

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

On Contraception and Procreative Good: Contraception and the Natural Law

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Philippine Studies vol. 14, no. 1 (1966): 175–176

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

ON CONTRACEPTION AND PROCREATIVE GOOD

CONTRACEPTION AND THE NATURAL LAW. By Germain G. Grisez. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1964. 245 pp.

A most timely book is this first major work of Professor Grisez of Georgetown University. Anyone teaching ethics or Moral Theology would value it for the vast amount of information and erudition contained within its pages and crammed into the footnotes. Few will agree with everything found in this stimulating work but all who take the time will be richer for having weighed the arguments.

The author contends that the usual arguments from reason offered to prove that contraception is always forbidden are not conclusive. The "perverted-faculty" argument, for instance, is shown as begging the question in the way it is usually proposed. The traditional arguments and some of the modern arguments, such as the phenomenological one, are examined minutely and found wanting. The author then goes on to establish what he considers conclusive arguments after outlining a more adequate theory of moral law in contradistinction to the conventional natural-law theory (which leads to the inadequate arguments), and in opposition to what he calls "Situationism" which is exemplified by the "classical utilitarianism of Bentham, dialectical materialism, and the ethics of ambiguity".

The central thesis of the book is clearly stated more than once: "The malice [of contraception] is in the will's direct violation of the procreative good as a value in itself, as an ideal, which may never be submerged" (p. 92); "To bring home to someone's mind the intrinsic malice of contraception, it should be enough to point out the value of the procreative good and the fact that contraception is against it" (p. 190).

It seems to this reviewer that such an argument has an essential weakness since it does not distinguish clearly enough between those who have already begotten a family, perhaps a large one, and those who shirk their duty for selfish reasons. The couple who have already shown their devotion to the procreative good may now be certain that nature no longer wishes them to bring children into the world; their family is as large as right reason demands or expects. Supposing that rhythm was impossible for them an argument from reason must prove conclusively that they are bound to avoid the full use of their marital rights for the rest of their fertile years, perhaps a fifteen year period or more. To say that nature still insists that such a couple seek the "procreative good" in using their rights when right reason (nature) already teaches that they should not have any more children or else that nature forbids the full use of their marriage rights is the stumbling block for those who approach this problem from reason alone. The author tries to prove such a teaching of nature but not to everyone's satisfaction.

Fr. Haring, C.S.S.R. (*America*: July 3, 1965:21) accuses Prof. Grisez of so approaching the problem that he depreciates both human life and conjugal love. According to Fr. Haring the natural-law doctrine of the author puts life or service of life fundamentally in competition with or in opposition to love. Prof. Grisez had stated earlier that Fr. Haring was too willing to depreciate human life in favor of love (*America*: May 22, 1965:754). The sharp exchange between the two writers shows that the book under review is not the last word in the great controversy that has arisen around contraception and the natural law. But it is a book that must be read by anyone who wishes to keep abreast of the debate.

G. W. HEALY, S.J.

A SOUTHEAST ASIAN BIBLIOGRAPHY

SOUTHEAST ASIA: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED REFERENCE SOURCES IN WESTERN LANGUAGES. Revised and Enlarged. Compiled by Cecil Hobbs. Head, South Asia Section, Orientalia Division, Reference Department, Library of Congress. Washington: 1964, v, 180, pp. Index.

According to the indefatigable compiler in his Bibliographic Note, "In 1952 the Library of Congress published [photo-offset] the bibliographical compilation *Southeast Asia: an Annotated Bibliography of Selected Reference Sources*, with an analysis of each of the selected 345 entries, the majority of the items being published between 1942 through 1952.

"The present publication comprising 535 entries, drawn from thousands of items, is an updating of that former publication, with most of the books carrying imprints from 1952 through 1962. The original format has been preserved [8" x 10 1/4", double column] thereby giving a critical appraisal in substantive language of the text, bibliography, maps, illustrations, statistical tables, and documents" (iii).

The Information Officer of The Library of Congress adds in the Press Release enclosed with the volume that "...the new publication covers the countries of Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, with entries arranged by broad subjects within each country. These subject groupings are: General Background (including geography and physical setting), History, Politics, and Government; Economics (agriculture, commerce, industry, and labor); Social Conditions (anthropology, education,