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"His Canon 'Gainst Self Slaughter": The Work of Rescue, Inc., of Boston

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of difference between the resistance of Cranmer and that of Pole; between the resistance of Cromwell and that of More; between the resistance of Lacordaire and that of Lamennais.

**HAS THE TIME COME?**

The points which have been made above are most important for an objective evaluation of Dr. Rock's recent book. In no way do they intend a defense of his position on artificial birth control. They do indicate, however, one significant fact: in condemning Dr. Rock for forcing his point of view in the face of the Church's teaching, we must not also condemn him for all that his book has actually done. As Cardinal Cushing has pointed out in an official statement (April 30, 1963) [Cf. LQ, May 1963, pp. 94-95], there are many things in the book that are bad but there are also some things that are good. It is good to have our attention called to the real issues because they might interfere with our comfort and established position; one which refuses to take action because it might meet opposition; one which refuses to bear witness because it might not be expedient.

We must rightly criticize Dr. Rock for the stand he has taken contrary to the teachings of the Church, but we must ask ourselves honestly if we too cannot be criticized for failing to be sincerely concerned about a problem which is almost overwhelming in its proportions and its immediacy.

Dr. Rock states that "the time has come." Has it really? Our answer to this question should be both "yes" and "no." The time has not come for us to fly in the face of the teaching Church, to ignore her message and her constant doctrine, to present her as ready to change her established position for the sake of expedience. The time has come, however, for us to be stirred out of the lethargy of cozy Christianity into which we might have fallen: one which refuses to face real issues because they might interfere with our comfort and established position; one which refuses to take action because it might meet opposition; one which refuses to bear witness because it might not be expedient.

We must rightly criticize Dr. Rock for the stand he has taken contrary to the teachings of the Church, but we must ask ourselves honestly if we too cannot be criticized for failing to be sincerely concerned about a problem which is almost overwhelming in its proportions and its immediacy.

The mystery of God-given life is the most beautiful gift of all. That He should see fit to bestow upon us this grandeur is all but inconceivable. He has made us in His image and this is our greatest blessing.

Despite the beauty and the divineness of the opportunity to follow God's way, man has not fully recognized his treasure. Throughout history there have been those who have taken their own lives—in the pagan sacrifice of propitiation, in misguided heroics, in non-Christian Far Eastern cultures and, as happens mostly in this country, during the terrible periods of economic depression.

Suicide has been interpreted in many ways by many cultures. It is recorded in the Bible frequently; Samuel pulling down the Temple of Dagon upon his Philistine enemies and tormentors; St. Apollonia leaping into the flames to escape her torturers trying to force her to deny her God. These Biblical references to suicide, now so familiar, we have come to accept.

Until St. Augustine condemned suicide as a sin there was no official Church position against it. His action came as a halt to the excesses of self murder by those deluded souls who felt that to escape the worldly made them more Godly.

The reasons for the suicides of today are many and varied—but real only to the person who attempts to take his own life. Unfortunately, godliness seldom appears as the reason.

Suicide has been with us almost since the existence of man, yet it is one of the least known subjects. It is the tenth greatest killer of mankind and there has seemed to be no cure. It is the world's greatest moral and social affliction but until recently, this ill was not diagnosed.

Several years ago, I was called by the Boston Police to aid them in convincing a distraught young sailor not to destroy himself by leaping from a downtown building. With God's help, the boy was convinced to come to safety. A similar occurrence happened shortly after. On an even later occasion, I arrived at a scene of absolute horror. A young man, who had barricaded himself in his home and threatened suicide, blew out his brains at almost the precise moment of my arrival.

With this tragedy etched on my mind—a soul and a body destroyed—I approached Richard Cardinal Cushing with a somewhat vague idea of doing something to contain this problem of suicide and to still the hand that would cast away God's gift of life. He immediately gave his warm blessing to the project and in that moment Rescue, Inc. was born. Skeptics could not believe that a person determined to commit suicide could be stopped—and I, myself, had a few doubts. Our first office was a small room in the psychiatric ward of Boston City Hospital, generously donated by Dr. John Conlin, hospital administrator. He and several other doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, and clergymen accepted this challenge of life over death.

Our office later moved to its present location in Fire Headquarters Building, 115 Southampton St. We continued our 24-hour call service for the distraught. Our major weapons...
were then—as they are now—understanding, love, and a willingness to listen to all who call.

In the five years of our existence, we have received 7,893 calls with 3,794 truly suicidal. The majority of the others were the alcoholics, the disturbed, the curiosity-seekers, or the lonely. Some, also, just wanted to present challenges. All persons were answered.

We have tried to counsel those in need of it, our volunteer workers devoting as much time as required to each person. We have referred to the proper areas those who need social service or psychiatric help. The empathy given those who call, I feel, is great since some of our volunteers had themselves attempted suicide.

The compelling list of statistics compiled during our years has been made available to students at Boston University, Boston College, and Simmons College School of Social Work for research studies.

The facts show that some two million persons now living in the United States have at one time attempted suicide.

• That this year, 175,000 Americans will attempt it and that 25,000 will succeed.

• That the age level of the suicide has dropped and an appalling number of younger persons, clouded by immaturity, romanticism, and a departure from religious beliefs, will try death as “a way out.”

• That the older person, the lonely and depressed, feeling that life no longer matters, will be among the top percentile of those seeking death.

• That women make the majority of calls threatening suicide while men most often succeed in the act.

A disturbing factor is that 55 per cent of the calls come from Roman Catholics, 40 per cent from Protestants, and the remaining 5 per cent from those of the Jewish faith. However, while the callers profess to these religious denominations, they do not actively practice their religions.

I would find it extremely hard to believe that a practicing Catholic would reject all that he has been taught in his faith—that he could reject the belief of mortal sin and take his own life, risking the possibility of non-Christian burial.

We have discovered that many of these desperate, fallen-away Catholics return to their religion in time. Although Rescue, Inc., is a non-sectarian organization, I believe all receive a special comfort and discipline not found elsewhere.

To a great extent, the telephone communication with the potential suicide almost duplicates a confessional. The innermost feelings of sorrow—of guilt—of despair—are aired. In some instances, messages of futility are said for the first time—and all realize that their words are respected as we respect those heard in the confessional.

There is nothing electric or dramatic in our efforts at Rescue, Inc. We work simply—using love and understanding as the answer to the cry for help.

The distraught person who feels there is nothing left for him but death is shrieking an appeal. It is up to us to heed that call with all the strength of our faith, renewed and intensified through all the help God has given us to comfort those in need of it.

Through God's help, we have been fortunate enough to bring people back from the brink of a death, they do not want. More important, we have been able to bring many back to the God