

ANNOTATIONS

PROPOSALS TO END THE BATTLE OVER BIRTH CONTROL

Rock, John, M.D.: *THE TIME HAS COME: A Catholic Doctor's Proposals to End the Battle over Birth Control*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1963, 204 pp. \$3.95.

BIRTH CONTROL has been a controversial subject in the United States for some time. It has caused conflict in two of the main areas of society—religion and politics. In his new book, Dr. Rock sees the subjects of birth control and the population explosion as major world problems which must be solved quickly. He believes that “the time has come” for the United States to play a major role in this area and that she has to solve her own birth control problems before she can aid other nations.

The author emphasizes the religious controversy. Writing as a faithful Catholic, he believes that a workable compromise between the Catholic and non-Catholic views can come about. In Part II, Dr. Rock tries to show that the Catholic Church is not opposed to family planning and birth control as such. The dispute is over the type of contraception to be used.

In Part III of the book, Dr. Rock discusses some of the better known political controversies over birth control at the city, state, national and international levels. He points out that major opposition even in the field of public policy still comes from the Catholic Church. He believes this is doing the Church

more harm than good. The author shows that he is not alone in this opinion; some eminent Catholic clergymen and writers agree with him, at least with some qualifications. However, there have also been some vigorous disclaimers, particularly with reference to the author's contention that the use of the oral pill is compatible with Catholic doctrine. Arguing that laws against birth control are not enforceable, the author states that in order to prove an illegal act the government would have to secure evidence from the bedroom.

As an illustration of what can be done to facilitate a compromise among the various views on birth control, Dr. Rock describes the final agreements arrived at in the recent controversy over the establishment of birth control services in New York City's municipal hospitals: "When there are clearly defined medical conditions in which the life or health of a woman may be jeopardized by pregnancy, it is generally recognized by the medical profession that contraceptive measures are proper medical procedure. . . . Municipal hospitals should provide such medical advice, preventive measures and devices for female patients under their care whose life and health in the opinion of the medical staff may be jeopardized by pregnancy and who wish to avail themselves of such health services. . . . Physicians, nurses and other hospital personnel who have religious or moral objections should be excused from participation in contraceptive procedures.'" (pp. 123 and 124.)

The book ends with a plea for more research in the field of human reproductive physiology. Since the main source of conflict between the Catholic and non-Catholic segments of the population is over the methods of contraception, perfection of the rhythm system or some other system agreeable to the Catholic Church would greatly facilitate the end of the controversy.

In the closing chapter Dr. Rock reverts to the theme of his book and says: "Our nation still has time to throw its rich resources and skills into a constructive program to help mankind bring its overabundant fertility under rational control. How much longer that choice will remain open to us, however, is uncertain, and the more rapidly we decide to exercise our option, the better for all of us." (p. 203.)

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Christian A. Herter, in the Foreword to this book, says of Dr. Rock: "Personally, I believe his proposals are worthy of implementation by the best minds, with the best research facilities, governmental and philanthropic, of many nations—whatever is necessary to give them the best chance of success. The consequences of failure to find effective, acceptable ways of meeting the population crisis are unthinkable." (x)

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PIONEERING IN FAMILY PLANNING

THE spectacular decline in fertility that Japan has evinced since 1949 constitutes one of the major social changes of our time. Understandably, it has had many eager spectators and it is also one of the best documented cases of the demographic transition. Part of the documentation—the English reports by Dr. Yoshio Koya concerning his research on Japanese fertility attitudes, reproductive histories, and family limitation methods during the fifties—is now available in one volume entitled, *PIONEERING IN FAMILY PLANNING*. A number of the papers have already appeared in this *Quarterly* and elsewhere,

Koya, Yoshio: *PIONEERING IN FAMILY PLANNING: A COLLECTION OF PAPERS ON THE FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN JAPAN*. [Published with the assistance of the Population Council, New York.] Tokyo, Japan Medical Publishers, Inc., 1963, 173 pp.