

CATHOLICS, MARRIAGE AND CONTRACEPTION by John Marshall, M.D. *Helicon*, 21s.

In the publishers' blurb we read: 'This is the first book in this field which has not been dedicated to a "line". Rather does it seek to set before people with impartiality the issues on which they must judge'. This is a very special use of language indeed. Doctor Marshall is fully committed to the belief that the condemnation of contraception is and always has been the unalterable teaching of the Church; he believes also that it is the duty of all married couples to regulate births, and that the use of the 'safe period' is not merely the only licit means of doing so, but is the ideal from every point of view. The book is in fact an extremely cogent argument in favour of what most people would call the 'official Catholic line', plus a less convincing but even more enthusiastic study of the excellence of periodic continence.

The claim to impartiality is not, one is glad to note, made by the author himself. He says in his Introduction: 'It is, of course, impossible for any human being to write upon an issue of this kind without his own stand-point emerging. This will no doubt become apparent as the book progresses'. Obviously this must be so; and it is, I suppose, equally obvious that if you hold Dr. Marshall's convictions, you must feel a passionate wish to convince as many people as possible of their truth, and may well decide that this can be best done by what sets out to be an objective argument and to arrive at its conclusions by straightforward reasoning. This is in fact a well-tryed apologetic method. But one cannot escape the feeling that it would look more honest to have admitted from the start that this is a crusading book dedicated to proving that these ideas are true, and demonstrating their attractiveness.

The book opens with a historical survey of the negative ideas about sex current in the

Church in the past, showing how they came to be held, and goes on to give a marvellous account of the relationship between love and marriage which we are coming to see ever more clearly now. There is also a most helpful distinction between the 'procreative' activity of bringing a child into being, and the 'creative' activity of rearing and educating the child which, of course, must be the major element in the parents' work. This leads to a good analysis of the relationship between the 'ends' of marriage with which I think no Christian today would quarrel, and to the conclusion that parenthood must always be responsible, always the result of free and prudent choice. Apart from one or two passing references to contraception as 'evil', this part of the book is very much what both blurb and introduction suggest, and is one of the best things I have ever read.

But the author's position becomes crystal clear when, having said that the arguments used against contraception in the past are not convincing, and that 'It seems that at the present time there is no *single rational* argument which provides a satisfactory answer to this question', he goes on: 'In the face of this conclusion we must turn for guidance to the Church'. His chapter on 'The teaching of the Church' opens with the statement: 'There can be no doubt that the Church has always taught that contraception is wrong'. It further declares that 'contraception is intrinsically evil and therefore is in all circumstances objectively wrong'. The references he gives are to St Hippolytus, Caesar, Bishop of Arles (470-542), St John Chrysostom and St Jerome, all of whom condemn the taking of potions by women to make them sterile<sup>1</sup>; the Sacred Penitentiary condemning *coitus interruptus* in

<sup>1</sup>References are made elsewhere to Augustine, Gregory the Great and others in the early Church who condemn either coitus, or at least the pleasure associated with it, as necessarily sinful – but these are cited merely to indicate what false ideas were current about sex at the time.

1822, 1842, 1886 and 1916, and a male contraceptive in 1916; the Holy Office condemning *coitus interruptus* in 1851, a male contraceptive in 1853, and female contraceptives in 1955. His three key references are to Pius XI in 1930, Pius XII in 1951, and the recent statement by Paul VI that the 'norms given by Pope Pius XII in this regard . . . must be considered binding at least until we feel obliged in conscience to change them' (and Dr Marshall warns us against taking the last clause too seriously).

In brushing aside those who say that the condemnation of contraception is a recent thing in the Church, Dr Marshall ignores what seems to me the most important distinction drawn by Dr Biezanek in her book *All Things New* (Peter Smith 1964; Pan Books 1965), which for all its theological oddities is a most authentic and moving Christian witness, between withdrawal (*coitus interruptus*) and contraception. He nowhere makes this distinction – and yet the earliest condemnation of a contraceptive that he gives is that made by the Holy Office in 1853. One would not necessarily feel an obligation to associate oneself with every decree ever made by the Holy Office; I cannot myself see why one should follow Caesar, Bishop of Arles, writing in the sixth century on the question of medicaments designed to render women sterile rather than Archbishop Roberts writing today; and I have heard it pointed out by one eminent theologian that there must be something wrong with a situation in which one of the major topics in the confessional is something not even mentioned in the New Testament. There are many, in fact, to whom the case seems far from closed.

As I have said, given Dr Marshall's convictions, the rest follows. If periodic continence is the only moral method of family limitation, then perhaps it is 'irresponsible' – as he considers one, at least, of the authors of *Contraception and Holiness* (Collins 1965) – for Catholics to write disparagingly of it, or to write about it at all without first making certain that they are in possession of all the facts now established scientifically on the subject. But it is precisely this that is at issue; and that being so, it must be perfectly legitimate for those who do not agree that contraception is 'intrinsically evil' to give us the conclusions they have drawn, from their own experience and that of people they have come in contact with, about the practice of periodic continence. The fact that without expert help (which, heaven knows, is not

always easy to come by) many people totally fail to find the 'safe period' safe, is no proof as to what the Church teaches. Nor is the fact that many who find it safe enough do not, for various reasons, find it satisfactory. But when the question is raised, as it is being today (not just by married people indulging in wishful thinking, but by wise pastors and theologians) then witness of this kind must have its place in the discussion.

And it is when it comes to Dr Marshall's giving of his own witness in the matter that I find him most deeply disappointing. Having written so beautifully of the relationships between love, sex, marriage and creativity; having stated so clearly the evil of the mistrust of sex and the body felt by many Christian writers in the past (above all St Augustine); having recognized the importance of a continuation of coitus despite the need to avoid procreation, because it is the expression of mutual love which makes a marriage what it is; after all this, when it comes to the objections people raise against periodic continence, he writes, it seems to me, as though he has simply not been listening to himself:

'Many discussions on the topic involve one of three premises regarded as axiomatic; the infertile period does not work, or if it does work, it cannot be taught, or if it can be taught, men are incapable of the necessary control. . . . The recurrence of this theme raises the question as to whether some people are afraid that it might work, and be able to be taught, hence they would have to face squarely the issue of control.

There is increasing evidence that the issue of control is the real issue in the minds of Men. This is expressed in a variety of ways. 'My love for my wife does not follow a calendar or chart,' 'this sex thing is so unpredictable, sometimes you want it, sometimes you don't', 'the problem is on Saturday nights when we have both had a drink or two', are all manifestations of this fundamental issue. Is genital satisfaction something which must be had whenever it is desired or is it expressive of a love which involves other considerations than that of genital satisfaction?'<sup>2</sup>

And when considering one writer's suggestion that five day's abstinence in each cycle would be the longest acceptable time: 'These writers do not discuss what is to happen when one or other spouse is away (for physical proximity is not essential to sexual attraction), or being

present is fatigued, burdened or ill'. What is under discussion here is precisely not the illness or absence of one or other, but the presence and wish to make love of *both*. Does the wish to make love become a mere urge to genital satisfaction because it is the wrong time of the month? And while many couples do have to endure long absences, what seems to be hardest from this point of view is not the absence itself, but the occasion when they are re-united outside the safe period (especially if the reunion has to be a short one). As I have said, all this does not make contraception right *if it is wrong*, but there is nothing base, or selfish, or out of control in finding it agonizingly difficult; and the tensions that can result in a marriage are very real, and not surely to be dismissed as merely failures in 'control'. It is, in any case,

an extraordinary over-simplification to lump together the control required because of the absence of one's partner, that required because of consideration for his or her feelings or state of health, and that demanded of both partners together in the practice of periodic continence. They are three very different things, and to see them as the same is to cloud the issue hopelessly. It is also out of keeping with the humanity and clarity of so much that the author himself has to say.

This is a curate's egg of a book – but if one reader's reactions are anything to judge by, it should certainly fulfill its author's hopes that it may 'perhaps contribute something to a final solution'.

ROSEMARY SHEED

WITTGENSTEIN AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY by Justus Hartnack, translated by Maurice Cranston, *Methuen & Co., 21s.*

This study by the Professor of Philosophy at Aarhus University, Denmark, is meant 'to give a general survey of Wittgenstein's thought, considering both the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*, and also to give some account of the influence which these two very different books have exercised' (ix). In general, it will be a useful introduction for someone untrained in modern philosophy. I should, however, warn the reader that in its earlier portions, the author has in some respects misrepresented Wittgenstein.

After a 'Biographical Introduction' (1–7), he proceeds to an exposition of the central themes of the *Tractatus* (8–35), and here he sometimes fails to show how Wittgenstein's doctrines hang together. Thus we read 'one elementary proposition cannot contradict another elementary proposition' (14), and on the very next page: 'He also holds that the constituent elements of the world, what he calls "states of affairs" are logically independent of one another. . . . Hence, as Wittgenstein himself pointed out, a proposition that denies an elementary proposition is not itself an elementary proposition'. 'A "state of affairs" is a fact that in itself does not consist of facts' (13); how then are we to understand that 'a state of affairs is a combination of possible facts' (ib.)? Wittgenstein 'did not think there was any need to construct a new language because he held that there is only one language. From a logical point of view, all languages are one language, one language with respect to the

logical conditions they must satisfy' (11). How is this compatible with Hartnack's confrontation of the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*: 'According to the earlier work, a proposition may be in a correct or an incorrect form, according to the later work, a proposition has neither a correct nor an incorrect form . . .' (63)? Hartnack sums up the account of language in the *Philosophical Investigations* thus: 'Every sentence is, as Wittgenstein puts it, "in order as it is"' (62). But, unfortunately, Wittgenstein is here quoting from the *Tractatus* (5.5563).

This positive attitude towards ordinary language, however, does not prevent the *Tractatus* from postulating absolutely simple objects. Hartnack fails to consider the bearing on ontology which Wittgenstein assigns to logic in this question (13, esp. fn. 3). In other respects, too, the picture theory of language does not get a fair treatment: 'To say that an elementary sentence is a model or picture of a state of affairs is to say, among other things, that a state of affairs exists' (14); but further on we learn: 'A picture is still a picture whether it depicts a truly existing fact or only a possible fact' (17). What Wittgenstein says is that a picture *depicts reality* truly or falsely, but the *states of affairs* it *represents* 'it represents independently of its truth or falsity' (cf. 2.17, 2.22, 4.031). The author finds it 'hard to see why one proposition should not be able to state anything about the logical form of another proposition' (21–22). But this is a consequence of the picture theory: that alone