

POPULATION: AN INTERNATIONAL DILEMMA<sup>1</sup>

MUCH effort has gone into this little book of 89 pages. The reminder is of the Greek philosopher who expressed regret that time did not permit a short letter and therefore he must write a long one. In this instance, the author found time and took time. The result is a straightforward account of the population problem, as it exists today and of what may be done about it. The source material presumably was voluminous, drawn from a series of meetings by a Conference Committee on Population Problems sponsored by The Population Council, Inc. Discussions extended over 19 months and included 23 prepared papers by guest consultants. The easy temptation would be an edited and annotated transcript of what took place. Nor is this a precis; it is a thoughtful digest of critical elements. The general reader is provided an informative text; the expert in one or other phase of this international dilemma will find things not to be had from more pretentious publications. Each of the five chapters has an adequate summary; the neat paragraphs that end sections within chapters give particular delight. The book is in two parts; the first outlines present conditions, the second gives indicated lines of action.

First attention is to the need for rational regulation of births in the modern world by reason of social, political, economic, and health considerations. A separation of the special problems of densely populated areas and those of advanced countries gives weight to the theme of this presentation, that the population problem is worldwide. American attitude is still too much that of a business of faraway places.

An analysis of attitudes and practices affecting fertility, and the influence of religious teaching and morals has the purpose of identifying factors contributing to population growth, and thereby the possibilities for bending them to the desirable end of numbers of people fitted to the material resources of a country or region. Cultures and religions differ so greatly that no

<sup>1</sup>Osborn, Frederick H.: *POPULATION: AN INTERNATIONAL DILEMMA*. New York, The Population Council, Inc., 1958, 89 pp.

single approach, no common program, can expect to have general acceptance. Added to that is the circumstance that "mass reliance for the moment must be placed on contraceptive measures which are only partly effective and not easily accepted, ranging from methods which are fairly effective but require materials out of reach of peasant populations, to incomplete intercourse which requires unusual control, and the rhythm method which is ineffective with untrained people." An obvious conclusion is the need for studies to determine the characteristics, customs, and beliefs about procreation evidenced by particular populations and to test the efficiency of possible control measures when applied under those conditions. The research of today is the practice of tomorrow.

The final chapter of the book is for Americans. What is said applies equally to other countries with a low ratio of population to natural resources, including the Soviet Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Should the United States double its population, a situation toward which it is now heading, standards of living would tend strongly to be lowered. That, as is properly stated, is something for the American people to worry about. The world concern is that such general increases among highly industrialized populations would make for increasing demands on world resources, sufficient to restrict to their present position nations now struggling toward a better human wellbeing. The dilemma is international to the extent that all countries are involved. It is also international in that what happens in one place affects the rest of the universe. No country has a wholly individual problem; the necessary viewpoint is ecologic and holistic.

The statement that the United States is a backward country so far as a population policy is concerned will engender little controversy. Most persons will view that challenge in terms of their own little piece of it. The author leaves no doubt of the obligations of public health, which he considers the most promising vehicle for a national and organized program for controlling size of family. That everyone has a part in the problem is inescapable, for population control is "not an end of itself but only a means of advancing the more general objective of human welfare." In terms of man's existence popu-

lation growth to an extent to give concern is a phenomenon of recent origin, about 200 years. The next generation, the coming 50 years, are critical times.

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## ABORTION IN THE UNITED STATES<sup>1</sup>

**T**HIS book represents a skillfully condensed transcript of a conference called by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America to discuss the abortion problem in this country. Participants include 38 specialists from the fields of obstetrics, psychiatry, public health, biology, sociology, law, and demography. Discussion ran for two full days and evenings in April and then for another day in June, 1955.

Editorially the book is interesting. Its text reads like the ideal conference which chairmen dream about: everybody sticking to their points, always raised in proper contexts; viewpoints expressed without repetition and a minimum of bickering; social relations so unproblematical that little time need be wasted on amenities such as introductions or acknowledgments. Of course this paragon of group deliberation is partly the product of a hard-working editor and editorial committee who succeeds in "whittling down 600 pages of expertly stenotyped script by about 60 per cent" and "to regroup under appropriate title heads discussion that had been actually scattered over the entire extent of the conference."

Several generalizations emerge from the personal experiences and fragmentary statistics reported by the discussants. Many of the present state laws regarding abortion are obsolete and unrealistic and as a result the legal positions of doctors performing abortions in these states is far from secure. The current trend is to narrow the conditions under which patients are accepted for abortion and generally to elaborate administrative safeguards against easy abortion. Indeed in some

<sup>1</sup> Calderone, Mary S. (editor): *ABORTION IN THE UNITED STATES*. Hoeber-Harper, New York, 1958, vii + 224 pp. \$5.50.