

adviser has to be sure that his clients *understand* a physiological process exactly, in complete contrast to the normal practice of the consulting room, where one is not expected to ensure that a patient understands exactly all the clinical and pathological details of his or her disease. In an attempt to simplify the problem, Dr Marshall has subdivided couples seeking advice into a number of groups and suggested a form of approach suitable to clients in each of these categories. The suggested approach is in no way stylized but is given on broad principles and in the best traditions of clinical medicine.

In general, the book fills a very serious need and should be read and kept as a reference by all those who advise on periodic continence. It is the answer to those who claim either that the safe period does not exist or who allege that it is completely unreliable and unworkable. By close attention to all the details of this book, there is no reason why a medical adviser should not achieve much the same results as those of the average family planning clinic which gives instruction in contraception but does not dispense the 'pill'. A separate chapter is devoted to the psychological aspects of advising on the safe period. This is important reading as it deals with many of the common problems which are encountered in this work. Of note is the management of possible difficulties and objections concerning the observance of continence. The old fallacy that sexual desire in women is greatest at the time of ovulation is exploded by quoting statistics from a paper published in a well-known medical journal.

The Introductory chapter poses the problem of fertility control and the population explosion in sober terms. Most of the points on this problem, which are made in Dr Rock's book, *The Time has Come*, are covered here with considerable economy of words but with telling force. In contrast, the final chapter on 'Theological Aspects' is rather dreary reading. The time-worn 'Natural Law' arguments are invoked to condemn mechanical and chemical contraception and to justify periodic continence. This presumably means something to some Catholics and is taken on trust by others, but it is completely unintelligible to our separated brethren. It is a good example of 'instant morality', about which various writers in the national press have complained. This is in no way a reflection on the author of the book but is an indictment of this most inadequate method of expressing our doctrinal position as Catholics. A process of enquiry into the sacramental nature of marriage is much needed in order to illuminate the doctrine of the sanctity of the sexual act, and all that it implies, and to diminish reliance on merely legalistic arguments.

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THE POPULATION EXPLOSION AND WORLD HUNGER., by Arthur McCormack; Burns and Oates (Faith and Fact); 9s 6d.

The complexities of the debate on the effects of the astronomical increase in world population are such that the layman is likely to abandon the attempt to assess their merits. On one hand he is frightened out of his wits by prophecies

of cataclysmic disaster: on the other he is met by brisk reassurances that all will be well, that it is simply a problem of organization and technology. And by-passing the whole problem is the solution of the population controllers: contraception and sterilization must do what natural control has failed to achieve.

There is great need, therefore, for an objective presentation of the facts and some clear indication of their sane interpretation. This Fr McCormack has provided in a useful survey of the present world situation and of the various attempts that are being made to meet the challenge of a huge increase in population ('By A.D. 2,000 there will be as many people in Asia as there are at present in the whole world', he reminds us). He begins with the premiss that hunger and poverty can in fact be eliminated, that the resources of the world are sufficient to provide the food and other necessities of life for all the people of the world. What is lacking is the labour and capital and technical skill, and, above all, the will to employ them on a scale of international co-operation undreamed of up to now. He provides plentiful evidence of what can be accomplished by improvement in farming techniques, the use of food from the ocean and the control of pests, among many other matters. And he has pertinent information to give on the economic and political consequences of a world-wide effort to eliminate hunger and poverty. His summary of recent papal utterances—and in particular the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*—is a valuable commentary on what is after all the basic question: the readiness of nations to abandon their selfish interests for the common good. 'We have all the technical knowledge, we have all the material resources, we have all the financial potential to wipe poverty off the face of this earth in this generation or in this century at least. What is lacking is a sense of urgency, a sense of optimism, a conviction that we can and must do it.'

A brief section of Fr McCormack's book deals with the Church's opposition to the solution of those who advocate drastic methods of population control. This is the weakest part of his argument, because it is the least developed. He could in fact have omitted it altogether. The Church's attitude is well known, and its proper presentation needs a much more thorough argument than this brief glimpse at the usual apologetic. And harassed Catholic parents will be amazed to hear that 'this method (i.e., that of the "safe period") has become more and more accurate in recent years and is as "safe" as or safer than contraceptive methods'. Generalizations of this sort are dangerous. One may hope that the important survey now being undertaken under the auspices of Georgetown University, with the help of a grant from the Ford Foundation, into the whole question of this method of family limitation may indeed produce valuable results. But too little is as yet known to justify confident conclusions.

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