

The Freethinker

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EVERYONE has heard of Dr. Anne Biezanek, the Roman Catholic doctor, mother of seven, who has opened a birth control clinic and been barred from the sacraments. Most of us have probably formed a mental picture of her as a nominal Catholic only, for whom perhaps religion is—as for so many Christians—one of the peripheral things of life. Dr. Biezanek's own account of herself, in her book *All Things New* (Pan Books, 3s. 6d.) shows this view to be quite wrong. We have here a distinctively Catholic case for contraception, presented in semi-mystical religious terms. Reading discussions of contraception by such Catholics as Dr. Rock and Archbishop Roberts, firm Catholics though they are, one seems to be dealing with minds not so unlike one's own, but Dr. Biezanek, thinks on a different wavelength altogether.

Dr. Biezanek was born Anne Greene. Her parents are Quakers. As an adolescent she was deeply affected emotionally by the misfortunes of Poland. The Polish national emblem is a white eagle, which, with the help of poetry, Anne succeeded, to her own satisfaction, in identifying with the white dove of the Holy Ghost! Add to that the existence in Poland of an ancient painting of the Virgin credited with miraculous powers, which was ceremonially crowned by a papal envoy in the eighteenth century, and Dr. Biezanek comments, "Thus I had in my spiritual sights a nation that had the Holy Ghost for its uncrowned King and the Mother of Christ for its crowned Queen. That the issue of this royal union *must* be Christ himself seemed to me self-evident".

Conversion and Marriage

Soon after reaching this conclusion she joined the Roman Catholic Church—which, one must agree, seems the right place for anyone whose mind works on such lines. Nor is it surprising that, while still a student, she married the first Pole she had ever met.

By her conversion and marriage she had involved herself in desperate trouble. She was determined to be a good Catholic, so contraception was out of the question for her, and the traditional attitude of the Church—and of her husband—was that a wife should never refuse her husband love, and so some eight years after her marriage she was forced to return to her parents' home with five children. While she had had only four she had been working full-time as Registrar at a mental hospital, and providing a home for the family in a house that went with the job, but a further baby and a miscarriage led to a breakdown which made it impossible for her to continue work. After her return to her parents she again became pregnant, and after the birth of baby number six she spent some weeks in a mental hospital. However, this did not deter her husband, and soon she was pregnant again. She could then no longer remain with her parents, and the family was scattered. However, the Biezaneks did finally get a home of their own, in which their seventh child was duly born.

Now Dr. Biezanek thought her troubles were over, and

she could bring up her fine large Catholic family in the peace of her own home, but she was in for a nasty shock. She had seven children, four of them under five years old. She writes: "I simply had too much to do. The sixth child was still a night-screamer. These two youngest children alone, for over a year, had me out of bed three or four times a night, every night . . . Being over-tired, I was constantly irritable with the children . . . I never went out,

I never met anyone . . . In my constant battle to stop the chores getting on top of me, I was becoming coarsened, mentally and physically. Not—please note—refined by labour and suffering, in the manner that so many spiritual books would lead one to suppose, but

simply coarsened. I wanted, above all things, not to have children getting under my feet, not always to have two or three shouting simultaneously to gain my attention . . . I didn't care sometimes where they went or what they did, provided they left me enough elbow room in which to prepare the next meal . . . These are . . . experiences common to all mothers of large families. I had constantly and frequently, as a doctor, heard others complaining of just these things. It was only now that I was experiencing their full and undiluted horror for myself".

Desperate

Moreover Jan Biezanek's earnings in the Merchant Navy were not large, and when the two eldest children won grammar school places and needed spending-money and uniforms the position became desperate:—

"The anxious faces of the children as they hesitatingly told me of the money they had to have for this and that were a continual reproach. My explosions of irritability and wrath at every mention of these modest and innocent requirements precluded any possibility of true family happiness.

"Against this background, the thought of another pregnancy, with the nausea and tiredness it brings in its own right, took on the prospect of a nightmare . . . Thus did my husband's brief and unpredictable appearances in the home become in themselves a source of torment. As I wished the children out of my way, so did I wish him . . . Thus was I driven down the suddenly fashionable Roman Catholic line of thought that maintained that the solution to all marital problems of my type lay in the abolition of sex. My husband had to be banished from my presence, into a room of his own. Everything in me that attracted him to me and me to him had to be suppressed . . . Hate had become the order of the day".

The good Catholic home had become a hell on earth and Dr. Biezanek, in despair, started on the Pill in May 1962.

This was a terrible moment for her. So far she had accepted the official ruling of the Church, at an appalling cost to herself and to her family. Her whole ideal of herself, all her self-respect, was bound up with obedience to the Church's teaching, and the Church assured her that what she was doing was punishable by hell-fire. She told the priest what she was doing, and he said she could not

IEWS AND OPINIONS

A Future Saint?

By MARGARET McILROY

have communion or confession. This involved her in further family difficulties, for her eldest daughter, taught by nuns, was begging her mother to come to communion with her. Dr. Biezanek decided to go and see what happened, first informing the priest that she was coming, and that she was still taking the pills. The priest did not refuse her the wafer, and she became again a regular communicant, though a bishop to whom she did not hesitate to explain matters told her that she was guilty of sacrilege "by continuing to receive our Lord" while sinning so gravely.

Dr. Biezanek is probably like thousands of other Catholic wives in her just determination to keep the rules laid down by the Church and her later turn to contraception when experience proved it to be necessary for her family's happiness. Thus far she seems to have been distinguished from the others chiefly by the grim determination with which she held out at the risk of her health and sanity; but now there emerges a still greater difference between her and less strong-minded Catholic women—her open acknowledgment of her actions and her increasingly firm and public insistence on the rightness of her decision and the wrongness of the clergy. Thanks to the pill her health and morale had improved, and looking back on the past nightmare she came to see it in an entirely new light. "I became convinced", she writes, "that God wanted me to make this stand, and that it was He who had brought me so near to despair, so that I should learn for myself how bullied and wretched Catholic women are. It became my desire to help such women".

Refused Communion

Having reached this conclusion she acted promptly. She attended a course run by the Family Planning Association, and opened a clinic, dedicated to St. Martin de Porres, in her own sitting-room. Again she took care to inform her bishop and Archbishop Heenan of her action, and these dignitaries "listened very politely". However the polite atmosphere was not to last, for this venture by a practising Roman Catholic received press and radio publicity, after which, without any warning, she says, as she was kneeling to receive communion, "The parish priest took the Communion plate from my daughter, who was before me, and passing in front of me, said out loud 'You don't get it.'—a shattering experience for the whole family!

However, on May 31st, 1964, she was given Communion in Westminster Cathedral. She attaches great importance to the date, for May 31st is "the feast of the Queenship of Our Lady". Thus she writes, "On May 31st I received my freedom, not from Archbishop Heenan, whose conduct suggests that he does not greatly care what I do, but rather from the Queen of Heaven herself". Encouraged by letters of support from men and women of all religions and none, Dr. Biezanek has gone on to develop a theological defence of her defiance of the Church's ruling—on lines which will probably seem amazing to most Catholics as they do to us.

Dr. Biezanek accepts the story of Adam and Eve as literally true, stating: "The action of the wife, Eve, led to the disgrace of herself and her husband Adam . . . The terms of the sentence pronounced upon Eve was that henceforth was her husband to have dominion over her, that her conceptions were to be multiplied and in sorrow was she to bring forth children". Dr. Biezanek adds, "The long history of woman's sorrow in her position of bondage to a man is in itself a most powerful testimony to the truth of Holy Scripture". She shows the same lack of logic, the same sort of confusion between cause and effect, between symbol and reality which led her to become a Catholic and marry a Pole. This literal belief in the

curse of Eve had inspired the nineteenth century moralists who condemned the use of anaesthesia for women in childbirth. Dr. Biezanek seems to differ only in her bitter realisation of the cost to women of their degraded status. But suddenly she brings something quite new into the discussion, and we read, "The contraceptive pill has come to women as a heavenly reprieve from that primordial doom. It is my contention that this must be willed by God, and I say that the appearance of these drugs can be taken as a sign of God's pardon to Eve".

Co-Redemptrix

She links all this with a true Catholic emphasis on the Virgin Mary: "This reprieve for the daughters of Eve was won for them by 'the Second Eve', Mary the mother of Christ". Dr. Biezanek hopes and expects that the Church will be reborn by defining "the last Marian dogma" declaring Mary "Co-redemptrix" . . . "giving to the woman, the mother of Christ, a status in the scheme of salvation equal to that of her son . . . The Holy Ghost was so enamoured of her spiritual beauty that he took her to himself, and the issue of that union was Christ".

Dr. Biezanek is not interested in Mary's life-long virginity. "Her state of virginity in her married life can only reflect an attitude on the part of her husband", who "made no claim upon her". Dr. Biezanek will not accept Mary's married life and her method of keeping the family small as having any relevance to the problems of Catholic women today. Mary's particular virtue was her willingness, if God asked it of her, to face the consequences of premarital conception, in a society where this was punishable by death.

"Mary's obedience preceded that of her Son in time, just as Eve's disobedience had preceded Adam's. It has taken mankind all but 2,000 years to digest the meaning of these events, and until they were understood God did not think it good for women to benefit in too revolutionary a sense from the fact of the redemption". (What a swine Christians make out their God to be!) After attributing this hardness of heart to God it seems rather unfair to blame, as Dr. Biezanek does, "the theologians of the Roman Catholic Church" for being slow "to understand that it is the Almighty himself who is now pleading with them through the cries of distress of her own people".

Face-saving Formula

To her own satisfaction at least, Dr. Biezanek has found the face-saving formula which the Church so urgently needs. On contraception Catholics should "stop and consider whether the present official 'line' of the Roman Catholic Church does in fact represent true Catholic doctrine . . . It is frequently stated by Roman Catholic apologists that the Church has *always* opposed artificial methods of birth control, and that which has been consistently and successfully opposed by philosophers and theologians for the best part of 2,000 years cannot suddenly become right". But, says Dr. Biezanek, "What in fact the Church has condemned through the ages is birth prevention by means of abnormal sexuality". The invention of contraceptives which do not interfere with the nature of the sexual act *as experienced by the participants* completely changes the moral significance of birth control, and the invention of contraceptives has been willed by God himself.

Furthermore, "peace on earth depends on domestic peace, which depends upon sexual harmony", and "the purpose of the individual sex act is the maximum sexual satisfaction of the partners". In a very practical section, Dr. Biezanek discusses the relative advantages of different methods of contraception, emphasising that the method chosen should be one which the particular couple both

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A PROTESTANT ASSESSMENT

The Roman Catholic Church and Contraception

By VERNON C. GROUNDS

EVEN some of his most ardent admirers must be wondering by now whether Pope John XXIII was altogether wise in calling for an *aggiornamento*, a modernisation of the Roman Catholic Church. He evidently decided that the clanging engine of the Papacy needed to be lubricated and repaired: it was failing to keep up with the flow of traffic on our crowded 20th century highways. It looks, however, as though many of the ecclesiastical mechanics are in favour of repairs so radical that, if they have their way, the Roman Catholic Church will emerge as practically a new model.

Bishop Grotti of Brazil exclaimed in a speech at Vatican II:

What novelties we are hearing here! Opening the Church to everybody: pagans, separated brothers, women. . . . Women were silent for more than a thousand years and now some wish to invite them to these Council sessions, and not just to make *cafe and cappuccino*.¹

And women within the Bishop's Church are indeed breaking the silence of centuries. One of them is Dr. Anne Biezanek of England, the mother of seven children, a devout Roman Catholic who became a convert at the age of 19. Goaded by her personal experience and a sensitive conscience, Dr. Biezanek has opened a Family Planning Clinic in defiance of the ecclesiastical authority which, as a devout Roman Catholic, she otherwise obeys. In her book, *All Things New*, Dr. Biezanek throws down the gauntlet to the hierarchy on the issue of family limitation, arguing that here her Church must change its position whatever the cost, even if it means the open confession of past mistakes. From her perspective, a battle is being waged between the traditionalists and the progressives with the issue of birth control as a kind of Thermopylae; and a deadly battle it is despite the fact that all the participants are co-religionists.

The adherents of one viewpoint cannot afford to dismiss the others as "not truly Roman Catholic", any more than the participants on either side in a civil war can afford to dismiss the other side as "not really our countrymen". For they clearly are of the same country, they are truly present, and victory for neither side is possible until the other be overcome. So it is in the Roman Catholic Church now, nothing less than civil war. War that must be fought to the finish with only death or victory at the end. There is no compromise possible.²

Has Dr. Biezanek over-dramatised the birth control issue and its possible repercussions on Roman Catholicism? Not in the opinion of Paul Johnson, who had this to say regarding a courageous manifesto on contraception by Dr. John Rock, the eminent Catholic gynaecologist and Emeritus Professor of Medicine at Harvard University.

Significant was the failure of the Catholic authorities to condemn the book outright. Cardinal Cushing of Boston, in whose province it was published, gave it indeed a guarded welcome. When it appeared in this country, the reaction of the Catholic authorities was similarly muted. Evidently, the more responsible Catholic prelates were anxious to avoid a pitched battle. There was always a risk, however, that an individual Catholic might choose to force the issue and challenge the authorities to take action. This is precisely what Dr. Anne Biezanek has now done. The ground on which the Catholic hierarchy now finds itself could not have been, from its own point of view, more ill-chosen. Dr. Biezanek is a sincere and highly respected woman. She is herself the mother of seven children. Opinion among non-Catholics is overwhelmingly in her favour and it is evident that she has widespread sympathy and support among Catholics too. If the bishops attempt to crush her, they will certainly arouse the hostility of other Christian groups (and thus jeopardise the progress of the ecumenical movement), and they may also

provoke rebellion among their own flock. For the truth is that large numbers of Catholics refuse, in practice, to accept the Church's teaching on birth control . . . the bishops are well aware of this. They thus find themselves upholding a doctrine which is persistently and increasingly ignored by most of their followers.³

Johnson therefore thinks that on this issue the Roman Catholic Church is facing "an agonising reappraisal" which is obviously "fraught with difficulties." Is he right, and is Dr. Biezanek likewise right? Is the matter of birth control — seemingly so remote from the subtleties of theology and the realities of ecclesiasticism — becoming the very vortex of Pope John's *aggiornamento*?

To outsiders it certainly looks as though the Roman Catholic Church has officially and hence unalterably set itself against contraception. (Up until 1932 it was "unalterably" opposed to birth control in any form; that year, however, the so-called rhythm method was discovered by Dr. K. Ogino of Nagata, Japan, and Dr. H. Knaus of Graz, Austria; and since it was a natural method of family limitation, the hierarchy enthusiastically endorsed it.)⁵ Father Maurice O'Leary, chairman of England's Catholic Marriage Advisory Council, seems to have all the data solidly on his side when he declares: "There is no uncertainty about the Church's teaching on contraception. From the earliest times until today it has been condemned."⁶

Unquestionably the weightiest pronouncement on contraception is that made by Pius XI in his 1930 encyclical, *Casti Connubii*. Because of its importance we shall quote the entire section which prohibits contraception (except of course by the rhythm method), flatly labelling it "a grave sin."

And now, venerable brethren, we shall explain in detail the evils opposed to each of the benefits of matrimony. First consideration is due to the offspring, which many have the boldness to call the disagreeable burden of matrimony and which they say is to be carefully avoided by the spouses not through virtuous continence (which Christian law permits in matrimony when both parties consent) but by corrupting the natural act. Some justify this criminal licentiousness on the grounds that they are weary of children and wish to gratify their desires without their consequent burden. Others say that they cannot on the one hand remain continent nor on the other can they have children because of the difficulty whether on the part of the mother or on the part of the family circumstances. But no reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may be rendered conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined of its very nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately deprive it of its natural force and power act against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious. Small wonder, therefore, if Holy Writ bears witness that the divine Majesty regards with greatest detestation this horrible crime and at times has punished it with death. As St. Augustine notes: "Intercourse even with one's legitimate wife is unlawful and wicked where the conception of the offspring is prevented. Onan, the son of Juda, did this and the Lord killed him for it." Since, therefore, openly departing from the uninterrupted Christian tradition some recently have judged it possible solemnly to declare another doctrine regarding the question, the Catholic Church, to whom God has entrusted the defence of the integrity and purity of morals, standing erect in the midst of the moral ruin which surrounds her, in order that she may preserve the chastity of the nuptial union from being defiled by this foul stain, raises her voice in token of her divine ambassadorship and through our mouth proclaims anew: any use whatsoever of matrimony in which the act, in being exercised, is deliberately deprived of its natural power to procreate life is an offence against the law of God and of nature, and those who commit such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin.⁷

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This Believing World

SO EVEN among Jehovah's Witnesses, there is a strong whiff of disunity! According to the *News of the World* (13/6/65), 25,000 of them were informed that 200 of their "brothers and sisters" had been expelled last year for "adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and other offences". We are not told why Jehovah allowed so many members of his flock to fall prey to such heinous crimes. But, put in another way, it looks as if there is precious little difference between the Witnesses and other Christian sects. Jehovah, just like Jesus, is powerless against the wave of "immorality" that we are told is now dominating Christian life.

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BUT was it not always so? Are not the Middle Ages packed with the angry denunciation by Christian preachers of the "immoralities" of Christians everywhere, recorded for us by such writers as Boccaccio, Rabelais, and hosts of others? In fact, has there ever been a time when, exactly like Jehovah's Witnesses, people have not been attacked by similarly holy and righteous Christians.

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THE ROMAN CHURCH appears to be faced with a different horrid crisis. There are actually fewer and fewer candidates for the glorious devoted work of priesthood. Young men don't respond to the appeal of a holy celibate's life, despite its promise of eternal life with all the past popes, to say nothing of Jesus and that prize bore, Peter. And Cardinal Heenan is at his wit's end to procure suitable candidates. For, as he says there "can be few more melancholy sights than a parish church without a priest".

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HE PUTS it all down to "lack of faith and lack of priests" (*Sunday Express*, 13/6/65). So, alas, he has to leave the serious position "to the Almighty"; and when an Archbishop has to do that, it can be seen how very serious things really are in the Church. And in fact, more priests would not be any solution—in the ultimate. The general lack of faith is quite simply due to the realisation that Christianity is not true?

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WE JUST love the way Christian writers have coyly changed the dear old-fashioned "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost" to "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit". A Holy Ghost is too much like a Holy Spook these days and that would never do. Even that Fountain of Holy Christian Piety, the *London Evening News*, prefers "Spirit" to "Ghost"—though we defy it to tell us what either means. "Spook" on the other hand is unmistakable. It would make everybody laugh—and Christianity has never been able to stand ridicule.

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YET WE have the *London Evening Standard*, (9/6/65) showing us in a delightful picture how happy Christians can be displaying placards with the joyful news, "Thou shalt surely die". "The Wicked Shall be turned into Hell", "Repent and Believe", "Prepare to meet thy God", "The Coming of the Lord draweth nigh", and similar gems of biblical truth, shown in various public places at Whitsun. And no one can read the accompanying text without laughing—which the journal meant readers to do at these specimens of religious imbecility. What will the *Evening News* think of its London rival?

SPECIAL OFFER to readers of this paper. The Autobiography of Major Christopher Draper, DSC., entitled *The Mad Major*, First published in 1962 at 25s. A limited number offered at 10s. post paid. 230 pages fully illustrated and autographed from C. Draper, 2 Conway Street, London, W.1.

A FUTURE SAINT?

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find agreeable—never mind theology! She is well aware of the drawbacks of the safe-period method, which is impossible without the complete co-operation of the husband.

Evidently from bitter experience, Dr. Biezanek has a very clear understanding of the predicament of women whose husbands insist on their marital rights, while insisting that the consequences are something for the wife to deal with as best she can. What good does the Church's advice on "periodic abstinence" do her? The priest who fiercely informs her that any other way of birth control is damnable does not insist to her husband that he must limit his demands to the "safe period".

Dr. Biezanek also takes the Church to task for its emphasis on passive obedience. She asserts that this attitude is a product of the Renaissance, and she insists that a part of the Church's "very foundations in the Middle Ages is that *the conscience of the individual has the force of law*". In actual fact the medieval Church has an appalling record of persecution and massacre of heretics, and if it asserted the primacy of conscience it did so in theory only. Nonetheless, Dr. Biezanek has herself acted on the principle in her conflict with the Church authorities. It seems odd to find this courageous independence of mind combined with the extreme credulity she so often shows. It cannot be coincidence that this splendid stand has been made by a Catholic who had the advantage of a Quaker education, and was never subjected to the training in conformity which is such a basic feature of Catholic education. Even inside the Catholic Church she does credit to her Quaker upbringing.

In her the bitter suffering of Catholic womanhood becomes at last articulate. No priest has ever spoken from experience such as hers—a worm's eye view of the hopeless misery of caring for an impossible number of children and satisfying the sexual demands of an inconsiderate husband, while exhausted in mind and body from almost continuous pregnancy and loss of sleep. She herself believes that the wretchedness she endured before taking the pill was sent by God to prepare her for the work she is now doing, and the Church itself will very likely come to share this view. In the probably not far distant time when the Church has accepted contraception, this woman may well be venerated as an inspired pioneer, because she justifies the new approach to sex in mystical terms, and suggests a formula by which the Church can change its mind, while claiming to have been fundamentally right. My own prophecy is that in record time Dr. Anne Biezanek will be made a saint by the Church she at present defies.

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London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. J. W. BARKER, L. EBURY, J. A. MILLAR and C. E. WOOD.

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Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society, (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday July 4th, 11 a.m.: Dr. JOHN LEWIS, "D. H. Lawrence in 1965".

Notes and News

THE greater part of this week's issue is devoted to the subject of the Roman Catholic Church and the Pill, a subject that affects not only Catholics themselves but literally the whole world. For, in a period of enormous population growth, the opposition of Catholic-dominated nations in UNO and WHO gravely hindered the spread of birth control knowledge among underdeveloped peoples. The Roman Catholic is not, it must be emphasised, the only religion that opposes birth control, but it is the most influential in the advanced nations and the most powerful internationally.

WE HAVE long insisted that the Vatican will be forced—as the expression goes—to “come to terms” with birth control. We have further argued that the Pill, differing as it does from other contraceptive methods, provided a likely escape route from the Church's now impossible anti-birth control position. No one familiar with papal practice would expect a sudden *volte face*. Infallible pronouncements, however misguided, cannot be completely ignored, especially when they have been reiterated in every Catholic diocese in the world. Pope Pius XII had, of course, condemned the Pill at the Congress of Haematologists on September 12th, 1958. It had become necessary about ten years before, he said, for the Holy See “to declare expressly and publicly that direct sterilisation, permanent or temporary, of a man or woman is illicit by virtue of the natural law from which the Church herself, as you know, has no powers to dispense”. The Pill—or, as the Pope put it, the use of medication—had as its end the prevention of conception by preventing ovulation. It was therefore an instance of direct sterilisation.

DR. JOHN ROCK's *The Time has Come* was published in 1963. In August of the same year, a significant official

statement was issued by the entire Dutch Roman Catholic hierarchy. This expressed a concern for “marriage problems which cause anxiety in so many families”, and admitted that the Church had “no immediately appropriate answer ready” to meet all the questions posed by new biochemical methods for the regulation and limitation of human fertility. Though the oral contraceptive could “be no more accepted as the generally used solution to matrimonial distress that the already long known instrumental means”, Catholic theologians were, the bishops said, “discussing the question whether these means could be acceptable in certain circumstances”. The statement concluded with the hope that the second session of the Vatican Council would “offer the opportunity of discussing these questions in a broader context”.

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MONSIGNOR McREAVY, might argue in the *Clergy Review* in February 1964, that there was “no real conflict” between the “prudently worded declaration” of the Dutch hierarchy and the “more explicit pronouncements hitherto made by the Holy See”; that they both rejected “outright” any contraceptive use of the Pill. But, however prudently worded, the Dutch statement did represent an advance—a development—from the lawful-use-by-nuns-in-danger-of-rape attitude. “Acceptable in certain circumstances” sounded cautious enough, but the framework was not a Congo convent overrun by “rebels”; it was the marital situation and its “problems”. Therein lay the significance of the declaration from Utrecht. The latter recognised what an English priest, Father Wilfrid Stubbs, called the “conscientious difficulties” of a Catholic married couple. Priests are, Father Stubbs had said in a letter to the *Clergy Review* in May 1963, “dealing with human persons and not machines” and anyone “who seriously equates a loving wife with a virgin in danger of rape, is out of touch with real people and real human problems”.

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THE theological aspects of the problem were dealt with by Canon Janssens of Louvain in an article in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis* (Oct-Dec. 1963). “One must not have recourse to the use of progestogens when periodic continence is possible, and sufficiently efficient to assure voluntary and generous procreation”, the Canon concluded. But when periodic continence is not practicable or efficient (when for example, “it is difficult to determine the moment of release of the ovum; if the cycles are too irregular, if the temperature curve is imprecise; if instruction is lacking”) it “seems to us that it could be replaced by recourse to progestogens as long as they are used in the service of justified birth regulation”.

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FOR British Catholics, the great sensation came with Archbishop Roberts's article in *Search* in April 1964. Not only did the Archbishop say openly that the reasons for the official Catholic condemnation of birth control did not convince him, he showed how the Church had definitely changed its teaching on other matters in the past. And, he concluded, “Those of us who can't see why or how to convict of crime the millions who see contraception as a right or duty in marriage—we certainly may and must press for the acceptance by the General Council of the ‘challenge’ to justify by reason our own challenge to the world made in the name of reason”. By and large, however, the English—or Irish-English—clergy has been conservative, or at least silent, Father Cocker and Father McMahon being notable and courageous exceptions. Courageous, too, has been Dr. Anne Biezanek, whose book *All Things New*, forms the basis of this week's articles by Margaret McIlroy and Dr. Vernon C. Grounds.

The Roman Catholic Church and Contraception

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Language could scarcely be any plainer. Contraception is "a grave sin", "a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious", and which "the divine Majesty regards with greatest detestation", a "horrible crime" which "at times has been punished" even "with death"; and this view of contraception is by no means a novelty, a modern idea; it is, on the contrary, "the uninterrupted Christian tradition."

Similarly, in his 1951 Address to Catholic Midwives, Pope Pius XII asserted with respect to the pronouncement of his predecessor :

This precept is as valid today as it was yesterday, and it will be the same tomorrow and always, because it does not imply a precept of human law but is the expression of a law which is natural and divine.⁸

In that same address Pius discussed some of the reasons which may justify the rhythm method of birth control :

There are serious motives, such as those often mentioned in the so-called medical, eugenic, economic, and social "indications", that can exempt for a long time, perhaps even the whole duration of the marriage, from the positive and obligatory carrying out of the act. From this it follows that observing the non-fertile periods alone can be lawful only under a moral aspect.

But the Pontiff immediately goes on to point out that if

there are no similar grave reasons of a personal nature or deriving from external circumstances, then the determination to avoid habitually the fecundity of the union while at the same time to continue fully satisfying their sensuality, can be derived only from a false appreciation of life and from reasons having nothing to do with proper ethical laws.

And what if the rhythm method does not work ? "There is but one way open, that of complete abstinence."⁹

Again in his 1958 Address to the International Congress of Haematology, Pius XII condemned the use of anovulant steroids. First, he interdicted sterilisation, rebuking "theologians animated by imprudent zeal and shortsighted temerity."

Sterilisation which aims, as a means or as an end, at rendering procreation impossible, is a grave violation of the moral law, and is therefore illicit. Direct sterilisation, permanent or temporary, of a man or a woman, is illicit by virtue of the natural law from which the Church herself, as you know, has no power to dispense.¹⁰

Then, turning his attention to drugs which inhibit ovulation, the Pontiff branded their use as "direct sterilisation."

A direct and, therefore, illicit sterilisation results when ovulation is stopped to protect the uterus and the organism from the consequences of a pregnancy which it is not able to sustain. Some moralists contend that it is permissible to take medicines with this latter intention, but they are in error. It is likewise necessary to reject the view of a number of doctors and moralists who permit these practices when medical indications make conception undesirable, or in similar cases, which cannot be discussed here. In these cases the use of medication has as its end the prevention of conception by preventing ovulation. They are instances, therefore, of direct sterilisation.¹¹

Once again, Pius XII in 1958 told representatives of Large Families of Rome and Italy :

The value of the testimony offered by the parents of large families lies not only in their unequivocal and forceful rejection of any deliberate compromise between the law of God and human selfishness, but also in their readiness to accept joyfully and gratefully these priceless gifts of God — their children — and whatever number it may please Him to send them.¹²

We now have before us all the important papal statements on this issue. Hence we are constrained to endorse the summarising conclusion set forth by Dr. J. Dominian in the *Catholic Herald*, May 22nd, 1964 :

There have been pronouncements from the Holy See in 1822, 1842, 1851, 1853, 1856, 1886, 1916, 1940, 1947 and 1955 con-

demning contraception, as well as the authoritative encyclical *Custi Connubii* in 1930 by Pius XI and the pronouncements of Pius XII in 1951 and 1958. While just short of a formal infallible definition, the teaching has been clear and consistent. From a moral point of view contraception is the deliberate intention and positive action taken by any means to deprive sexual union of its procreative potentiality and this is what is condemned. *It should be noted here that both the intention and the means matter.*¹³

To Protestants Dr. Dominian's conclusion appears irrefutable, and we fail to discover any ground whatever for challenging the statement of Father Maurice O'Leary which was previously quoted : "There is no uncertainty about the Church's teaching on contraception. From the earliest times until today it has been condemned."

We fail to see, moreover, how a conscientious Catholic like Dr. Biezanek can operate a Family Planning Clinic in the light of Pope Paul's allocation on June 23rd, 1964. In part the Pontiff said :

A problem which everyone talks about is that of birth control, as it is called, namely, of population increases on the one hand, and family morality on the other. It is an extremely grave problem. . . . The Church recognises the multiple aspects of it, that is to say the multiple rights, in the forefront of which are certainly those of married people, their freedom, their conscience, their love, their duty. But the Church must also affirm her own rights, namely that of God's law, interpreted, taught, favoured and defended by her. And the Church will have to proclaim this law of God in the light of the scientific, the social and psychological truths which in these times have undergone new and very ample study and documentation. . . . The question is being subjected to study, as wide and profound as possible, as grave and honest as it must be on a subject of such importance. It is under study which we may say, we hope will soon be completed with the co-operation of many and outstanding experts. . . . But meanwhile we say frankly that up to now we do not have sufficient motive to consider out of date and therefore not binding the norms given by Pope Pius XII in this regard. Therefore they must be considered valid, at least until we feel obliged in conscience to change them.¹⁴

This has all the earmarks of an authoritative directive : "the norms given by Pope Pius XII" are still "valid" and consequently "binding". And when any pontiff thus speaks his mind, the faithful Catholic, as we understand his duty, has no option but obedience. Indeed, a noted moralist, Father J. C. Ford, S J, wrote with respect to Pius XII's interdiction of all contraceptive techniques other than the rhythm method :

On 12th September, 1958, Pope Pius XII clearly and explicitly rejected as immoral the contraceptive use of drugs, pills or medicines which "by preventing ovulation make fecundation impossible." There can be no doubt but he intended this teaching to be binding in conscience. It is true that theologians do not consider that such moral pronouncements are proposed to the faithful like an article of faith with infallible authority. But . . . his authoritative pronouncements call for acceptance, and . . . are binding in practice on the consciences of Catholics.¹⁵

Nor is that all. Unquestioning obedience is demanded of a good Catholic even when an ordinary Bishop speaks, to say nothing of the Pope. It is precisely this suffocating authoritarianism, implicit if not too frequently overt, which calls forth the protest of a layman like Daniel Callahan in trenchant criticism. *Honesty in the Church*. Callahan cites the dictum of a reputable theologian concerning a layman's subordination to his bishop and this dictum dates not from the Middle Ages but from 1962 and the United States of America !

The bishop is the ruler, the shepherd sent by Christ to his territory. The layman is responsible for his own personal life. He must rule his own life as directed by the bishop who stands for Christ. He must follow the bishop's teaching in the domain of the natural law, in the moral aspects of the social

and political spheres, in the area of canon law, even in the application of these laws of Christ to his own personal decision. This is a true act of maturity. It is to rule one's life according to the will of Christ.¹⁶

No wonder Dr. Biezanek complains that her Church (and she insists on remaining a faithful member of it) is a repressive system of totalitarianism which leaves no room for conscience!¹⁷ How, then, do conscientious Catholics, deciding to abide within the papal fold, justify their advocacy of contraception? Since the Popes have forbidden the practice of contraception, why does a Dr. Biezanek dispute the traditional and authoritative position of her Church? This is an interesting question . . . We simply raise some related questions which may embarrass Roman Catholics but which we as Protestants raise in sincere perplexity.

Does the infallible guide sometimes strangely disappoint floundering Roman Catholics by refusing to speak until it perceives the direction the wind is blowing? Then does it belatedly put its rationalised *imprimatur* on a *de facto* situation which has developed? In short, is the infallible guide afflicted with a fallibility which nullifies its claim to infallibility?

There are Roman Catholics who insist that they possess a certainty which bewildered Protestants might well envy. For example, Father O'Leary roundly affirms: "We have this certainty from the teaching of the Church, that contraception is intrinsically immoral, and no opinion to the contrary may be allowed."¹⁸ But Daniel Callahan, a contemporary Diogenes, flatly contradicts his co-religionist:

The Catholic is supposed to be indistinguishable from other men by his absolute certainty, his unwavering devotion, his secure conviction that his search for truth has come to an end. The individual Catholic often does his part to sustain this preconception. To the outsider he will present the solid presence, one which carefully conceals any problems he may be having. Even to other Catholics, he may not fully reveal him-

self; his inner restlessness will be masked consistently and effectively. In hard fact, however, the Catholic may be as much subject to uncertainty as the next man. This is particularly true today. For the past decade the Church has been in the midst of a tremendous upheaval. Many practices once thought permanent have been called into question by the Second Vatican Council. Many teachings, once thought unquestionable, have been subject to intense analysis and criticism. Many hesitations, once carefully hidden, have now come into the open. While much of this rumbling is the natural fruit of a desire for renewal in the Church, it has also unmistakably revealed the existence of the subterranean life in the Church far more complex than the bland surface that appears in theology manuals.¹⁹

Perhaps, therefore, conscientious Roman Catholics are being driven to "an agonising reappraisal" which will be far more excruciating than they had at first imagined it would be.

[Reprinted from *Christian Heritage*, June 1965]

1. Quoted by William Birmingham, "Authority, Dissent, and Modern Needs," ed. William Birmingham, *What Modern Catholics Think About Birth Control*, a Signet Book, 1964, pp. 85-86.
2. Anne Biezanek, *All Things New*, 1964, p. 99.
3. Quoted in *The Pill*, ed. Leo Pyle, p. 62.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
5. Those who are concerned about the details of this dramatic reversal will find them conveniently assembled in Elvah W. Sulloway, *Birth Control and Catholic Doctrine* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 155ff.
6. Quoted in Leo Pyle, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
7. Quoted by Leslie Dwart, "Casti Connubii and the Development of Dogma," Archbishop Thomas D. Roberts *et. al.*, *Contraception and Holiness: The Catholic Predicament* (1964), pp. 237-239.
8. Quoted in Leo Pyle, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
9. Quoted by William Birmingham, *op. cit.* p. 77.
10. Quoted by Frank J. Ayd, Jr., "Pius XII's Statement on the Pill," *The Catholic Mind*, January 1965, p. 50.
11. *Loc. Cit.*
12. Quoted by William Birmingham, *op. cit.* p. 77.
13. Quoted in Leo Pyle, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
14. Quoted in Leo Pyle, *ibid.*, pp. 211-212.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
16. Quoted by Daniel Callahan, *Honesty in the Church*, 1965, pp. 85-86.
17. Cf. Anne Biezanek, *op. cit.*, pp. 108, 109, 149, 152.
18. Quoted in Leo Pyle, *op. cit.* p. 93.
19. Daniel Callahan *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

The Vatican and the Future

By F. A. RIDLEY

DURING this past decade, to be precise, ever since the accession of the late Pope John XXIII, a remarkable metamorphosis has overtaken the Roman Catholic Church and its Vatican leadership — "a papal revolution" as the late Pope himself termed it. For whereas in earlier ages, and very particularly since the Protestant Reformation, Rome prided herself upon her exclusiveness and took up a uniformly hostile attitude towards every other form of Christianity, today the emphasis is primarily laid upon unity; upon Christian reunion. And current papal policy seems to be consciously aiming at the eventual attainment of some kind of (to borrow a political metaphor) Christian united front under — it goes without saying! — the "infallible" leadership of the Papacy. The present tangled manoeuvres of the Vatican Council seem to envisage such a kind of eventual fulfilment.

What are the future perspectives that stem from this present startling *volte face* of the world-wide Church of Rome?

First of all, let us examine the origins of this present remarkable development. Unlikely as it may sound, it is actually true that, in a sense, the present papal revolution started in Birmingham! For that famous metropolis was not only the city of the Chamberlains, it also ranks among its most famous residents the most important Catholic thinker, John Henry Cardinal Newman, and it was precisely Cardinal Newman who, a century before Pope John,

laid down the determining theory of the papal revolution that is nowadays transforming the Vatican seemingly out of all recognition.

It was Newman who, very especially in *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, first established the then novel idea that the Christian Church contains within itself the seeds of new "development"; and it was an idea that transformed static Catholic theology to an evolving process.

The Pope, by virtue of his infallibility, has the power to add, subtract, modify, or even totally refashion the currently operative theory and practice of the Church. By virtue of its faculty of development, the Church must no longer be regarded as a stick-in-the-mud, hopelessly tied to its irrevocable past. For it now has the power previously denied it — to change with the times. Such were the epoch-making theories evolved by this great thinker in his monastic cell at Edgbaston who, as a former FREETHINKER editor Chapman Cohen used to say, is the last Christian thinker whom Freethinkers are compelled to take seriously as a foeman worthy of their steel. And do we not at present see precisely such a development in papal practice, such a reversal of bygone traditions as Newman had already forecast more than a century ago? I repeat, the present papal revolution at Rome had its origins in Birmingham.

What are the future perspectives? Rome today is not

changing her line because she likes to do so; she is changing it because she has to; even at Rome, circumstances are omniscient and evolution irresistible. For as the Jesuit expert on Christian reunion, Cardinal Bea, recently remarked to the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich (Dr. John Robinson of *Honest to God* fame): "the Counter-Reformation is over." Or to put it perhaps more realistically, that phase in the evolution of Catholicism which began at the Council of Trent as the "counter" to the Protestant Reformation has now exhausted its utility.

Protestantism is no longer the major enemy of Rome — outside Belfast at any rate. That position has now been taken up by atheism or, more precisely, by the scientific revolution of our era, which in the field of philosophy expresses itself as atheism — that is, by the exclusion of the supernatural from a universe autonomous and explicitly self-sufficient. It is against this world view — one infinitely more alien and dangerous than even the most iconoclastic forms of Protestantism ever were — that Rome is now regrouping her forces and seeking new allies even amongst her former enemies.

It is with the reorientate its anti-Protestant front that the Vatican nowadays appears to be exactly following the advice traditionally given by one of its former missionaries, who used to advise his pagan converts to worship everything that they had previously burnt, and to burn everything they had previously worshipped.

It is with the express aim of jettisoning its earlier primarily anti-Protestant strategy and of evolving one aimed primarily at containing the forces of atheism and secularism, that Rome has now invoked Newman's theory and is developing it at a speed and towards ends that might well have astonished its original author.

It will now be clear what is the ultimate objective of the present papal revolution at Rome. For if it actually implies the end of the old — 16th century — Counter-Reformation, it equally implies the beginning of a new Counter-Reformation; the effective substitution of an anti-atheistic Counter-Reformation for its anti-Protestant predecessor. The Second Vatican Council is inaugurating the new one in much the same fashion as the Council of Trent inaugurated the old one. What are the current perspectives and the future prospects for this new Counter-Reformation that began in 1958 with the advent of Pope John?

Actually the prospects do not appear at all bright for the Vatican. Certainly Rome (as Lord Macaulay stressed in a famous passage) is an extremely resilient institution and one that has weathered many crises in the course of its 2,000 years of evolution. But the present crisis is qualitatively and not only quantitatively different. The scientific revolution which has transformed human society more completely within a single lifetime than it had been previously transformed since the days of the Pharaohs, would appear to spell the inevitable doom of the whole concept of the supernatural, and therewith of its most impressive embodiment in human history, the Roman Catholic Church. At present that Church is falling back on its "Maginot", its final line strategic defences, the united front of all the Churches and perhaps eventually of all the gods. Failing some such major retrogression of human civilisation such as followed the fall of Rome in the Dark Ages, the end would definitely appear to be in sight for the Vatican. For what we witness today is its final stand.

The third and final part of Georges Ory's article, *The Evidence for Jesus* has been held over until next week.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE NCCL

The statement in a recent issue to the effect that THE FREETHINKER is not the organ of the National Secular Society prompts me to write to you regretting the space devoted to the AGM of the National Council for Civil Liberties (11/6/65), the more so as you were good enough to publish a letter of mine a year or two ago criticising the association of the NSS with the Aldermaston march. You may say that as I am not a member of the NSS the activities of that body are no business of mine, but I would point out that my concern is with THE FREETHINKER, which I have read since 1924 and which I continue to take, not because at my age it can teach me anything, but to support the freethought point of view and for use as a propaganda medium.

In my opinion the propaganda value of THE FREETHINKER is much reduced by the association of the NSS with equivocal bodies such as CND and NCCL. It is, for instance, disturbing to find reported in the columns of THE FREETHINKER, apparently with approval, a statement to the effect that young people "may fight in national wars at 18, but not vote for or against them." When, may I ask, has the electorate ever had the opportunity of voting for or against a war? (Please note the indefinite article.) The statement is at best meaningless; at worst deliberately misleading.

Again, the last paragraph of the report states that "Through its affiliated bodies the NCCL now represents 3½ million people in Great Britain." "Through its affiliated bodies" means of course that the NCCL claims to represent people who in fact have probably never heard of it.

I suggest that THE FREETHINKER cannot afford space for statistics of this kind, which are as valueless as a trade-unionist's signature, or for coy lists of delegates which if more closely specified would look very odd indeed in a libertarian context.

W. E. NICHOLSON.

I read with amazement motions 1 and 2 from the National Secular Society for adoption by NCCL, mentioned by Mr. Tribe in THE FREETHINKER, June 11th: "This annual general meeting urges HM Government to remedy the following violations of individual and group freedoms entailed by the Establishment of the Church of England, viz.: (1) inability of the C of E to change its formularies and forms of service without approval by an external body, viz.: Parliament, which may be neither sympathetic nor interested; (2) appointment of higher Church dignitaries by the Queen acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, who may be of any or no religion and acting according to political considerations."

The NSS has always advocated the Disestablishment of the Church of England. This entails renunciation of the privileges accompanying establishment. A state church has no right to demand freedom from state interference; to grant this would be taking a liberty with the state and all other religious bodies. The Church of England was awarded power, privilege, lands, wealth and buildings by the state because it accepted jurisdiction from the state.

That a Church should have to bow to Parliament in matters of doctrine and rites and to a Monarch for permission to appoint a Church dignitary is, of course, ludicrous. But it is even more ludicrous that the NSS should espouse the sorrows of the State Church and enter the lists in support of its dignity and freedom. Should we not rather enjoy the spectacle of non-Conformists, Atheists and even (in one case) a Parsee, voting upon the desirability of this or that form of worship to impose upon their Reverent Lordships, the Bench of Bishops? Disestablish the Church, by all means, but while it clings to its privileges and emoluments, leave it open to the contempt of intelligent people.

EVA EBURY.

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