

POPULATION: EXPLOSION OR CONTROL? by A. Nevett, S.J., *Geoffrey Chapman, 25s.*

he publisher tells us that 'this very competent book is *not* a contribution to the birth control controversy'. In fact it is (and it could not be otherwise), as even its title reveals.

If the book was not deliberately designed to oppose the Government of India's birth control policy, that is in fact what it does. Of course I am not attacking that attitude, but only the unrealistic statement about the object of the book. Father Nevett addresses himself in the first five chapters to various aspects of India's population problem. The methods applied by the Indian Government, by the majority of private bodies. Indian and non-Indian, Christian and non-Christian, by most of the United Nations organizations, are all of them condemned by the Catholic Church, on moral grounds as against the 'natural law' binding on every human being.

Here is the true issue, as expressed for OXFAM (now prepared to give direct aid to the International Planned Parenthood Federation) by Dr J. N. Mehta, High Commissioner for India in London, late President of the Indian Medical Association, and Director-General of Health Services to the Government of India.

'Those who oppose family planning schemes often say it is not the principle that they object to, but to the "unnatural" methods used. But what if the so-called "natural" methods do not work? Most authorities regard these methods as unreliable for Western peoples. They have been shown to be unsuitable for most people in undeveloped countries. In India, the peasant mother is abject in her poverty, crushed physically and spiritually by an unbroken series of pregnancies. Can it be "natural" to condemn a woman to this state by deliberately depriving her of reliable methods of family planning? Can it be "natural" to withhold help that would enable her avoid having unwanted children – children for whom the future holds nothing but a life of misery and poverty? I cannot accept so cruel a view of what is natural to man. On the contrary, I believe it is much more natural to make the fullest use of man's inventiveness in the pursuit of human happiness and dignity'.

Space does not permit his further challenges to the term 'unnatural', but he calls some of the arguments against family planning 'fantasies'. Finally, he quotes the Roman Catholic gynaecologist, Dr Rock, as sharing his belief that 'while population control alone cannot resolve the population crisis, no combination of other measures can succeed without it'.

In fact, the birth control controversy is tending more and more to drop the argument of 'natural law' (the crucial one in dealing with all non-Catholics) and to fall back on authority. Catholic authorities cannot well quote Popes and Catholic theologians for India. They fall back, therefore, on Mahatma Gandhi, who thought about sex very much as did St Augustine or St Gregory the Great.

The mistake in this attitude is to suppose that the Indian Hindu, Muslim, or agnostic could ever attach anything like the same importance to Gandhi's *doctrine* as a Catholic must give to the Pope. Even in his lifetime, his own disciples would quote back to him his own admission of 'Himalayan blunders' he had committed. No such blunder of his was ever so great as his blunders about sex. This can be shown by quotations from Gandhi chosen by Father Nevett himself.

Our author gives an excellent account of the Indian woman and marriage in Chapter 6, to which we may return later. He also says, 'the views of Gandhi are a good example of the continuation of this ideal . . . nobody can stand as a rival to him in probing the soul of Hinduism and interpreting to the world what the masses of India felt and wanted'. Gandhi's wife was twelve when he married her. At that time it was standard practice. Not only was there no consultation of the girl but she was often married to an old man. Literacy among girls was rare and frowned on. Many social and religious traditions combined to canonize the largest possible families. Underpopulation had for centuries been as serious a problem as over-population today. Inevitably, the 'companionship' side of marriage was all but eclipsed by the procreative. The historical picture in Europe was very similar, and complicated by

the relegation to convents of girls unmarried. To establish a *tradition* condemning contraception supports its existence as an *issue*. How little it was an issue seems to be proved by the silence of Holy Scripture, except for the very disputable case of Onan. There is the same silence in the saner writings of other world-religions, and for the same reason.

The author would presumably commit India to follow Gandhi's lead on what is most fundamental to Gandhi's view – that the only justification of sexual intercourse is the breeding of children. A whole chapter might be filled with statements by early Christian writers in precisely the same sense, all ruling out what the Church today admits as the further end of 'companionship': the expression of married love in the way lawful within marriage. This is usually called the 'secondary' end of marriage, and has been regarded as strictly subordinate to the primary end of offspring. The *Schema* presented to us last October at the Third Session of the Vatican Council lays great stress on this secondary end, and several speeches questioned whether the secondary end was strictly subordinate at all.

On page 110, Gandhi is quoted as wanting to attach to Hindu scriptures a strictly authoritative character such as we claim for the Bible, or the Muslim for the Koran (the comparison is mine, but does no violence to Gandhi's thought).

On page 112, Father Nevett quotes Ramakrishna as regarding women as did some early Christian ascetical writers, as a danger to the spiritual life. Gandhi's views are called 'not so severe', though he does insist on 'intercourse only for procreation'. Gandhi insists that in the Hindu scriptures 'the sole object of sexual intercourse is the desire

for progeny . . . simple gratification of the sexual instinct would be counted . . . as lust'.

Father Nevett's only concession is to say that 'Catholic moral theologians would not be so severe; quite reasonably, they would not consider as sinful the normal use of marriage for the purpose of fostering mutual love.'

If you read Dr Messenger's *Two in One Flesh*, published seventeen years ago, or the New American Library's *What Modern Catholics Think of Birth Control* you will find page after page of quotations from the Fathers – both Greek and Latin – taking precisely the same view as Gandhi's. I find it exceedingly revealing that a modern Jesuit, often regarded as an official spokesman of the Church's social doctrine in India, should quote Gandhi as authoritative for India in much the same sense as St Augustine or St Gregory the Great for Catholic theology. It is this question that we must face up to.

There is a further significance in this book, to which I must refer even at the price of hurting the author's modesty. As a priest, he is even better known as philanthropist than as an author. Many British Catholics have read reports about his work in India by Father Bernard Basset, S.J. To most non-Catholics with intimate knowledge of poverty in India – especially of the suffering among women – the Catholic attitude is not merely unnatural, but extremely harsh and cruel. Perhaps it is providential that the exponent of the traditional view is a man so much admired and loved for his dedicated love of humanity.

India is not the only country where the difficulty exists. It is being met now, please God, by Rome, and at the highest level.

✠ T. D. Roberts, S.J.

THE EXPERIENCE OF MARRIAGE. Edited by Michael Novak *Darton, Longman and Todd*. 25s and 12s 6d (paper-back).

MARRIED LOVE by Emile Joseph de Smedt. *Chapman*, 15s.

Michael Novak wanted to know what intelligent lay people really thought and felt about Catholic marriage as a way of life and love, as opposed to

what moral theologians thought they ought to think and feel.

Did it work? Was it a success as a human way