

RELIGIOUS BULLETIN

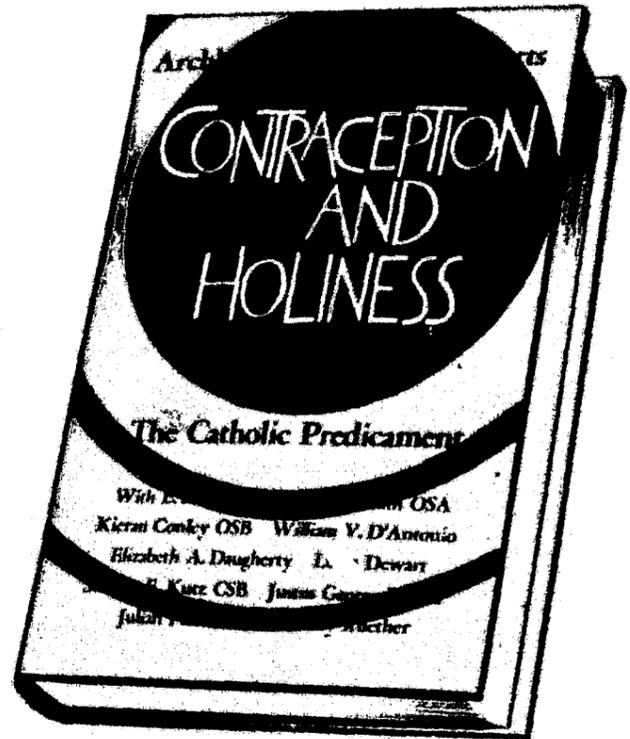
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BOOK WITH A SEDUCTIVE TITLE

The dichotomous title of Contraception and Holiness is fascinating, but leaves the bookstore browser in a quandry. In fact, the attractive jacket of the book appears to indicate that an Archbishop is the editor of the ten essays, published with the subtitle, "The Catholic Predicament." if you open the cover, you will not find any editor listed.

According to a communique from the publisher, the Most Rev. Thomas D. Roberts, S.J., the semi-retired and former missionary Archbishop of Bombay, participated in the planning and editing of the book. Although he is listed on the title page only for his introduction, one could be led mistakenly to believe that his name, preceded by an episcopal cross, serves as an Imprimatur.



Archbishop Roberts, whose pronouncements on freedom in the Church and modern nuclear warfare have shown "courage of unpopular convictions" in England, published some personal remarks on the question of contraception in the British newsletter Search, last April. They immediately drew an authoritative reply from the English hierarchy. Nevertheless, the Archbishop has shown his courage again to speak out and reiterate the same convictions in a more expansive article, which introduces Contraception and Holiness.

By no means, should my own opening remarks indicate that the collection of essays on contraception is taboo. Pope Paul himself remarked last June that the question of birth control is under study by a large group of learned experts. In the meantime, however, he mentioned that Pius XII's regulations on the use of the anovulant pill remain valid, even though these regulations may be "modified." In view of the directive, Contraception and Holiness can be of great

Father Leon Mertensotto, C.S.C., assistant professor of theology and assistant head of the department here at Notre Dame wrote this feature review of Contraception and Holiness for Ave Maria (Dec. 5, 1964) This very controversial book has also been reviewed for The Commonweal (Dec. 4, 1964) by Father Charles E. Curran who teaches moral theology at St. Bernard's Seminary, Rochester, New York; and for America (Nov. 14, 1964) by Father Richard J. McCormick, S.J., who teaches moral and pastoral theology at Bellarmine School of Theology, North Aurora, Illinois.

service as information and discussion on the unsettled question.

Furthermore, these essays contain such a volume of ideas, insights, and conjectures that a book review cannot adequately and justly appraise in detail the content of this book. Consequently, an appraisal of the overall content -- scientific, sociological, philosophical, and theological -- may expose some of the assets as well as shortcomings.

First of all, the lessons in biology and zoology by Julian Pleasants and Elizabeth A. Daugherty are equally perspicacious and inevitably provocative. Although the theologian cannot substitute for biology the genetic laws and eugenic phenomena relating to living organisms and vital processes in their evolution, development, and causal antecedents, nevertheless, a biologist becomes preposterous when he claims that "the Church's position (on birth control) may indeed be right, but if so, this is an accident entirely unrelated to the evidence on which the position was reached". It is true that the monestrous and polyestrous phenomena of sub-primate mammals as well as the phylogenetic laws of primates, as discovered by the zoologist, can be greatly advantageous to a theological discussion of procreation, but can the theologian make his decision only upon an inductive inquiry into the thus-far-known phenomena of the endocrine and reproductive mechanisms in animal life?

Secondly, the essay on parenthood and population by Professor William V. D'Antonio does present the sociological and demographic problems we face in the world today. But, again, when a sociologist asks if the question of goodness or evil in an act is not to be found in the motivation for the act, he does not realize that intention is also a circumstantial factor of the act and that the primary source of morality is in the object or nature of an action, and not in its situation.

In addition, a discussion on birth control and sexuality is an exquisite sociological study by Rosemary Ruether, who, as a Roman Catholic, startled the country last April with her convictions in a Saturday Evening Post article. While the present essay is more reflective than her previous one, it again gives personal experience in confronting marital problems, and indicates thereby that the whole question of birth control and sexuality needs intensive discussion and rethinking, if present-day marriage difficulties are to be solved. In other words, the "relational" expression of marriage must complement the "procreational" aspect, so widely emphasized by the theology of marriage in the past.

Thirdly, the philosophical approaches to the problem inculcate the modern personalist and existential trend in discussing person, conscience, and natural law, i.e., the agent and his subjective and objective norms of morality. In an essay on procreation and person, Father Kiernan Conley emphasizes the Pauline notion of personal re-

sponsibility in the famous Martin Buber "I and Thou" relationship, and applies it to the totality of the married couple in the marital act as an articulation of love. It is true that our traditional morality perhaps overemphasizes the Aristotelean concept of nature; the "dimension of person and love, however," cannot supplant the dimension of nature, but complement it. Man is a human person because his intellectual and physiological-biological nature determines and constitutes that personality. Consequently, the "language of love" and response of a person can never be separated from his total nature. If one would concede that "nature always remains relative to a personal good", then the standard of good and evil becomes relativized according to the situation wherein the person exists.

Likewise, Father Stanley E. Kutz's discussion conscience and contraception is intriguing, and leaves the reader wondering what conscience really is. Although conscience is correlated with such appealing existential terminology as "free response, total knowing, free person, existential encounter, creative responsibility, etc.," nevertheless, man's conscience cannot be divorced from his total personality, which includes nature. Conscience has always been understood as personalizing the objective norm of nature because the individual person must act according to the demands of his nature. Whether "natural law reveals itself to the conscience of a free person" or a person freely follows his conscience dictating natural law through right reason, it does not give conscience any autonomy from or preeminence over natural law. It is difficult to see how the essayist can answer "We think not" to his question, "Does not this way of thinking lead to the complete relativism of situation ethics?"

The chapter on discovering natural law by Professor Justus G. Lawler attempts to investigate the possible natural law evidence against contraception, and reiterates the standard objections against the methodology and understanding of the theological arguments underlying the traditional position. Unfortunately, the exposition within the essay reveals a lack of an understanding of the history of the natural law theory in its essence, recognition, and actualization. Besides, the article's degenerating overtones reaffirm a deficiency apparent to anyone with a sense of erudition.

Finally, there are three essays on the epistemology or methodology of the moral theology of contraception. Professor E. R. Baltazar's chapter on contraception and process again advocates that the meaning of man's nature cannot be found in the sense of "being," but in the evolutionary aspect of "becoming." Because of these existential factors of time and place, and because of an evolving concept of man, it still does not indicate that "we have even begun to change our concept of the natural law itself". Evidently, the author has interpolated papal statements to confirm his solution that contraception may be practiced to enhance interpersonal conjugal love.

A lengthy article by Professor Leslie Dewart on the development of dogma in regard to the Church's teaching on marriage and the marital

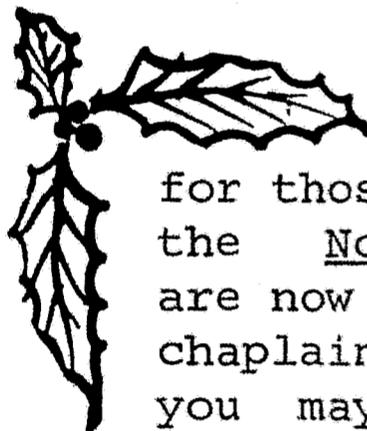
act is probably the most disappointing of all. Although it appears to be a take-off on the great Newman essays in the development of dogma, it fails in an intellectualist approach to understand concrete reality and falls into a conceptualist attempt to produce certitude. Such wrangling over concepts with logistic concatenations produces only less certitude and leads to a skepticism that undermines theology as a reflection upon faith. It is true that the Casti Connubii encyclical is not complete in its theology of marriage and needs much further development on the nature of matrimony, but the encyclical's so-called "underdevelopment" does not imply that its doctrine is valid only in relation to the moral problem of its time, and that it does not envisage the new problem of contraception under new cultural conditions.

In the last essay of the book, Father Gregory Baum asks the question, whether the Church can change her position? Again, the authoritativeness of the past papal pronouncements on marriage is reassessed, but in a more concrete historical fashion than the preceding article does. In the light of the Gospel message, the author has confidence in a future development of doctrine. Fr. Baum is not convinced by the traditional arguments given to show that contraception is intrinsically evil. Consequently, he believes that a situation wherein couples with the conviction that the use of contraceptives is demanded is not subjectivism, but objective holiness. While any theologian would agree to it as a case of a subjectively erroneous conscience, it would be difficult to correlate contraception with holiness in the objective order.

Contraception and Holiness is attractive enough to become a best seller. Euphemistically, it reminds me of a book entitled The Sex Life of Primates, which recently appeared in England; it became a best seller overnight because many thought it was about Archbishops.

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IN YOUR CHARITY please pray for the following: Deceased -- grandmother of James Conway of Fisher; uncle of Tom Heck of Morrissey; uncle of Walt Basladynsky of Zahm; Robert Martin, '46; Frank Tyler, '23; Joseph W. Lauber, '29; Mrs. Joseph Kolibowski; David Panullo; father of William N. Sheehan, Jr., '58; father of Fred Genovese, '58; father of John C., '39 and Thomas A. Hynes, Jr., '49; father of John P. Dempsey, '49; Sister M. Carla, C.S.C.; father of John C., '44, and William A. Baum, '41; father of Richard E. Breunner, '58; Sister M. Gertruden, C.S.C.; father of Steve Bayer of Stanford. Ill -- mother of James McCue of Cavanaugh; wife of Bert Metzger, '31.



CHRISTMAS CARDS

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