



REGIS COLLEGE

3425 BAYVIEW AVE., WILLOWDALE, ONT., CANADA

September 6 1968

Dear Father,

In answer to your request I would note that traditional Catholic doctrine on the sexual act followed rigorously from the position adopted by Aristotle in his De generatione animalium. That position was that the seed of the male was an instrumental cause that changed the matter supplied by the female into a sentient being. As was argued from the instance of wind-eggs, the female by herself got no further than a nutritive principle. The efficient causality of the male was needed to produce the sensitive principle or soul. On that basis it was clear that every act of insemination was of itself procreative and that any positive interference was an act of obstructing the seed in its exercise of its efficient causality.

Two factors, however, have combined to bring about a notable change in the views of Catholic theologians on this matter. The first, of course, is the fact that the Aristotelian position is erroneous. Insemination and conception are known now to be quite distinct. The act of inseminating is not an act of procreating in the sense that of itself, per se, it leads to conception. The relation of insemination to conception is just statistical and, far more frequently than not, insemination does not lead to conception.

So there arises the question whether this statistical relationship of insemination to conception is sacrosanct and inviolable. Is it such that no matter what the circumstances, the motives, the needs, any deliberate modification of the statistical relationship must always be prohibited? If one answers affirmatively, he is condemning the rhythm method. If negatively, he permits contraceptives in some cases. Like the diaphragm and the pill, the menstrual chart and the thermometer directly intend to modify the statistical relationship nature places between insemination and conception.



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ical/ Besides erroneous Aristotelian biology there has been another factor leading to the change in Catholic theological opinion. It is that sexual intercourse between man and wife both expresses and fosters their mutual love. This is fully acknowledged in Vatican II and also in Humanae vitae. Aristotle treated not marital intercourse but generation as common to all animals. His oversight has been corrected by contemporary phenomenology inquiry.

While the Encyclical acknowledges the "unitive sense" of marital intercourse, it claims that inseparable from it there is a "procreative sense." This would be easy enough to understand if one still clung to Aristotle's biology. But on contemporary biology, if insemination may be said to be inseparable from normal intercourse, conception cannot be said to be inseparable from insemination. The discharge of two million spermatozoa into the vagina does not mean or intend two million babies. Most of the time it does not mean or intend any babies at all. The relationship of insemination to conception is not the relation of a per se cause to a per se effect. It is a statistical relationship relating a sufficiently long and random series of inseminations with some conceptions.

In my opinion such ~~opinion~~ opinions as are expressed in phrases like "actus per se aptos ad generandum" and "process open to conception" are transitional. They reformulate the Aristotelian position and the resultant Catholic tradition during the interval between the discovery that Aristotelian biology is mistaken and the discovery that marital intercourse of itself, per se, is an expression and sustainer of love with only a statistical relationship to conception.

I have concentrated on what I consider the main issue. Much seems deliberately done to obscure it. The issue is not whether or not people have to have reasons for accepting the Pope's decision. The issue is that, when there is no valid reason whatever for a precept, that precept is not of natural law. Again, re dissent, Vatican II refused to oblige theologians to silence after the Pope determined controverted issues. See Orsy, America August 17 1968 p. 99, central column, top.

Fr. Sheridan has permitted me to xerox three papers of his own in this connection. They state more fully what I have indicated, add references from which I have abstained, and deal with further matters. He will be a peritus at Winnipeg, and I am sure you will treat these outlines with the same discretion and respect for property as this letter.

With every good wish,

B. Lonergan
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