

THE DECLINE OF MOTHERHOOD: PILLS, POLITICIANS AND ABORTION

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Borne on cyclical winds, which blow hot and cold according to the intellectual ferment of the moment, projected birthrate curves are viewed either with alarm because they are dropping or with panic because they are rising. In 1870, worried English experts were proving that by 1940, British population would exceed 100 million. In 1943, they were proving just as convincingly that by the end of the century, only a few million would be left. English statistics in the 1940s showed that there were one-and-a-half million less children than there were in 1914. To preserve Britain, the solution was to breed faster.

In America during the '20s and '30s, intelligent thinkers bemoaned the one-child family and predicted the certain decline of Western Civilization because of its failure to propagate. Today, this same class of sophisticated (effete?) speculators now prophesies our doom within a half-century from overcrowding and starvation because we propagate too rapidly.

Formerly, in spite of limited communication, the birthrate fluctuated without professional advice of demographers. Now, with experts in profusion and television carrying the message of overpopulation into every home, it remains just as uncontrollable. Paradoxically, during earlier years when we instinctively reduced our birth rate, possibly in response to obscure economic and environmental influences, only primitive methods of "family planning" were available—rhythm, the douche, the rubber and abstinence. More recently, in addition to these unstylish means that once served so effectively, we have Pills, loops, foams, creams, suppositories, diaphragms and jellies handy on every corner, and population thumbs its nose.

The confusion generated by the emotional arguments of politicians and crusading intellectual theorists concerned with overpopulation at times approaches hysteria. Yet while they cry for drastic measures to reduce our numbers, they simultaneously castigate American medicine for its "disgraceful" record in fetal mortality statistics and insist that we wipe out the causes of adult death and prolong life indefinitely. It is a mixed-up mess. And nowhere is the muddle more evident than in the recent political and neofeminist furor over the Pill and the question of abortion.

Only a few years ago, the Pill was hailed as the most significant breakthrough in medical history. As a sociologic answer to all feminine problems, it would liberate womankind forever from the bondage of unwanted pregnancy. Overnight the women's

magazines dropped Grantly Dick-Read¹ and the joys of natural childbirth and jumped on the bandwagon of contraception. Gynecologists were flooded with demands for the wonder Pill and browbeaten into prescribing it indiscriminately by young mothers, old mothers, school girls and swinging menopausal spinsters and menopausal worriers. As every gynecologist has experienced, merely to suggest that a woman discontinue her Pill because of some unhealthy side effect elicited a scream of anguished despair as if she had been sentenced to instant, galloping fertility.

Throughout the Pill's relatively short history, gynecologists have stayed concerned about the disturbing side effects and the unknown long-term effects of administering these super-potent steroids for prolonged periods. They have been harried day and night by the phone calls from frantic females who can't count, who drop a pill in the john, who forget that Wednesdays follow Tuesdays, or who must meet husbands in Hawaii week after next. Thousands of gynecologists have wished that the Pill had never been invented or would somehow go away.

Their silent prayers may soon be answered. There are signs that the popularity of the Pill is on the wane. Long-suppressed research findings, accumulating over the years and soft-pedaled by insistent social tinkers promoting their greatest good theories of population control, are now spilling out in public investigative hearings.

And who is in the vanguard of the new critical attack on the Pill? Why, naturally, the same army of liberated womankind that once demanded it as a birthright. New women's liberation groups now shrill that it has all been a plot on the part of men and medicine to murder them all and blight their future children. They have borrowed a popular vogue word from Black Militants and accuse us of genocide (gynocide might be more appropriate).

Their worry may be genuine, but Motherhood and preservation of the race are not their aims. The Pill must go, but the new battle cry being formulated is Abortion on Demand.

While it is doubtful that many of these string-haired beauties (some even resemble Margaret Mead) now advocating wholesale abortion will ever have the opportunity to nurture a growing fetus in their wombs, they proclaim the right for all women to control the destiny of their bodies. No more accidental babies, no more unwanted babies, no more inconvenient babies. Abortion will solve all problems and control world population to boot.

¹ Regarded by many as the father of natural childbirth.

With considerable justification and the statistics to back it, medical men, and gynecologists in particular, have always emphasized the hazards of illegal abortion. Unemphasized, but well recognized by every conscientious gynecologist are the inherent dangers of any abortion performed even under ideal conditions. There are definite and serious risks to the mechanical procedure itself. Most of us approach an indicated therapeutic abortion with misgiving, having learned from long experience that it is often very difficult to remove a normally developing pregnancy from a normal, healthy uterus without the risk of complications.

However, with typical feminine logic, the crusading women apparently assume that because illegal abortion is dangerous, legal abortion must therefore be safe. With their friends, the same liberal politicians who blame us for not saving enough newborns and want legislation to abolish capital punishment, they now ask us to destroy 100% of babies growing in uteri on the whims of women preserving their special rights.

Unenviable though our position as reluctant executioners may be, gynecologists should find some consolation in the plight of politicians. They too are in a bind. Once there were three sacrosanct causes that could be championed with impunity, God, the Flag and Motherhood. But God is dead, and the Flag has become an object of scorn. Now that he can no longer even come out in favor of Motherhood, the politician stands exposed to all, vulnerable and naked as an unplanned newborn.