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## BIRTH CONTROL AND THE LUTHERANS The Missouri Synod as a Case Study

Despite the familiarity with which Americans now speak of The Pill (nobody has to inquire *which* pill), general public acceptance of contraception is of comparatively recent origin, and its endorsement by some Protestant groups more recent still. Ironically, while in the present ecumenical age Protestant disenchantment with papal intransigence on contraception strikes a discordant note, in earlier decades of bitter interdenominational polemic much of Protestantism wholeheartedly agreed with Rome in denouncing birth control as contrary to God's will. Most Protestants of course subsequently reversed their position. Since religious affiliation is essential in explaining current fertility differentials, the Protestant reversal is of considerable importance and deserves scrutiny. How the shift was accomplished bears study also because it illustrates the interplay between church and society in the definition of religious attitudes on social questions. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, most conservative and homogeneous of the three major Lutheran bodies in this country, serves admirably here as a case study.<sup>1</sup> Through its eventual acceptance of contraception it

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<sup>1</sup> In this case, continuity seems to hold more fascination than change. Perhaps attracted by the problem of explaining that church's continued opposition, historians have focused on Roman Catholic attitudes, most notably in John T. Noonan, Jr.'s monumental *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, 1965). But what is to the contemporary mind so sensible, the Protestant reappraisal of birth control, has received short shrift by historians.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, despite its name a national denomination, is the ninth largest religious body in the United States. Of nineteenth-century German immigrant origin (*Die Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten*), it was founded in 1847. Its headquarters, main seminary, and publishing house are located in St. Louis. Especially since World War II, it has gained considerable notice for its conservatism, isolationism, and rapid growth. The best general introduction to the Synod's history presently

may demonstrate, in slow motion as it were, the Protestant progression. And in the painful hesitation with which it surrendered on this issue, the Synod may help illumine through parallel and contrast the still unresolved controversy within Roman Catholicism.

From the nineteenth century through the 1930's, Missouri Synod spokesmen were consistently and flatly opposed to all forms of contraception. To understand the determination of this resistance, one must begin—as Missourian theologians did—with the divine *Schoepfungsordnung*, the order of nature established by God at Creation according to the Synod's exegesis of Genesis. Within this order man was to subdue the earth and, with the necessary male participation, woman was to people it.<sup>2</sup> Reasoning from the natural order does not inevitably preclude family limitation. But, as John Noonan wisely remarks, "development of doctrine is rarely a logical necessity. It is a response of the Christian community to meditation on the Scripture and to the pressures of the environment. Both Scripture and environment confine the options. But there are usually options. The selection is a creative choice which may be observed but not completely accounted for."<sup>3</sup>

In this case, family limitation was felt inadmissible because patently at odds with views on marriage and the status of women which Synodical leaders identified as ordained in the natural order. Although in the most judicious view within the Synod the purposes of marriage were threefold—"legitimate sexual intercourse, the procreation of children, and cohabitation for mutual care and assistance"—many of the clergy reverted to a position closer to Augustine and perhaps Luther, stipulating procreation as the sole or at least the chief end of matrimony.<sup>4</sup> When pleasure in sex

available is *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, ed. Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. Theodore Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, 523-526 (the original, German edition was published in 1924); August L. Graebner, *Theological Quarterly*, III (1899), 134, 412, 421; W.P.S., *Concordia Magazine*, I (1896), 33. When positive of identification, I have inserted the full name of contributors and editors without use of brackets to isolate the initials customarily employed to indicate authorship. When in doubt, I have simply given the initials. Absence of either denotes an anonymous contribution. Books published by Concordia Publishing House are so identified to signify their official standing in the Synod.

<sup>3</sup> *Contraception*, p. 55.  
<sup>4</sup> August L. Graebner, *Outlines of Doctrinal Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1910), p. 94; A. L. Graebner, *Theological Quarterly*, III (1899), 406. Interestingly enough in light of later theological justification for

was thus either denigrated or ignored in favor of its utility, the way was clear for uncompromising attacks on birth limitation. Missouri Synod Lutherans could speak of "perverting" or "subverting" the purpose of marriage through contraception; birth control made matrimony "legal adultery" or "legal prostitution." Such "abominable doings," wrote one pastor, "make marriage far filthier than a pigsty."<sup>5</sup>

The proper status of women in the natural order was also involved and similarly reflected the characteristic tendency of the birth control polemic to get tied up with other arguments. For the Synod's theologians, God's placement of women in a subordinate position was apparent already at Creation and the Fall: Eve was created second and became the agent for the introduction of sin. In the New Testament St. Paul confirmed the previous status.<sup>6</sup> In late nineteenth-century challenges to such views, Lutheran churchmen thought they saw the impending dissolution of the family. For the Synod's most important German organ, *Der Lutheraner*, the feminist movement was a *Zeitkrankheit* and female suffrage an *Unordnung*, to be voted down by good Lutherans wherever it appeared on a ballot. The catastrophe female suffrage would produce was described by J. Frederic Wenchel in the *Lutheran Witness*, Missouri's official English newspaper. "Many women," he predicted, "will be so busy about voting and political office that the home and children will have no attraction for them, and American mothers and children, like Christian charity, will be a rarity."<sup>7</sup>

a new position, in his proof-texts, Graebner twice placed the comment of Genesis 2, with its emphasis on the unitive aspect of marital sex, over Genesis 1, with its emphasis on propagation. *Doctrinal Theology*, pp. 59, 95. For Augustine, see Noonan, pp. 107-139; several different and not always reconcilable Luthers may be quoted on this point. See, however, his exposition of the sixth commandment in his *Large Catechism*.

Representative Missourian comment is in Carl Manthey-Zorn, *Der Lutheraner*, I (1894), 120; Manthey-Zorn, *Questions on Christian Topics Answered from the Word of God*, trans. J. A. Rimbach (Milwaukee, 1918), p. 153; O. H. W. Hornbostel, "Die Christliche Familienleben," *Sechszwanzigster Synodal-Bericht des Kansas-Distrikts*, 1925, p. 20; A. L. Graebner, "Lehrverhandlungen ueber das sechste Gebot," *Achter Synodal-Bericht des Minnesota- und Dakota-Distrikts*, 1892, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> A. W. Meyer, *Lutheran Witness*, XXIV (1905), 157. Richard Jesse, *Lutheran Witness*, XLIV (1925), 337. Quoted in *Lutheran Witness*, XX (1901), 55; M. H. Coyner, "The Christian Home," *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Convention of the Central Illinois District*, 1936, p. 24. Manthey-Zorn, *Questions*, p. 180.

<sup>6</sup> The most extensive discussion is W. H. T. Dau, *Woman Suffrage in the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House Print, n.d. [c. 1916]).

<sup>7</sup> A. L. Graebner, *Der Lutheraner*, I (1894), 71-72, 91. *Lutheran Witness*, XXXIX (1920), 330.

Men so convinced of the fragility of the home could hardly respond favorably to something which promised to accomplish the very revolution they feared. Birth control not only diminished at least the quantitative importance of the woman's sphere, but even provided women the means to escape the home entirely. Sympathetic discourse on birth control alone would have been difficult; it was impossible, as the *Witness* demonstrated, when feminism became involved. "The new woman has cast the church aside, because it teaches subordination of the wife to the husband, and enjoins domestic duties from which the 'taste' of the new woman revolts. The new woman hates children, and is madly exerting her ingenuity in frustrating the ends of matrimony." An editor attacked women active in public life who "gave speeches and essays and high moral instruction to the world instead of giving children."<sup>8</sup>

Biblical witness was, as we have seen, called upon to support the natural order thesis. In addition Holy Writ provided one concrete episode which speaks directly of birth control. This is the peculiar case of Onan, an obscure Old Testament figure ordered to produce children by his brother's widow. He disobeyed by deliberately spilling his semen on the ground and was thereupon killed by God (Genesis 38:8-10).<sup>9</sup> The basic argument against birth control, then, went something like this: according to the natural order, woman's place is in the home; according to divine injunction her role is to bear children; to this end marriage was instituted; to interfere in any way with the process is to be guilty of frustrating a/the purpose of marriage, and of violating the moral order established by God.

The nineteenth-century condemnation of birth control by the Missouri Synod was unequivocal, but two further characteristics require mention. First, the practice was usually not specified as entrenched within Lutheran circles. Instead, German immigrant girls working as maids in upper-class, American homes or econo-

<sup>8</sup> *Lutheran Witness*, XVII (1898), 55. Luecke, *Lutheran Witness*, XIX (1900), 14. For similar polemical linking of feminism, female suffrage and birth control, see James Kennelly, "Catholicism and Woman Suffrage in Massachusetts," *Catholic Historical Review*, LIII (April 1967), 43-57. On the question whether feminism was, in fact, responsible for the rise in family limitation, see Joseph A. and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (New York, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., A. L. Graebner, "Lehrverhandlungen," p. 47. The passage had been cited for centuries by early Jewish and Christian writers against contraception. Noonan, p. 34 *passim*.

mically successful, more Americanized laity were said to come into contact with this otherwise unknown sin.<sup>10</sup> Such statements are reminders that for the Missouri Synod, contraception originated among outsiders—in homiletical parlance, it was "of the world." This had particular import in a denomination with Missouri's immigrant ghetto ethos; in addition the Synod tended to place unusual emphasis on the wall between the Christian and the world and, by insisting upon extensive doctrinal agreement as a prerequisite for association, to remain aloof even from most other Lutherans. Birth control would have been denounced in any case, but in this denomination its origins discredited its advocates and was further cause for censure.

A second important characteristic is the infrequency of the Synod's nineteenth-century comment on birth control, especially when compared to attention after 1900. An anonymous tract in 1868 and scattered, brief references during following decades are all that can be produced until the late 1890's.<sup>11</sup> The likeliest explanation for the uncharacteristic reticence is that some of the clergy failed at first to detect what was going on among the laity; others perhaps saw the practice, but hesitated to say anything in print. To account for this hesitation as well as for the increased incidence of comment after 1900, one must examine the broader American scene. Missouri Lutheran spokesmen could—and did—quote Luther and their favorite seventeenth-century orthodox theologians for support, but they were still men of the late nineteenth century. It is hardly remarkable that the results (though not always the processes) of their reasoning on most questions connected with sex usually coincided closely with general conservative opinion in the decades around the turn of the century.

The view of sex then held in common by this immigrant church and by middle-class America was the congeries of silence, reputa-

<sup>10</sup> Anon., *Das Kindermord* (St. Louis, 1868); J.F.S.H., *Der Lutheraner*, LI (1895), 138; A. L. Graebner, *Theological Quarterly*, II (1898), 349; A.M., *Lutheran Witness*, XIII (1894), 78; H. B. Hemmeler, *Lutheran Witness*, XVI (1897), 110; *Lutheran Witness*, XVII (1899), 67.

<sup>11</sup> C. F. W. Walther (1811-1887), the patriarch of the Synod, mentioned birth control in a condemnatory way a number of times, but his remarks were few and scattered. See *Der Lutheraner*, XXVIII (1871), 4; he was quoted in *Der Lutheraner*, LXII (1906), 241, without source and I have been unable to locate the original reference. He does not recognize the subject in his influential *Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoralthologie*, first published in St. Louis in 1872, and frequently reissued thereafter by Concordia Publishing House.

sion, disdain, innocence and repression often loosely labeled Victorian. In that age, according to a reminiscing Henry Seidel Canby, "sex, as they say of poultry in the market, was steady and quiet. Old roosters were lively, young broilers up and down, but fowls kept their price and their counsel."<sup>12</sup> As Henry F. May and James R. McGovern have pointed out, this was challenged in polite society already before World War I as well as during the oft-cited revolution in morals of the Twenties.<sup>13</sup> The Progressives' successors were repelled by their negativism about sex. But the Progressives' predecessors were more impressed by their frankness. Between the turn of the century and the war, Americans engaged in or at least frequently read about energetic campaigns against prostitution, white slavery, pornography, divorce, and contraception. William Marion Reedy may have been hasty in diagnosing the new American malady as coprolalia, but the extent of the campaigns and the publicity given them was undeniably unprecedented.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> "Sex and Marriage in the Nineties," *Harper's Magazine*, CLXIX (Sept. 1934), 431. Helpful here in various ways are Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven, 1957), pp. 341-430; Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Bloomington, Ind., 1954), pp. 65-108; Aileen S. Kradtner, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York, 1965), pp. 14-42; William L. O'Neill, *Divorce in the Progressive Era* (New Haven, 1967). For the Missouri Synod, practically any volume of *Der Lutheraner* or the *Lutheran Witness* close to the turn of the century offers a plethora of documentation on this point.

<sup>13</sup> May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Time, 1912-1917* (New York, 1959); McGovern, "The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals," *Journal of American History*, LV (1968), 315-333.

<sup>14</sup> Reedy was quoted in *Current Opinion*, LV (1913), 113-114. Eyal Feldman, "Prostitution, the Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination, 1910-1915," *American Quarterly*, XIX (Summer 1967), 192-206; Paul H. Hass, "Sin in Wisconsin: The Teasdale Vice Committee of 1913," *Magazine of Wisconsin History*, XLIX (Winter 1965-66), 138-151; Roy Lubove, "The Progressive and the Prostitute," *The Historian*, XXIV (May 1962), 308-330. Cf. the earlier campaigns of Anthony Comstock in Carol Flora Brooks, "The Early History of the Anti-Contraband Laws in Massachusetts and Connecticut," *American Quarterly*, XVIII (Spring 1966), 3-14; Heywood Brown and Margaret Leech, *Anthony Comstock: Roundman of the Lord* (New York, 1927), pp. 85, 153, 249, 258.

More confident than the previous age that they could control vice if the facts were known, the Progressives were willing to do what their predecessors feared: talk openly about sex. As the San Francisco *Argonaut* put it in 1914, "During the last few years we have seen the almost complete destruction of those reticences upon sex matters that doubtless had their own attendant evils, but that did actually prevent far more evils than they caused." Nothing now, the magazine complained, "is too private for public discussion, no audience too young for admission and participation, no vital fact too explosive for reckless handling. . . . All the protective veils of mystery and sanctity have been broken down, and in their place we are offered statistics, hospital reports, and iodoforn." Quoted in *Lutheran Witness*,

The attack on birth control took a peculiar turn under presidential leadership. Theodore Roosevelt shared some of the northeastern patrician's racist fears, but, refusing to accept immigrant restriction, he adopted E. A. Ross's phrase, "race suicide," and exhorted patriotic fecundity in letters from the White House and even in a message to Congress. When the president thus sounded the trumpet, it was necessary no longer for other voices to remain muted; indeed, preservation of the republic required further description of the peril. As a result from 1905 through 1909, more than thirty-five articles dealing with race suicide appeared in general publications.<sup>15</sup>

Though in other respects still far from Americanization, the Missouri Synod reflected closely this national pre-occupation. In 1905 the *Lutheran Witness* reprinted the text of Roosevelt's address before a convention of mothers and in the following decade spoke more frequently and openly on the subject than at any other time before the 1960's.<sup>16</sup> To evaluate this rhetoric, one must be clear on the precise object of condemnation. A wide variety of birth control methods existed by the turn of the century. Advances in rubber technology permitted improved condoms and the vaginal diaphragm; pessaries and suppositories of one form or another and douching were also known and practiced. The crudest form was early-term abortion or, for the timorous, unusual exertion to induce miscarriage. As would be expected, both were indicted by Lutherans as murder and menaces to maternal health, "a suttee of a different form."<sup>17</sup> Abortion's status, if predictable, is nevertheless

XXXXIII (1914), 41. Although the subject requires more attention than it has received, it is not implausible now to suggest that shortly after the turn of the century, Victorian reticence on sex was supplanted by Progressive reform candor. Little more than a shift in motivation separated this in turn from the pre-war proto-flapper McGovern has described.

<sup>15</sup> Ross, "The Causes of Race Superiority," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, XVIII (1901), 67-89; Roosevelt to Mrs. Bessie Van Vorst, Oct. 18, 1902, *Presidential Addresses and State Papers*, II (New York, 1904), 508-510; "Message of the President . . . to . . . Congress . . . Dec. 6, 1904," *Presidential Addresses and State Papers*, III (New York, 1910), 137; "Address before the National Congress of Mothers," March 13, 1905, *Presidential Addresses and State Papers*, III, 282-299; *Review of Reviews*, XXXV (1907), 551. See Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York, 1965), pp. 302-306; Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston, 1955), pp. 188-189; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York, 1963), pp. 147-148.

<sup>16</sup> XXXIV (1905), 51-53.  
<sup>17</sup> Norman E. Himes, *Medical History of Contraception* (New York, 1963). The quotation is from Otto C. A. Boecker, *Lutheran Witness*, XXXVII (1908),

noteworthy, because it tended to color thinking on birth control by contraception. Many clergy extended the physical effects of repeated, clandestine abortion and the supposed psychic effects of coitus interruptus to all forms of birth control, painting a dark picture indeed. Eighty-five percent of all women in Chicago hospitals were said to be there as a result of birth control. "All forms of contraceptives," announced one cleric, "are more or less injurious to the health, both of husband and wife, but particularly of the latter, as every reputable physician will testify."<sup>18</sup>

Some of such pious fraudulence may be attributed to credulity. The circumlocutions often used about birth control may represent either discretion or ignorance. Probably many pastors were typified by the minister who privately confessed in 1925, "I know next to nothing about it." Yet, though contraception suffered by association with abortion, its condemnation was not always out of ignorance. Quite early in the century, Lutherans mentioned the existence of a contraceptive industry and supplies of all kinds of medicines and instruments—"rubber goods" appears as an English phrase in a German article—which agents peddled from house to house.<sup>19</sup> Such writers made a differentiation between abortion and contraception, but they treated it only as a technical nicety. Ethics were not to be influenced here by a different means to an end, for ends were as much at issue as means.

Early twentieth-century Lutheran birth control pronouncements were not only considerably more frequent than previously, but they diverged somewhat in content. For example, the marked, early decline in the French birth rate occasioned frequent and dolorous comment in the church press—something probably not uncongenial for a denomination both German and Lutheran and

opposed to birth control as well. Typical was the clergyman who identified St. Paul's Corinth as the Paris of the ancient world.<sup>20</sup> But increasingly appended to remarks on France were admissions of Lutheran guilt. After a look at parochial school enrollments in 1908, the *Witness* observed sadly that the tendency toward small families "is no longer confined to the 'Yankees'; it has already invaded every class of the population, and also the Lutheran portion, German and otherwise, is no longer exempt."<sup>21</sup>

The changes during the early twentieth century in the type of argumentation employed against family limitation also reflect this conviction. There was no sudden desertion of the classic brief, but there were some modifications within it. The natural order was still referred to, but once the nineteenth amendment had settled the political status of women, her place was stressed much less than the basic position and role of the family. Onan's example was still cited, though especially after World War I the clergy was likelier to quote the more affirmative verses of Psalm 127.<sup>22</sup> Most important, after 1900 the church's leaders began to consider specific arguments for birth restriction in order to refute them.

Why do people limit the size of their families?, denominational spokesmen asked rhetorically. Many, they answered, try birth control because they believe they cannot support financially a large family. This however is gross materialism and displays a lack of trust in God; it is assuredly grounds for alarm when even Lutheran congregations refuse to call ministerial candidates with large families because of the high cost of support.<sup>23</sup> Still others practice

<sup>17</sup> See also C. A. Weiss, *Lutheran Witness*, XXVIII (1909), 217; *Kindermord*, pp. 6-7; Luecke, *Lutheran Witness*, XX (1901), 47, 55; Luecke, "Be Fruitful and Multiply"; *Earnest Words to Married People* (n.p., n.d. [1914]), p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Lutheran Witness*, XXXVI (1917), 196. Luecke, *Be Fruitful*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> J. H. Lindemeyer to Theodore Graebner, Sept. 15, 1925, Theo. Graebner Papers, Box 101, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis. R.v.N., *Der Lutheraner*, LX (1904), 242; Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, LXII (1906), 241; Alb. H. Brauer, *Die Schaaßen der Korinthischen Gemeinde und Pauli Werbung diese abzutun und zu ueberwinden, eine Lehre auch fuer unsere Gemeinden*, *Dritter Synodal-Bericht des Nord-Illinois-Distrikts*, 1912, p. 52. Before the turn of the century, A. L. Graebner had in his library several works by John Humphrey Noyes, explaining the peculiarities of birth control (coitus reservatus) at Oneida. Copies of *Essay on Scientific Propagation and Male Continence* with Graebner's autograph are now in the Ludwig Fuerbringer Library at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

<sup>20</sup> Brauer, "Die Schaaßen," p. 47. For a sampling of additional references, see Luecke, *Be Fruitful*, p. 9; W.D., *Lutheran Witness*, XIX (1901), 190; Fritz, *Lutheran Witness*, XXI (1902), 166. The events in France are covered in Joseph J. Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation* (Durham, 1938), and Wesley D. Camp, "Marriage and the Family in France Since the Revolution: An Essay in the History of Population" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1957).

<sup>21</sup> Luecke, *Lutheran Witness*, XXVII (1908), 17. *Der Lutheraner* corroboration is in R.v.N., LX (1904), 242; and Fuerbringer, LXI (1905), 24. The only exception to such pre-war dating I have located is Carl Eisfeldt's 1921 opinion that birth control was not quite yet rampant in Lutheran circles. His use of archaic phraseology, however, does not lead to confidence in his perspicacity. *Magazin fuer Ev.-Luth. Homiletik und Pastoraltheologie*, XVI (1921), 118-20.

<sup>22</sup> Vs. 3-5: "Lo, sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate."

<sup>23</sup> Theo. Wuggazer, *Lutheran Witness*, XXVIII (1909), 591 (in part this article is an unacknowledged paraphrase of *Das Kindermord* of a half-century earlier); R.v.N., *Der Lutheraner*, LX (1904), 242-243; R. Piehler, "Das Leben der sicht-

birth control, wrote Synodical observers, because large families are not fashionable. It is true, they complained, that landlords of fine apartments specify "no children." "It requires no expert sociologist to note how 'race suicide' and the ubiquitous 'divorce' seem to flourish with the modern 'apartment' house"; neighbors and friends even of a Christian woman who is pregnant deplore that there must be another childbirth in that home, and parents of large families are subject to all kinds of sly innuendo.<sup>24</sup>

Some married couples limit the number of children, churchmen stated, because they fear for the health of the mother. On this point the clergy came down hard. The plea of health, Lutherans were assured, is in nine cases out of ten a mere subterfuge to mask female selfishness. The most uncompromising authors maintained that even if experience demonstrated that childbirth did shorten a mother's life, one could not rightfully interfere with God's natural order. Fortunately, child-bearing does not have a deleterious effect, they insisted; in fact, a mother's health is preserved by it. Seminars studying pastoral theology in the 1920's and '30's read that "women with many children are in middle age much more beautiful than those who have few children. . . ."<sup>25</sup>

Concentrating their fire upon agitation for fewer, but better, children, Synodical writers frequently reminded their readers that fertility and genius are not incompatible. In fact, "genius is rarely found where there is one child." Often included were impressive compilations of famous people from large families. Thus Franklin was fifteenth of seventeen children; Caruso was a nineteenth child, while Schubert was a fourteenth, though presumably no less talented for it. The fact was, one author contended, "that the oldest children are often weaker than the younger. If the latter remain unborn, and if only the oldest children continue the family trunk, degeneration is not to be avoided."<sup>26</sup> Even the financial difficulties incurred

*baren Kirche unserer Zeit, ein Zeichen der Naehة des Juengsten Tages,* "Zwoelfter Synodal-Bericht des Nord-Illinois-Distrikts, 1925, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Brainer, "Die Schaaден," p. 53. H. B. Hemmeler, *Lutheran Witness*, XXIV (1905), 30. J. T. Mueller, *Der Lutheraner*, LXXXI (1925), 129; Manthey-Zorn, *Questions*, p. 179.

<sup>25</sup> "Wayfarer," *Lutheran Witness*, XXXVI (1917), 82. R.v.N., *Der Lutheraner*, LX (1904), 242-243. Fritz, *Walther League Messenger*, XXXIII (April 1925), 462. Quoted by Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), p. 178.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in *Lutheran Witness*, XXXVI (1917), 196. Quoted by Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, p. 179; for Margaret Sanger's counter-list of single sons, see *My Fight for Birth Control* (New York, 1931), pp. 222-223.

in attempts to breed genius are not disadvantageous; "in families . . . where constant frugality is demanded in the distribution of the family income, there seems to be a rugged independence for which wealth can offer no compensation." If nothing else, Lutherans contended, family limitation promoted the already alarming rate of divorce. Couples with children were more likely to stay together than those without. And upon the home and family rest the fortunes of the nation.<sup>27</sup>

Such an endorsement of a prudential ethic was an important, perhaps irrevocable, step toward capitulation of the Synod's position. Implying the inadequacy of a "Thus saith the Lord" case, church spokesmen resorted to appeals to more immediate lay self-interest. But by admitting the relevance of birth control's effects, clergymen unwittingly hastened their own defeat. They failed to foresee that if their non-theological contentions were ever disproved by empiricism, then the Biblical basis, too, might be discredited.

In a shorter perspective, such arguments were tacit acknowledgment of the effectiveness of the increasingly open advocacy of birth control. Though there was a long and generally unhappy history of agitation for family limitation, no American received—nor had the talent for gaining—the publicity given Margaret Sanger after her dramatic emergence in 1914.<sup>28</sup> Religious free-thinker, divorcee, radical feminist, intimate of English and American literati, possessed of a vigorous social conscience, Margaret Sanger was everything the Missouri Synod was not, and Lutherans responded in vituperative terms. The *Witness* complained in 1923 that the *Nation* was aiding Mrs. Sanger's organization "to spatter the country with its slime." Describing Margaret Sanger's latest speech, one pastor reported, "this she-devil has again opened her trap."<sup>29</sup> As in the past, opposition to birth control and antipathy

<sup>27</sup> Walter A. Maier, *For Better Not for Worse*, 3rd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939), p. 389. For the connection between birth control and divorce, see Luecke, *Lutheran Witness*, XX (1901), 110; M. Brueggemann, *Lutheran Witness*, XXXV (1916), 174; "Wayfarer," *Lutheran Witness*, XXXVI (1917), 83; M. H. Coyner, "The Christian Home," p. 25; Maier, *Walther League Messenger*, XVII (1938), 603.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Fryer, *The Birth Controllers* (London, 1965); Sidney Ditzion, *Marrriage, Morals, and Sex in America: A History of Ideas* (New York, 1953). There is no adequate biography of Margaret Sanger or history of the American birth control movement. Lawrence Lader, *The Margaret Sanger Story and the Fight for Birth Control* (Garden City, N.Y., 1955), comes too close to hagiography.

<sup>29</sup> Theo. Graebner, *Lutheran Witness*, XLII (1923), 173. Piehler, "Das Leben