

BIRTH CONTROL *in* HOLLAND

BY
REV. J. VAN DER HEYDEN



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC WOMEN
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

THE FOLLOWING is an excerpt from a letter received by the National Council of Catholic Women from the president of the International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues, Madame F. Steenbergh-Engeringh, who is a resident of Holland:

"With regard to your letter of November 11, 1927, I am very much interested in what you have written concerning the struggle you are maintaining in order to obstruct the passage of laws defending the use of anti-conception methods.

"You also tell me that the promoters of birth control pretend that in the Netherlands that Government upholds birth control and that we have many clinics for the propagation of anti-conception methods. Through us you ask that I inform you on this subject and I hasten to assure you that it is absolutely false; on the contrary, our Minister of Justice Donner has refused again and again (the last time on June 15, 1927) to give official approbation to the Neo-Malthusian League on the grounds that it is spreading a doctrine harmful to the well-being of the nation and contrary to good morals, such official approbation being necessary for recognition under the law of the Netherlands.

"I quote below some articles from the Penal Code of the Netherlands which prove that our Government punishes those who teach anti-conception methods:

"ARTICLE 451—(3rd) He will be punished by two months' imprisonment, maximum, or by a fine of 200 florins, maximum, who displays anti-conception means, offers publicly or without demand these means or gives any service which prevents pregnancy, or propagates these methods by books or pamphlets. (4th) He will be punished by three months' imprisonment, maximum, or by a fine of 300 florins, maximum, who displays publicly means of abortion, offers publicly or without demand these means, or renders services of abortion, or spreads information regarding abortion by books or pamphlets."

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(Birth control advocates in the United States always cite Holland as a country which authorizes the practice of contraception. To ascertain what was the basis of these claims and what change had been made in Dutch legislation on the subject, the N. C. W. C. NEWS SERVICE requested the Rev. Dr. J. Van der Heyden, its Louvain Correspondent, to get the facts. His investigation wholly disproves the statements of American birth controllers that Holland either favors or tolerates the limitation of births.—EDITOR.)

IN HOLLAND the number of births per thousand inhabitants was 23.5 in 1926, a decrease compared with the preceding year, when the percentage was 24.3. Is that abnormal? No, for everywhere in Europe the birth rate scale is lowering. In fact, Holland's rate is still above that of her neighboring countries. The birth rate of her large cities, low when compared with the maximum rates known and enjoyed by Cairo in Egypt—51.6— and Alexandria—44.6—nevertheless cuts a good figure by the side of the rates of other European centers. Amsterdam's is 18.8 per thousand inhabitants; The Hague's, 18.6; Rotterdam's, 20.7, as against 24.3 for Rome, 17.1 for London, 16.1 for Paris, 15.3 for Copenhagen, 12.2 for Vienna, 12.1 for Brussels, 11.2 for Oslo, 11 for Berlin, 10.1 for Stockholm.

Is the diminishing birth rate in Holland due to legally favored birth control? In no wise; for the Dutch legislation, far from favoring birth control, has the most stringent legislation of any European country, Germany excepted, against the practices of the avowed birth controllers.

BIRTH CONTROLLERS DEFEATED

Not later than last July, the advocates of the limitation of children—for there are such in Holland as well as elsewhere—met

with a setback in the Dutch Parliament. It denied their association—the “Neo-Malthusiansche Bond”—(Neo-Malthusian League) the legal status for which they petitioned.

At one time, back in the nineties, a minister of Manchesterian faith granted legal corporate capacity to the League for a trial period of time, which expired in 1910. Ever since then the birth controllers have been trying in vain for recognition by the State of the existence of their organization. Their failure has not hindered them from doing great harm, notwithstanding the stringent legislation against the making of specific propaganda for birth control, either through the press or from the lecture platform, against the exposition for sale of contraceptive appliances, against advertising the same, etc. Through covert and devious ways, they but too readily influence people whom love of ease, egoism and fear of responsibility make willing listeners to the siren voice preaching the limitation of children upon economical and medical grounds.

IRRELIGION HELD RESPONSIBLE

The decline of religion, especially in the Protestant northern provinces, the ever-increasing chase after pleasure and ease characteristic of the times, are mighty auxiliaries of Neo-Malthusianism and render the task of those who combat the suicidal doctrines particularly difficult.

Two organizations—*De Vereeniging tot bestryding van Neo-Malthusianisme* (League to Combat Neo-Malthusianism— and *Voor Eer en Deugd* (For Honor and Virtue)—were founded with the express purpose of fighting birth control propaganda. At a recent gathering of the Amsterdam Branch of *Voor Eer en Deugd* the principal speaker was Dr. Meulemans, director of a lying-in hospital and of one of the two great state schools for accoucheuses, a gynecologist of renown, known far beyond Holland's boundaries.

Being a state official, it may well be assumed that Dr. Meulemans' public utterances reflect the sentiments of both the executive and the legislative powers of the land.

LOGIC OF BIRTH CONTROL

Now, in his address to the members of *Voor Eer en Deugd* and their guests at the meeting before mentioned, he squarely put the question:

“Is Neo-Malthusianism (birth control as understood by your Mrs. Sanger) licit *in se* or not?”

“If licit *in se*,” said he, “we may ask ourselves, if, with all the accidental motives of a medical and economical nature, the system is not at times desirable under well defined conditions.

“If not licit *in se*, then no motive of opportunism can ever make the illicit licit.

“That is the only way of putting the question squarely. And there is but one answer to it—Neo-Malthusianism must be absolutely rejected *in se*.

“It is one thing not to perform an action and it is another and quite different thing to perform it and at the same time to prevent all the natural and rational consequences of the deed performed.

“The man who causes an engine to stop acts quite differently from him who moves the lever that sets it in motion and at the same time works all the brakes intended to stop it. We are quite justified in entertaining doubts about the soundness of his mind.

PRACTICE INTRINSICALLY IMMORAL

“According to the ordinary laws of logic, which hold good for all times, there is but one conclusion to draw from the above, namely: any and every application of Neo-Malthusianism is reprehensible in itself (*in se*).

“That ought to settle the matter, not only for Catholics, but for every thinking man as well.

“But for all that, there may be some utility in putting the question: Are there perhaps medical or economical reasons militating in favor of Neo-Malthusianism?

“What would be the result economically of the limitation of offspring? It is not possible to give a general economical appreciation. In France, a century ago, the limitation of children through the application of Malthusianism, and later of Neo-Malthusianism, was regarded as sovereign economical wisdom; and at present it is just the contrary that is hailed as wisdom—France does not have enough children.

ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGEOUS

“Neo-Malthusianism practised out of sloth, love of ease and egoism, as is but too often the case, can but be economically disadvantageous. If in the holiest and highest of life functions, egoism

becomes the fundamental law of the individual, what can we expect but that the social conditions, which, after all has been said, are nothing more than the sum total of personal qualities, grow into wanton conditions to which no laws will be able to bring any improvement?

“It is said that the limitation of children increases the happiness of the home. Is that quite true? Who is going to decide whether or not a man possesses sufficient capacities and energy to provide for a large family? And do many children exhaust the mother and make her unfit for the pleasures of life?

“Let us look back a generation and compare our mothers, who were almost without exception surrounded by many children, with the women of the present day.

“We doctors stand aghast at the large number of women suffering from nervous diseases. They are called the victims of motherhood, grow old before their time, and are practically never well.

LARGE FAMILIES HAPPY

“Is the diagnosis right? Go, look at the preceding generation. All those ills were not known then. Do we not feast our eyes upon the photographs of the large family groups taken on the occasion of silver weddings upon which a mother of a dozen or more children shows off to advantage by the side of her eldest daughter? Should we not rather seek the reason for the sickliness of the modern family in the demands the strange unnatural mode of living exacts from our young people?

“And what is all that fiddle-faddle about the mother of a large family leading a humdrum life because she has no time to enjoy its pleasures?

“She who seeks and finds her supreme happiness in the care of her home and in the education of her children is much less in danger of becoming a wearied nervous sufferer than the mother of one or two children who leads the life of the up-to-date woman.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE QUESTIONED

“Birth controllers reproach Catholics for setting up as the highest aim of marriage to bring as many children as possible into the world. They would make us believe that the text: *Crescite et multiplicamini*, ‘Increase and multiply,’ which we hold to be a divine warning

against Neo-Malthusianism, cannot be the word of the all wise Creator, but of some one who gives a precept without thought of what he orders.

“To understand the ‘*Crescite et multiplicamini*,’ it is necessary to read the whole text. We find it in Genesis I, 28-29: ‘And God blessed then saying: increase and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth.

“And God said: ‘Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own kind, to be your meat.’

“We read further in Genesis IX, 1-3: ‘And God blessed Noe and his sons. And He said to them: Increase and multiply and fill the earth.

MAN’S SUPREMACY DECREED

“‘And let the fear and dread of you be upon all the beasts of the earth, and upon all the fowls of the air, and all that move upon the earth, and all the fishes of the sea are delivered into your hands.

“‘And everything that moveth, and liveth shall be meat for you; even as the great herbs have I delivered them all to you.’

“We see then that a promise of food and sustenance is connected with the commandment ‘Increase and multiply.’ From the context of those words it is evident that the process of multiplication is attended with reasonable conditions.

“Does it not, moreover, stand to reason that the sexual instinct must stand under the command of reason?

“Why should all human instincts have to be controlled by reason, and the sexual instinct form an exception? Because it is one of the strongest and mightiest of instincts? That is precisely the reason for putting on stronger brakes, so as to check that instinct.

“What would you say of the hydraulic engineer who would construct dams for all the small rivulets and creeks but neglect to do so for the mighty river, on the plea that because of its power, it needs no dam?”

DR. MEULEMANS’ AUTHORITY

Any one reading those public utterances from Dr. Meulemans, who may justly be regarded as an official authority, since he is the director of a lying-in hospital and of a school for midwives that has

cost millions to the State and is known far and wide as a model of its kind, cannot fail to see that to accuse the Dutch Government of favoring birth control is an out and out calumny. Holland stands fairly and squarely opposed to birth control; but unfortunately the wickedness of men and the weakness of human nature are perceivable in Holland as elsewhere and the evils of modern times are not less in evidence in Holland among all classes of the population than in her neighboring countries. The laws can do no more in Holland than they can in America to curb the passions of mortals.

Another proof that the official Dutch world does not at all favor birth control may be gathered from the following incident.

In the City Council of Warmond, a councilman pleaded for an extra allowance of salary to policemen for every child up to the third inclusively. He defended his plea upon the ground that the hardness of the times is attributable to the increase of population and such increase is to be regarded as a calamity for society at large.

MAYOR HALTS MOTION

The Mayor did not even allow the proposition to be put to a vote and *De Leidsche Courant*, taking its cue from the Mayor's answer to the motion, commented upon it as follows:

"Mr. Mothuyzen's move is nothing more nor less than propaganda for Neo-Malthusianism and for the deliberate limitation of children. His aim is to hit large families by withholding from them familial allocations for any child above the third. And he is impelled to this by his fear of overpopulation, evidently forgetting that his system may lead to depopulation; for 'woe to the people that through artificial limitation of births gets into the plight which used to be the consequence in times past of frightful calamities, of devastating wars, and of contagious diseases.'"

To this quotation from the German sociologist Father Pesch, S.J., *De Leidsche Courant* adds one from the Dutch University Professor Cort van der Linden, who, in 1887, wrote in *De Gids*:

"The increase of population is the spring of life. It stimulates to greater production, to new discoveries, to a competition which does not stop tearing down the old and erecting the new. On its onward move, society resembles an ever-growing pyramid, which to rise higher needs an ever widening foundation. If society is to progress then population must increase."