gratification of suppressed desires on the other with a resultant hypocrisy and cant. True morality cannot be based on conformity. There must be no conflict between subjective desire and outward behavior.

To object to these traditional and churchly ideas does not by any means imply that the doctrine of Birth Control is anti-Christian. On the contrary, it may be profoundly in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount. One of the greatest living theologians and most penetrating students of the problems of civilization is of this opinion. In an address de

livered before the Eugenics Education Society of London,⁴ William Ralph Inge, the Very Reverend Dean of St Pauls Cathedral, London, pointed out that the doctrine of Birth Control was to be interpreted as of the very essence of Christianity

We should be ready to give up all our theories, he asserted if science proved that we were on the wrong lines. And we can understand, though we profoundly disagree with, those who oppose us on the grounds of authority. We know where we are with a man who says, Birth Control is forbidden by God we prefer poverty, unemployment war the physical intellectual and moral degeneration of the people, and a high death rate to any interference with the universal command to be fruitful and multiply, but we have no patience with those who say that we can have unrestricted and unregulated propagation without those consequences. It is a great part of our work to press home to the public mind the alternative that lies before us. Either rational selection must take the place of the natural selection which the modern

⁴ Eugenics Review January 1921

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State will not allow to act or we must go on deteriorating. When we can convince the public of this the opposition of organized religion will soon collapse or become ineffective. Dean Inge effectively answers those who have objected to the methods of Birth Control is immoral and in contradiction and inimical to the teachings of Christ. Incidentally he claims that those who are not blinded by prejudices recognize that Christianity aims at saving the soul—the personality, the nature, of man, not his body or his environment. According to Christianity, a man is saved, not by what he has, or knows or does, but by what he is. It treats all the apparatus of life with a disdain as great as that of the biologist, so long as a man is inwardly healthy, it cares very little whether he is rich or poor, learned or simple, and even whether he is happy, or unhappy. It attaches no importance to quantitative measurements of any kind. The Christian does not gloat over favorable trade statistics, nor congratulate himself on the disparity between the number of births and deaths. For him the test of the welfare of a country is the quality of the human

beings whom it produces Quality is everything, quantity is nothing And besides this, the Christian conception of a kingdom of God upon earth teaches us to turn our eyes to the future and to think of the welfare of posterity as a thing which concerns us as much as that of our own generation This welfare, as conceived by Christianity, is of course something different from external prosperity, it is to be the victory of intrinsic worth and healthiness over all the false ideals and deep seated diseases which at present spoil civilization

It is not political religion with which I am concerned, Dean Inge explained, 'but the convictions of really religious persons, and I do not think that we need despair of converting them to our views'

Dean Inge believes Birth Control is an essential part of Eugenics, and an essential part of Christian morality On this point he asserts We do wish to remind our orthodox and conservative friends that the Sermon on the Mount contains some admirably clear and unmistakable eugenic precepts Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? A corrupt tree cannot bring

forth good fruit, neither can a good tree bring forth evil fruit. Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.' We wish to apply these words not only to the actions of individuals which spring from their characters, but to the character of individuals which spring from their inherited qualities. This extension of the scope of the maxim seems to me quite legitimate. Men do not gather grapes of thorns. As our proverb says, you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. If we believe this, and do not act upon it by trying to move public opinion towards giving social reform, education and religion a better material to work upon, we are sinning against the light, and not doing our best to bring in the Kingdom of God upon earth."

As long as sexual activity is regarded in a dualistic and contradictory light—in which it is revealed either as the instrument by which men and women cooperate with the Creator to bring children into the world, on the one hand, and on the other, as the sinful instrument of self gratification, lust and sensuality, there is bound to be an endless conflict in

human conduct, producing ever increasing misery, pain and injustice. In crystallizing and codifying this contradiction the Church not only solidified its own power over men but reduced women to the most abject and prostrate slavery. It was essentially a morality that would not work. The sex instinct in the human race is too strong to be bound by the dictates of any church. The church's failure, its century after century of failure, is now evident on every side for having convinced men and women that only in its baldly propagative phase is sexual expression legitimate, the teachings of the Church have driven sex under ground, into secret channels, strengthened the conspiracy of silence, concentrated men's thoughts upon the 'lusts of the body,' have sown cultivated and reaped a crop of bodily and mental diseases, and developed a society congenitally and almost hopelessly unbalanced. How is any progress to be made how is any human expression or education possible when women and men are taught to combat and resist their natural impulses and to despise their bodily functions?

Humanity, we are glad to realize, is rapidly freeing itself from this morality imposed upon it by its self appointed and self perpetuating masters. From a hundred different points the imposing edifice of this 'morality' has been and is being attacked. Sincere and thoughtful defenders and exponents of the teachings of Christ now acknowledge the falsity of the traditional codes and their malignant influence upon the moral and physical well being of humanity.

Ecclesiastical opposition to Birth Control on the part of certain representatives of the Protestant churches, based usually on quotations from the Bible is equally invalid, and for the same reason. The attitude of the more intelligent and enlightened clergy has been well and succinctly expressed by Dean Inge, who, referring to the ethics of Birth Control writes

This is emphatically a matter in which every man and woman must judge for themselves and must refrain from judging others. We must not neglect the important fact that it is not merely in the practical results of such a decision not in the small number of children, not even in the healthier and better cared for

children, not in the possibility of elevating the living conditions of the individual family, that the ethical value of Birth Control alone lies. Precisely because the practice of Birth Control does demand the exercise of decision, the making of choice, the use of the reasoning powers is it an instrument of moral education as well as of hygienic and racial advance. It awakens the attention of parents to their potential children. It forces upon the individual consciousness the question of the standards of living. In a profound manner it protects and reasserts the inalienable rights of the child to be

Psychology and the outlook of modern life are stressing the growth of independent responsibility and discrimination as the true basis of ethics. The old traditional morality with its train of vice—disease, promiscuity and prostitution—is in reality dying out, killing itself off because it is too irresponsible and too dangerous to individual and social well-being. The transition from the old to the new, like all fundamental changes, is fraught with many dangers. But it is a revolution that cannot be stopped.

The smaller family, with its lower infant mortality rate is, in more definite and concrete manner than many actions outwardly deemed moral, the expression of moral judgment and responsibility. It is the assertion of a standard of living inspired by the wish to obtain a fuller and more expressive life for the children than the parents have enjoyed. If the morality or immorality of any course of conduct is to be determined by the motives which inspire it, there is evidently at the present day no higher morality than the intelligent practice of Birth Control.

The immorality of many who practise Birth Control lies in not daring to preach what they practise. What is the secret of the hypocrisy of the well to do, who are willing to contribute generously to charities and philanthropies who spend thousands annually in the upkeep and sustenance of the delinquent, the defective and the dependent and yet join the conspiracy of silence that prevents the poorer classes from learning how to improve their conditions and elevate their standards of living? It is as though they were to cry: We'll give you any thing except the thing you ask for—the means

whereby you may become responsible and self-reliant in your own lives

The brunt of this injustice falls on women, because the old traditional morality is the invention of men. No religion, no physical or moral code,' wrote the clear sighted George Drysdale, proposed by one sex for the other, can be really suitable. Each must work out its laws for itself in every department of life." In the moral code developed by the Church, women have been so degraded that they have been habituated to look upon themselves through the eyes of men. Very imperfectly have women developed their own self consciousness the realization of their tremendous and supreme position in civilization. Women can develop this power only in one way, by the exercise of responsibility, by the exercise of judgment reason or discrimination. They need ask for no rights. They need only assert power. Only by the exercise of self-guidance and intelligent self direction can that inalienable, supreme, pivotal power be expressed. More than ever in history women need to realize that nothing can ever come to us from another. Everything we attain we

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must owe to ourselves Our own spirit must vitalize it Our own heart must feel it For we are not passive machines We are not to be lectured guided and molded this way or that We are alive and intelligent we women no less than men and we must awaken to the essential realization that we are living beings endowed with will, choice comprehension, and that every step in life must be taken at our own initiative

Moral and sexual balance in civilization will only be established by the assertion and expression of power on the part of women This power will not be found in any futile seeking for economic independence or in the aping of men in industrial and business pursuits, nor by joining battle for the so called single standard Woman s power can only be expressed and make itself felt when she refuses the task of bringing unwanted children into the world to be exploited in industry and slaughtered in wars When we refuse to produce battalions of babies to be exploited when we declare to the nation Show us that the best possible chance in life is given to every child now brought into the world, before you cry

for more! At present our children are a glut on the market You hold infant life cheap Help us to make the world a fit place for children When you have done this, we will bear you children,—then we shall be true women The new morality will express this power and responsibility on the part of women

With the realization of the moral responsibility of women writes Havelock Ellis the natural relations of life spring back to their due biological adjustment Motherhood is restored to its natural sacredness It becomes the concern of the woman herself, and not of society nor any individual to determine the conditions under which the child shall be conceived

Moreover woman shall further assert her power by refusing to remain the passive instrument of sensual self gratification on the part of men Birth Control in philosophy and practice, is the destroyer of that dualism of the old sexual code It denies that the sole purpose of sexual activity is procreation it also denies that sex should be reduced to the level of sensual lust, or that woman should permit

herself to be the instrument of its satisfaction. In increasing and differentiating her love demands woman must elevate sex into another sphere, whereby it may subserve and enhance the possibility of individual and human expression. Man will gain in this no less than woman for in the age old enslavement of woman he has enslaved himself and in the liberation of womankind, all of humanity will experience the joys of a new and fuller freedom.

On this great fundamental and pivotal point new light has been thrown by Lord Bertrand Dawson, the physician of the King of England. In the remarkable and epoch making address at the Birmingham Church Congress (referred to in my introduction), he spoke of the supreme morality of the mutual and reciprocal joy in the most intimate relation between man and woman. Without this reciprocity there can be no civilization worthy of the name. Lord Dawson suggested that there should be added to the clauses of marriage in the Prayer Book the complete realization of the love of this man and this woman one for another,' and in support of his contention declared that

sex love between husband and wife—apart from parenthood—was something to prize and cherish for its own sake. The Lambeth Conference, he remarked, envisaged a love invertebrate and joyless,” whereas, in his view, natural passion in wedlock was not a thing to be ashamed of or unduly repressed. The pronouncement of the Church of England, as set forth in Resolution 68 of the Lambeth Conference seems to imply condemnation of sex love as such, and to imply sanction of sex love only as a means to an end—namely procreation. The Lambeth Resolution stated

In opposition to the teaching which under the name of science and religion encourages married people in the deliberate cultivation of sexual union as an end in itself, we steadfastly uphold what must always be regarded as the governing considerations of Christian marriage. One is the primary purpose for which marriage exists—namely the continuation of the race through the gift and heritage of children the other is the paramount importance in married life of deliberate and thoughtful self control.”

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In answer to this point of view Lord Dawson asserted

Sex love has apart from parenthood a purport of its own. It is something to prize and to cherish for its own sake. It is an essential part of health and happiness in marriage. And now, if you will allow me, I will carry this argument a step further. If sexual union is (a gift of God it is worth learning how to use it) Within its own sphere it should be cultivated so as to bring physical satisfaction to both not merely to one. The real problems before us are those of sex love and child love, and by sex love I mean that love which involves intercourse or the desire for such. It is necessary to my argument to emphasize that sex love is one of the dominating forces of the world. Not only does history show the destinies of nations and dynasties determined by its sway—but here in our every day life we see its influence direct or indirect, forceful and ubiquitous beyond aught else. Any statesmanlike view, therefore, will recognize that here we have an instinct so fundamental so imperious, that its influence is a fact which has to be accepted, suppress it you cannot. You may

guide it into healthy channels but an outlet it will have, and if that outlet is inadequate and unduly obstructed irregular channels will be forced

The attainment of mutual and reciprocal joy in their relations constitutes a firm bond between two people and makes for durability of the marriage tie. Reciprocity in sex love is the physical counterpart of sympathy. More marriages fail from inadequate and clumsy sex love than from too much sex love. The lack of proper understanding is in no small measure responsible for the unfulfilment of conubial happiness, and every degree of discontent and unhappiness may from this cause, occur, leading to rupture of the marriage bond itself. How often do medical men have to deal with these difficulties, and how fortunate if such difficulties are disclosed early enough in married life to be rectified. Otherwise how tragic may be their consequences and many a case in the Divorce Court has thus had its origin. To the foregoing contentions, it might be objected you are encouraging passion. My reply would be passion is a worthy possession—most men, who are any good are capable of

passion. You all enjoy ardent and passionate love in art and literature. Why not give it a place in real life? Why some people look askance at passion is because they are confusing it with sensuality. Sex love without passion is a poor lifeless thing. Sensuality, on the other hand is on a level with gluttony—a physical excess—detached from sentiment, chivalry, or tenderness. It is just as important to give sex love its place as to avoid its over emphasis. Its real and effective restraints are those imposed by a loving and sympathetic companionship by the privileges of parenthood, the exacting claims of career and that civic sense which prompts men to do social service. Now that the revision of the Prayer Book is receiving consideration I should like to suggest with great respect an addition made to the objects of marriage in the Marriage Service, in these terms, 'The complete realization of the love of this man and this woman, the one for the other.'

Turning to the specific problem of Birth Control, Lord Dawson declared that Birth Control is here to stay. It is an established fact, and for good or evil has to be accepted.

Although the extent of its application can be and is being modified, no denunciations will abolish it. Despite the influence and condemnations of the Church it has been practised in France for well over half a century, and in Belgium and other Roman Catholic countries is extending. And if the Roman Catholic Church with its compact organization, its power of authority and its disciplines, cannot check this procedure, it is not likely that Protestant Churches will be able to do so, for Protestant religions depend for their strength on the conviction and esteem they establish in the heads and hearts of their people. The reasons which lead parents to limit their offspring are sometimes selfish, but more often honorable and cogent.

A report of the Fabian Society⁵ on the morality of Birth Control, based upon a census conducted under the chairmanship of Sidney Webb, concludes: "These facts—which we are bound to face whether we like them or not—will appear in different lights to different people. In some quarters it seems to be sufficient to dismiss them with moral indignation,

⁵ Fabian Tract No 131

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real or simulated. Such a judgment appears both irrelevant and futile. If a course of conduct is habitually and deliberately pursued by vast multitudes of otherwise well conducted people, forming probably a majority of the whole educated class of the nation, we must assume that it does not conflict with their actual code of morality. They may be intellectually mistaken but they are not doing what they feel to be wrong.

The moral justification and ethical necessity of Birth Control need not be empirically based upon the mere approval of experience and custom. Its morality is more profound. Birth Control is an ethical necessity for humanity to day because it places in our hands a new instrument of self expression and self realization. It gives us control over one of the primordial forces of nature to which in the past the majority of mankind have been enslaved, and by which it has been cheapened and debased. It arouses us to the possibility of newer and greater freedom. It develops the power, the responsibility and intelligence to use this freedom in living a liberated and abundant life. It permits us to enjoy this

liberty without danger of infringing upon the similar liberty of our fellow men, or of injuring and curtailing the freedom of the next generation. It shows us that we need not seek in the amassing of worldly wealth nor in the illusion of some extra terrestrial Heaven or earthly Utopia of a remote future the road to human development. The Kingdom of Heaven is in a very definite sense within us. Not by leaving our body and our fundamental humanity behind us, not by aiming to be anything but what we are, shall we become ennobled or immortal. By knowing ourselves, by expressing ourselves by realizing ourselves more completely than has ever before been possible, not only shall we attain the kingdom ourselves but we shall hand on the torch of life undimmed to our children and the children of our children.