

## THE LAMBETH REPORT— RESOLUTION 15

LET us introduce this subject with a quotation from the *Church Times*.<sup>1</sup>

At the Lambeth Conference of 1920, the Bishops issued 'an earnest warning against the use of any unnatural means by which conception is frustrated.' Their Report continued: 'We are aware that many persons of undoubted sincerity, whose opinions are entitled to respect, do not share this view, considering the whole matter as chiefly a question of expediency, to be determined on medical, financial and social grounds. This contention we cannot admit, as we believe that the question cannot be separated from the moral and religious issues involved.'

That was ten years ago. This year the Bishops have met again and this time the question of Marriage and the use of Contraceptives found a definite place in the *Agenda*. Their findings are now familiar. For after saying that:

The Conference affirms (a) the duty of parenthood and the glory of married life; (b) the benefit of a family as a joy in itself, as a vital contribution to the nation's welfare, and as a means of character-building for both parents and children; (c) the privilege of discipline and sacrifice to this end

they boldly face the problem of the use of contraceptives and go back on their previous statement. For now they say:

'The primary and most obvious way of dealing with such circumstances as seem to make the limitation of parenthood obligatory is total abstinence from intercourse, even it may be for long periods. Such abstinence brings with it to those who claim and receive Divine grace the opportunity for the highest exercise of Christian love and self-denial.

'Yet there exist moral situations which make it obligatory to use other methods. To a certain extent this obli-

<sup>1</sup> *Church Times*, November 15th, 1929.

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gation is supported by the advice of medical and scientific authority . . . . Each couple must decide for themselves as in the sight of God, after the most careful and conscientious thought, and, if perplexed in mind, after taking competent advice, both medical and spiritual.<sup>2</sup>

The *Evening Standard* (August 15th) comments on the Lambeth pronouncement under the heading 'The Bishops' Failure.'

They might have said: 'This criticism is a modern and malignant growth, a disease of the time. The ancient standards remain, the Church reaffirms them, and the Church will uphold them.' Or they might have said: 'The new age requires new methods, in morality as well as in other things. Since it falls to the Church to guide the people, we will boldly announce wherein the ancient standards must be modified.'

But they have done neither of these things. They have compromised with modernity, but they have done so in a reluctant, carping and querulous manner. The futility of this document is amply demonstrated by one sentence which says that 'sexual intercourse between persons who are not legally married is a grievous sin.' Did it really need three hundred odd Archbishops and Bishops, come from all the ends of the earth, to tell us that this was the opinion of the Church?

Small wonder that this declaration was trumpeted abroad by the Press as a triumph for the school of H. G. Wells and Marie Stopes, and that serious-minded Anglicans regarded it as 'a serious disaster,' 'a surrender,' and 'the most revolutionary practice in the history of sexual morals.'<sup>3</sup> Nor have matters been improved by the subsequent declarations of various Bishops on the Resolution.

The Bishop of London does not want to dissociate himself from his fellow Bishops, but, while detesting

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, September 5th, 1930. *Times* leader, September 10th, maintains that 'there is no real inconsistency between these declarations.'

<sup>3</sup> *Church Times*, September 12th and October 10th, 1930.

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the business, he is overwhelmed by 'the hard cases' and prefers to hide his head—ostrich-like—in the slum problem as the root of the evil!<sup>4</sup>

Bishop Barnes is, we know, in agreement with Lambeth.<sup>5</sup>

One curious feature of these Episcopal pronouncements—well described by the *Church Times* as 'a smoke screen'—is the fact that while the Bishops resident in England can hardly be said to come out well in the affair, the Colonial Bishops have denounced the Resolution in the plainest terms. The Bishop of Bloemfontein was most outspoken, but even his plain speaking was eclipsed by the vehement denunciations of the Bishop of New Jersey who, writing as a member of the Commission on the problem at issue, says frankly that the decision was pre-arranged :

This Resolution was adopted by a recorded vote of 193 ayes to 67 nays. As there were some 305 Bishops in attendance, a considerable number, even allowing for absentees, must have refrained from voting. I cannot understand a 'silent vote' on such a subject.

The Resolution as finally adopted was an improvement on the one originally submitted by the Committee; but nevertheless retained enough of its objectionable tone to make it impossible for many of us to vote for it.

Attempts were made to modify the Resolution by such phrases as 'the Conference passes no condemnation,' instead of 'the Conference agrees that.' Further, an attempt was made to indicate clearly that such cases as were under consideration were exceptional or abnormal. But all these attempts met a solid and immovable wall of opposition.

To say nothing of the great danger to health involved in the use of contraceptive methods, and the fact that they may produce barrenness, the whole thing is so repulsive to my mind as to put it in a lower moral category than fornication and adultery!

<sup>4</sup> *Church Times*, September 5th, 1930.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, December 6th, 1929.

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Nothing could be clearer to any observer than that the three hundred Christian gentlemen at Lambeth were wholly conscientious and high-minded. I believe that they would have repudiated with something like horror the suggestion that they themselves do, or could do, anything of the sort. But if under any conditions it is something to which the Conference agrees, that it is something which it approves, if it is lawful under the Christian codes and on the application of Christian principles, and expedient for a butcher, or a baker, or a barrister to use contraceptives, why not, pray, for a bishop?

It was equally clear to my mind (and I served on Committee II, I regret to say) that there was from the beginning a determination 'to say something definite on the subject.' I feel sure that this was pre-determined, and that the Committee was arranged accordingly, particularly as to its chairman, the Bishop of Winchester. I cannot avoid the impression, which grew upon me during the session, that his mind was made up in advance, and that he was pre-determined to make some such declaration. With his force and the driving power of his personality, his determination prevailed. . . .

It seemed to me that the Bishops were rather driven and led, and misled at that, rather than showing qualities of mastery and leadership. They followed a popular demand.

Bertrand Russell's *Marriage and Morals* is one of the most widely-read books in England. A new gospel is being preached. 'It isn't wrong to follow the bodily instinct, and the discovery of contraceptives is a triumph of modern science to be hailed with joy, and used to avoid inconvenient and undesirable consequences. It is quite comparable to the discovery of anaesthesia. If the consequences may be avoided, it is no more wrong for a girl to indulge herself as she pleases than for a man, and everybody knows that men for ages have condoned this act in themselves.'

Of course, the Conference condemned all this; but its putting a sort of moral equation between total abstinence and contraceptives vitiates the moral integrity of their utterance.

I asked the Bishop of Nigeria, a venerable negro with white hair, as to what effect such a resolution would have upon his people. He replied, at first, that it would have no

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effect whatever, because, he said, ' My people don't practise it at all.' But, on reflection, he realised, and publicly stated that it would have this startling effect upon his work. The Mohammedans, who are in close and immediate contact with his native Christian people, will say, ' See the breakdown of your stiff and artificial Christian system. How greatly superior ours is, with its benign institution of polygamy, providing for the full expression of man's God-given and implanted natural instincts, and yet with perfect consideration for women, shielded from the burdens of compulsory and frequent child-bearing. Come and be Mohammedans, follow the laws of nature and of nature's God, and leave the morally contaminating company of these Christian dogs, who have denied and who thwart the very nature a good God has given them, and who deserve condign punishment and death for their exaltation of reason and science above faith, morals, and religion!'

Bishop Carey of Bloemfontein was so overwhelmed by this action that he dissociated himself from the Conference. I did not feel that the American Bishops, some of whom desired to register their dissent, had been given an opportunity to do so, and consequently asked (unfortunately after the vote was taken) as a personal privilege to make a statement. As this plea was denied, I also left the Conference, and did not officially join with my brethren in the solemn service of thanksgiving with *Te Deum* in Westminster Abbey at the close of the Conference.

I welcome this opportunity of publicly dissociating myself from this one action of the Lambeth Conference, and in doing so I believe that I am substantially expressing the feeling of a large number of my fellow Bishops in the United States.\*

What, then, led the Bishops to this pronouncement? We cannot help asking, as we read, whether they were not suffering from an 'inferiority-complex.' For they knew perfectly well that they were challenging moral teaching which had up till then held sway even though men disregarded it in practice. But they had been told over and over again that the Church of England never affirmed or denied anything in posi-

\* *Church Times*, October 24th, 1930.

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tive fashion and they seem to have thought that the time had come to prove that they could speak. This may sound a harsh indictment, but how else are we to explain their oblique and ungenerous allusion to the Church of Rome? For they append to their *Resolution* the following remark :

Moreover, it is significant that the Communion which most strongly condemns in principle all preventive methods, nevertheless in practice recognises that there are occasions when a rigid insistence on the principle is impossible. If our own Communion is to give guidance on this problem, it must speak frankly and openly with a full appreciation of facts and conditions which were not present in the past but which are due to modern civilisation.

The above words at once produced from Cardinal Bourne a disclaimer :

Lest any be led astray by this Resolution of the Lambeth Conference, and placed thereby in danger of committing grievous sin, I now reaffirm the teaching of the Catholic Church on this subject, binding on the conscience of every man and of every woman.

Any direct interference with the natural consequence of the marital relation—namely, conception, whether within the marriage stage or outside it—is an unnatural vice, sinning against the nature which the Creator has bestowed upon us, and therefore grievously displeasing in His sight.<sup>7</sup>

On this the *Church Times* remarks that

No one can doubt that the use of contraceptives is an affront to the tradition of the Catholic Church. No one can say that Cardinal Bourne is not backed by the authority of the centuries in solemnly declaring that birth-prevention is a sin ' against the nature which the Creator has bestowed upon us, and therefore grievously displeasing in His sight.'

Indeed the question of Rome's attitude bulks large in all this dispute. Bishop Barnes said that 'he viewed with something like dismay the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church on some of these problems.'<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> At Swansea, Sunday, October 5th.

<sup>8</sup> *Church Times*, December 6th, 1929.

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deprecated the letters in some of the Church papers, which regarded the tradition of the Western Church as settling the matter once and for all. The Bishops had merely reaffirmed the position taken by two leading Cambridge Anglo-Catholics in 'One God and Father of All.' Fr. Wilfred Knox and Fr. Milner-White lived and thought in modern time, and not in the Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile the advertisements and sales of contraceptive contrivances have gone up, one advertisement being headed: 'Have no more moral scruples. At the Lambeth Congress one hundred and ninety-three Bishops voted in favour of suitable methods of birth-control.'<sup>10</sup> And while Lord Hugh Cecil pleaded for 'a thorough, consistent and complete theory of chastity to which we can appeal, and in the light of which we can solve all difficult questions,' another begs the Bishops to publish a *Moral Theology*.

Naturally enough men began to ask what authority Lambeth had to frame any such *Resolution*. Some maintained that it had none, others, like the Anglican Bishop of Nottingham, who was a member of the Commission, insisted that the meetings had been remarkable for 'an overwhelming sense of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a readiness to face facts.'<sup>11</sup> Others urge that the Lambeth *Resolution* is at least 'a consent of theological opinion'<sup>12</sup> and as such should have weight. Another points out that the Bishops themselves disclaim the notion that they have any authority whatever,<sup>13</sup> others again 'that the Bishops have more truly interpreted the facts of our moral experi-

<sup>9</sup> *Church Times*, October 17th, 1930.

<sup>10</sup> *Church Times*, October 31st, 1930.

<sup>11</sup> *Church Times*, October 17th.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, September 12th and October 10th.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, November 7th.

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ence than did the Schoolmen.’<sup>14</sup> But for many it remains a problem: ‘By what authority one hundred and ninety-three Bishops of the Catholic Church declare that an action, condemned by the Church as a whole as a sin, is not sinful at all?’<sup>15</sup>

This question has a very practical aspect for those Anglican ministers who hear confessions and claim to give absolution, and Dr. Gore and Dr. Kirk have declared that no confessor can absolve people who adhere to such practices even though they urge the Lambeth *Resolution*.

We cannot but sympathise with that very large number of good people who have been distressed and bewildered by the *Resolution*; they ask questions and get answers which are so contradictory that their bewilderment only increases. For, while one answers that ‘the whole trend of the *Resolution* and *Report* is towards positive teaching on the sacredness of sex relations and the glory of the Christian home,’<sup>16</sup> another asks whether ‘anyone can seriously contemplate our Lord giving such advice, or any of the Apostles or early Christian teachers.’<sup>17</sup>

Some appeal to the Medical Faculty, but doctors are divided. One doctor is denounced because he had given the perfectly correct answer, ‘That is best known to yourself,’ when a wife had asked him what she must do to avoid having any more children. This answer shews, we are told, that ‘Doctors are strangely ignorant of the existing conditions.’<sup>18</sup> Sir George Newman denounces all contraceptive practices as

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, October 10th.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, October 25th.

<sup>16</sup> *Church Times*, October 3rd, 1930.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> *The Liverpool Echo*, October 17th, 1929.



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‘dangerous’<sup>19</sup> while ‘A General Practitioner’ warmly recommends them.<sup>20</sup>

All this is bad enough, but matters become tenfold worse when a number of folk whom we are compelled to label ‘pseudo-theologians’ rush into the breach. We call them ‘pseudo-theologians’ because they are not laymen; they are men who ‘dabble’ in theology and who undertake to hear confessions and give advice on matters which they have only half understood. Several of these ‘would-be’ theologians have urged that conditions have now changed, and that since Moral Theology deals not only with acts but with their circumstances, it has now to deal with a state of affairs very different from that which prevailed when ‘the traditional teaching was framed.’<sup>21</sup> This is merely the so-called ‘hard cases’ argument in another form, the argument which harps on the horrors of a tainted stock, on the tragedy of ten children with only sufficient to bring up five, etc. The answer is vaguely touched upon in many letters, but the writers have let themselves be side-tracked by the analogies they have used, *e.g.* usury, the use of a stomach-pump by the Roman epicures, and so forth. Moreover they keep missing the point lamentably. Thus one writer is unable to see the difference between unchanging moral principles and their changing application. Yet the principles of mathematics are invariable, while the problems to whose solution they have to be applied are always changing. How easy it would be to do sums and get one’s accounts right, if one could change one’s mathematics! It sounds like *Alice in Wonderland*!

Another writer declares that ‘there is no explicit justification in the teaching of our Lord or of St. Paul

<sup>19</sup> *Church Times*, November 7th, 1930.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, November 7th, 1930.

<sup>21</sup> *Church Times*, September 5th and October 24th, 1930.

for the assertion that procreation of children is the primary object of marriage.'<sup>22</sup> One clerical correspondent puts the following conundrum :

All your correspondents agree that sexual intercourse is wrong for the unmarried ; but there is a difference of opinion as to whether it is wrong for the married when the possibility of conception is deliberately excluded. Is married intercourse right only when there is an intention to have children? Or does it serve other rightful ends which may suffice to justify its use, when its primary end is excluded? Those who condemn absolutely the use of contraceptives often write as though they supported the former alternative, and they profess to applaud the Church of Rome for its attitude in this matter. But do they in fact condemn all married intercourse which excludes the possibility of conception? It appears that they do not. For instance, a Roman Catholic doctor writes as follows :

Toutefois, ce n'est pas à la seule multiplication du genre humain que sont ordonnés les rapports conjugaux. Outre cette fin primordiale, ils en ont d'autres, essentiellement subordonnées à la première : ils cimentent et entretiennent l'amour mutuel des conjoints ; ils sont aussi un remède contre les décordements de la concupiscence, par la solution qu'ils apportent à l'affinité naturelle des sexes. Ces fins secondaires suffisent à légitimer l'usage du mariage lorsque pour une raison quelconque, la fin principale ne peut être réalisée, soit la fécondation ait eu lieu déjà, ou devienne impossible par suite de circonstances accidentelles d'âge, de temps, ou de conditions corporelles. (Dr. R. de Guchteneere, ' *La Limitation des Naissances* ' (1929), p. 204.)<sup>23</sup>

Why he should have gone to a French writer for so elementary a statement it is hard to see, though it is easy to see that he has completely failed to grasp the force of the key words '*essentiellement subordonnées à la première*,' as we shall see later on.

Another correspondent—a Bishop—writes :

I can conceive that there might be circumstances in which the use of these means to which science has introduced us

<sup>22</sup> *Church Times*, November 7th, 1930.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

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might be the lesser of two evils, between which, say, a good woman might have to choose. It is for this possibility that the Resolution seems to me to provide.

I believe, therefore, that it is nearer to the truth on the subject than Cardinal Bourne's uncompromising denunciation, or than the equally uncompromising denunciation of Bishop Chavasse, to which I listened trembling at the 1920 Conference.<sup>24</sup>

Yet another urges that 'science has made it possible for a man to avoid risking his wife's life. Is he to avail himself of it?'<sup>25</sup> Several answer this in the affirmative.

But the most amazing reply on this point is the following :

I am grateful to the Bishop of Bloemfontein for his article, but even he does not address himself to the root question, whether or not contraception in principle or in the abstract is sinful.

Probably opponents of contraception hesitate to stigmatise it as sinful because of the admitted hard cases where it seems to be a regrettable necessity. What is needed is a solution which resolves both sides of the antinomy, which may be stated thus : The Christian conscience shrinks from artificial methods ; artificial methods are, or seem to be, in some cases a necessity.

Contraception, if not sinful, becomes a matter not of principle but of taste, and the Bishops' fence will prove quite inadequate. A calculating element is introduced into the holy estate of matrimony, and couples will decide for themselves whether or not they will remain childless. Nor will the unmarried be denied the privilege of the married.

On the other hand, if contraception is declared to partake of the nature of sin, then those who wish to uphold the Christian ideal will only countenance it, in theory or in practice, in the gravest circumstances.

We must make room in this matter for a sound casuistry.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Church Times*, November 7th.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

One of the correspondents who most nearly touches the real essence of the problem asks boldly :

May I ask those who are disturbed by Resolution 15 a plain but necessary question? Are contraceptives to be condemned on natural grounds or on supernatural grounds, or on both? Roman Catholics reply, on both grounds. But before Lambeth, every Anglican authority on moral theology that I know had admitted that on natural grounds alone contraceptives could not be condemned. Dr. Goudge wrote : ' Those who have no belief in the Christian Gospel, and no hope beyond the present life, cannot be expected to accept the Christian views of marriage ; freedom of divorce and artificial birth control are to them simply matters of common sense.' (Comment on II Cor., p. 74.)

Anyone who knows anything of Catholic moral theology knows that then the real surrender was made, and I ask my question because Dr. Goudge reproduces this week exactly the scholastic grounds on which they are condemned as contrary to natural ethics. I therefore ask him, Does he now hold that the feasting-cum-emetics analogy and the means-and-ends theory of ethics condemn contraceptives for the world?

For some hundreds of years now we have witnessed a doctrinal apostasy with its terrible fruits of heresy, schism and indifference ; we have seen, too, a moral apostasy in practice—the sheep have gone astray because there was no shepherd. But now we have witnessed the worst apostasy of all, a moral apostasy in theory, a surrender of all those principles which, however much they might be neglected in practice by the many, yet remained on the statute book, as it were, a thing to which all right-minded men could appeal. Is it possible to go further? It would seem not. For it is not now the sheep that have gone astray but the shepherds.

Where is the remedy We might say : ' Return to the Rock whence ye were hewn,' for probably far more bewildered people will turn longingly to that

Rock when faced with the present moral bankruptcy than when faced with the doctrinal bankruptcy so long familiar to them. But confining ourselves to the point at issue: we are asked whether the use of contraceptives in any form whatever is unnatural or a sin against the law of nature? The answer must be an unhesitating affirmative. In support of this we might appeal to the emotional aspect of the problem. Did any man ever indulge in such practices without being ashamed of them? Men may unblushingly acknowledge that they do so indulge, but we are not talking of what one man says when talking to another: what does he feel, we ask, in the hidden realms of his inner consciousness? Granting, then, the sense of shame, whence does it arise? Surely from an instinct of nature? Only a fledgling, or a man who knows he has no case, will venture to dub such instincts 'conventions.' But a veritable instinct must have its roots in a law. What is that law?

There is a principle at which no one, presumably, will cavil: '*delectationes sunt propter operationes,*' in other words certain actions have an inherent pleasure attached to assure their performance. Who would eat, and so support life properly, were eating not pleasant? Self-preservation demands food, therefore the Author of nature made eating pleasant. But far more important than the preservation of the individual is the preservation of the human race, therefore the Author of the human race attached an intense pleasure to the act of procreation. The pleasurable act is the means, the procreation is the end. The only question at issue is: Have we the right to secure the pleasure while frustrating the end for which it was given? We were told when children that we did not live to eat, but that we ate to live. It is here and here only that the analogy of the Roman use of emetics comes in. It is not 'the over-indulgence in eating

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and drinking' that was condemned, though of course that was wrong, but that in order to secure the pleasure they frustrated the end for which eating and drinking was made pleasant. It is precisely the same with contraceptives. They are meant to secure the pleasure of marriage while deliberately frustrating the end which alone justified that pleasure.

It is idle to argue that there are other objects of marital relations besides the procreation of children. Of course there are, just as eating and drinking have social and recreative purposes on which a man can quite justly concentrate his whole energies while at table. But he must never, for the sake of those secondary pleasures, frustrate the main object of his meals, namely his self-preservation. That is why gluttony is a sin—it damages a person's health, in other words, according to its degree it frustrates the main object of eating. Nothing can affect these principles. They are not of the circumstances of our acts, but of their essence. It is absurd to say that because the main object of marital relations is the begetting of children it therefore follows

that the sex-act is a sin whenever it is potentially dissociated from the purpose of procreation. If this is so, we are led to the *reductio ad absurdum* that intercourse, after the woman has reached a certain age, is immoral. But this theory is untenable for more serious reasons. It is a denial that the sex-act, besides being the medium of procreation, is also designed as the sacramental expression of love between husband and wife.<sup>27</sup>

Nor can we argue that a man may not indulge in such acts with the hope that they may not attain their ultimate result. The only thing demanded by nature—and we are speaking only of nature and not of super-nature, of the ordinary and not of the heroic—is that

<sup>27</sup> *Church Times*, October 24th, 1920.

he must do nothing to frustrate nature of the object for which it was instituted. The same applies to the permitted use of marital relations at periods when conception will most probably not follow, for no frustration of nature is involved. The same applies to cases where a wife is past child-bearing or barren. But we repeat again that we are not here talking of the ideal, nor of the supernatural life according to grace. Though even here, where higher motives might suggest abstinence, there is room for those secondary and subordinate motives which amply justify such relations even when there is no possibility of offspring: a pledge of mutual affection, a remedy against sin, etc., all these have their legitimate place, but they must never be secured at the cost of the one end for which marriage was instituted.

It is impossible to deal with this subject without unpleasantly plain speaking. Reference was made throughout this controversy to what one pseudo-theologian ungraciously called 'Rome's loopholes.' We state emphatically that there is no 'loophole' provided by Rome which does not come under the principles we have laid down. A concrete example is furnished by the question where a correspondent asked whether there was any difference between interruption of the marital act and the use of an instrument. There is no difference in the effect intended by the physical act in each case, though the use of an instrument is proof of added malice and premeditation. Right reason and the Church's teaching declare both to be grievously sinful, and a confessor may not absolve a penitent who refuses to abstain from such abuse of the sanctities of marriage. But what is to be said of the wife whose partner practises such abuses though she has no desire or intention to do so herself? Clearly she must completely dissociate herself from the sin: she must

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withhold the consent of her will ; but grave reasons and the circumstances of the case may make it impossible for her to withhold from the physical act. If it is a question of the use of an instrument by her husband, she is obliged to offer every possible resistance to an act which she realizes beforehand is wicked in its very beginnings, and only the gravest threats would justify her in passively co-operating in the physical act against which her will rebels. If it is a question not of the use of an instrument but of the wilful interruption of the act by her husband, only grave reasons will justify her passive co-operation ; and she is obliged to protest against her husband's principles and strive to dissuade him from such practices and at the same time to restrain herself from all consent to the sinfulness of the act.

HUGH POPE, O. P.