

# THE POPULATION EXPLOSION: A THEOLOGIAN'S CONCERN?

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ONE OF the main themes, and the most important, of the World Population Year and the World Population Conference, Bucharest, 1974, will be the population explosion. The reasons are not because doomsday is just round the corner, not because we are soon going to run out of the resources necessary to sustain human life, but because the unprecedented rate of population growth in the second half of this century is helping to make more difficult the task of giving a life in keeping with human dignity to hundreds of millions of the world's inhabitants. If this is true—and such is the consensus of most experts—no post-Vatican II theologian could refuse to admit that the population explosion is the concern of the Church and hence of theologians. We can remove the question mark from the title of this article.

If this is obvious to most theologians, certain essential implications are not so obvious or are extremely difficult in practice. A first implication is that the theologian who would put his discipline to work on the population problem must be in possession of the pertinent facts. As Bernard Lonergan has phrased it, "To know the good, it [the human spirit] must know the real; to know the real, it must know the true; to know the true, it must know the intelligible; to know the intelligible, it must attend to the data."<sup>1</sup> This is far from easy, as the problems are so complex, the amount of data so huge, the difficulty of separating fact from hypothesis and ideology so vast.

Until recently, the Church has been frankly populationist and reluctant to acknowledge that there is a serious population problem and that, in some cases at least, rates of population growth are excessive. *Populorum progressio* in a frank passage (no. 37) was the first encyclical to admit the seriousness of rapid population increase without the qualification "some people believe" or some similar reservation.

Such reluctance was understandable, for the rates of population growth in this century are unprecedented; demographically we are in a completely new era. It is not the Church alone which has experienced this difficulty in adjusting its thought. Marxists have had even more difficulty in abandoning the idea that the population explosion is a capitalist myth or that the developing countries have for sinister motives of international imperialism been pressured into adopting population-restriction policies,

<sup>1</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) p. 13.

which they do not need, as a substitute for the economic development which they do. Other countries with plenty of space and resources have felt that in their own case expansionist policies are needed and they show scant sympathy for other countries with little room for their rapidly expanding populations and less resources.

But to the Church the new situation is more traumatic, because large families have seemed to be a generous response to the sacred privilege of co-operating with the Creator in passing on new life. The idea that in changed circumstances such a response might be imprudent or even against social morality is rather shocking. To restrict fertility as part of a population policy, rather than as a personal reaction to special circumstances within married life, seems somehow to be saying "no" to life itself. For the more devout, it has also seemed to be depriving potential human beings of the chance of eternal life with God, which is of such surpassing importance that it would be worth a lifetime of material misery, disease, and malnutrition—even death by starvation.

Connected with this is the attitude of the Church to contraception, culminating in Pope Paul VI's reiteration of the ban on artificial methods of family restriction. *Humanae vitae* has made many in the Church wary of discussion about population problems. Some are afraid to face the facts: to admit a population explosion would involve a need to restrict population increase, which would imply an additional reason for the use of contraceptives. Others are impatient with facts and want to insert moral values at once. The implication is that the facts are not important, that the Church has the answers, no matter what the facts are.

The attitude of the Church must be, visibly, respect for the facts, because it is at the service of the God of truth, but also because to ignore the facts is the worst disservice anyone—Christian, Marxist, capitalist—can do mankind at the present time. The fact that the United Nations Population Conference will be a conference of politicians rather than of experts—which has great advantages—may also mean that facts are distorted by bias or political attitudes. This temptation to bend the facts to one's particular interests is so great and perilous that it is worth illustrating.

I have been to a number of conferences, some of Catholics, some ecumenical, some secular, including those under UN auspices, in preparation for the World Population Year and the World Population Conference. I have been struck at times by the unfounded assertions so lightly made about factual matters based on preconceived ideas, and by an unwillingness to accept facts that go against such baseless suppositions. I take an example from the secular field.

At a high-level meeting of population experts and government repre-

representatives (present in their personal capacity) and UN officials in spring 1972, the representative from a large developing country charged that the World Bank policy in population was to make aid for development conditional on a country's adopting a population-restriction policy. It was pointed out that in the particular 1968 speech of World Bank President Robert McNamara which was referred to, there was no mention of such a connection; indeed, Mr. McNamara had expressly refuted this charge in a press conference shortly after. Since then, he had expressly declared that this was *not* World Bank policy, on the occasion of the acceptance of the Secretary Generalship of the UN Population Conference by Dr. Antonio Carillo Flores, the distinguished Mexican statesman, in 1972. Nevertheless, the speaker persisted in his charge. An official of the World Bank produced the convincing refutation that the country whose representative the speaker was had stoutly refused to have a population policy, yet it was the recipient of the largest financing from the World Bank of any developing country. This fact only elicited the reply: "Well, everyone in my country thinks that this is World Bank policy."

Another example of such a refusal to accept facts emerged recently at a Catholic conference. One of the speakers asserted, without proof, that the rich countries were imposing population restriction on poorer countries and that the whole population "scare" was unreal and artificial. But the fact is that in some countries population growth of around 3 percent or more is regarded as a sufficient reason by governments of developing countries to have this population control. The majority of the countries of the East (where actually the first concern about population increase was shown, not in the developed world) have a population-restriction policy of some kind. To imply that all these countries, including such countries as India, were the stooges of a Western antilife conspiracy, was a paternalistic type of insult—hardly in keeping with the facts.

If the Church wishes to be authentic in this field, the first question to ask is, what are the facts? It has the obligation to study the whole complex subject carefully, scientifically, without prejudice, without bias, as objectively as possible. This does not mean that one should abandon Christian principles, but it does mean one should not let them affect factual study or cause one to close one's eyes to the truth for fear of doctrinal difficulties.

#### INCREASE IN WORLD POPULATION

Rapid increase in world population really began in the nineteenth century. At that time it was the developed countries which experienced a rate of growth greater than ever before in history. For example, the rate

of population increase in England a hundred years ago was 1.5 percent per year. If the rate of growth in England's population had continued, the population of England would now be 180,000,000. But the present population is 53,000,000, because the rate of population growth in England and Wales has been brought down to 0.5 percent. In 140 years, at that rate, the population will be only just over 100,000,000. Other European countries have also lowered their rates of population growth from the higher level of the last century to such low levels that some countries are below replacement levels. West Germany, for example, is above replacement level only because of the large number of migrant workers. The rate of growth of German people themselves is lower than replacement level. The U.S. has a vigorous campaign for zero population growth.

The reason why the rapid population increase began in the developed world was that a great measure of death control—control of premature death—was achieved there first. The advances of medicine and hygiene meant that high birth rates were no longer accompanied by high death rates. Pestilence and famine in the developed countries no longer acted as the checks to high population increase they had been in the past. They might well have done so but for three factors: (1) the agricultural revolution, (2) the industrial revolution, (3) the fact that Europe and the United States had immense areas of largely fertile land available in North America. Thus excess population in Europe could be siphoned off.

These three factors meant that increased population did not lead to famine or poverty. On the contrary, more people were needed, and the industrial revolution made it possible that, after the first horrible poverty of the proletariat in the early nineteenth century, greater numbers of people were better fed and better off than ever before. Even so, birth rates in the nineteenth century were never so high as they are now in the developing world, for the more sensational triumphs of medicine were yet to come. True, England increased its population fivefold between 1800 and 1950, and the United States tenfold. But, as we have seen, the rate of population increase in England was only 1.5 percent a hundred years ago.

In the developing countries now the picture is far different. There is a veritable population explosion. Some object to this term as too emotional, not scientific; but consider the following facts.

It took the human race from the beginning of time to reach its first 1,000 million inhabitants in 1830. At the beginning of this century the population was 1,600 million, so that during two thirds of the nineteenth century 600 million had been added to the world's population. By 1950 there were 2,500 million. Julian Huxley at that time was moved to prophesy that there would be 3,000 million by the end of the century. As it

turned out, there were 3,000 million by the end of 1961. In fact, during the 73 years of the present century 2,000 million more people have come to inhabit the earth. At present, the population of the world is nearly 3,800 million, with an increase of about 74 million a year. This means that the 4,000 million mark will be reached shortly after the mid-decade mark.

In the developing countries the benefits of medical and sanitary measures have been brought rapidly to their peoples, especially since the end of World War II. Killer diseases have been wiped out; epidemics that formerly carried off millions have been eliminated. While there were and are famines, these have been largely brought under control except in catastrophic circumstances; even then, food aid has mitigated the worst effects. Death rates have gone down sensationally while birth rates have remained high. The result is that in most developing countries rates of increase are over 2 percent per year, many have a rate of 2.5 percent, a considerable number have a rate of 3 percent, and some are over that high rate.

A good example of the cause of population increase is Ceylon in the early fifties. Malaria, formerly one of the chief direct and indirect killers, was eradicated by DDT within about ten years at a cost of less than twenty pence per head. The result was that the rate of population increase shot up. At the beginning of the ten years the birth rate was 40 per thousand, the death rate 20 per thousand. The rate of population growth was 20 per thousand per year, or 2 percent (which means a doubling of the population in 35 years). By the end of the ten years the death rate due to the wiping out of malaria and other health measures was down to 10 per thousand, while the birth rate remained roughly the same. The result was that the rate of growth became 3 percent (a doubling in 23 years) instead of 2 percent.

This process has been taking place in many developing countries; hence a far more rapid rate of population growth in the developing countries in the twentieth century than occurred in the developed countries in the nineteenth century. In the latter, as death rates declined, birth rates also declined (see Figure 1). This is the main difference between the population situation in developed and developing countries.

Another difference is that many of the developing countries have no large easily accessible lands to open up. When new land has been cultivated, as in the fifties, this did no more than stave off population/food problems for more than a decade.

A further big difference was that in Europe, and later in the U.S., the agricultural and industrial revolutions occurred *before* the population increase caused by the medical advances which cut the death rate. In the developing countries medical advances have come *before* agricultural

ESTIMATED BIRTH AND DEATH RATES, 1770-1970

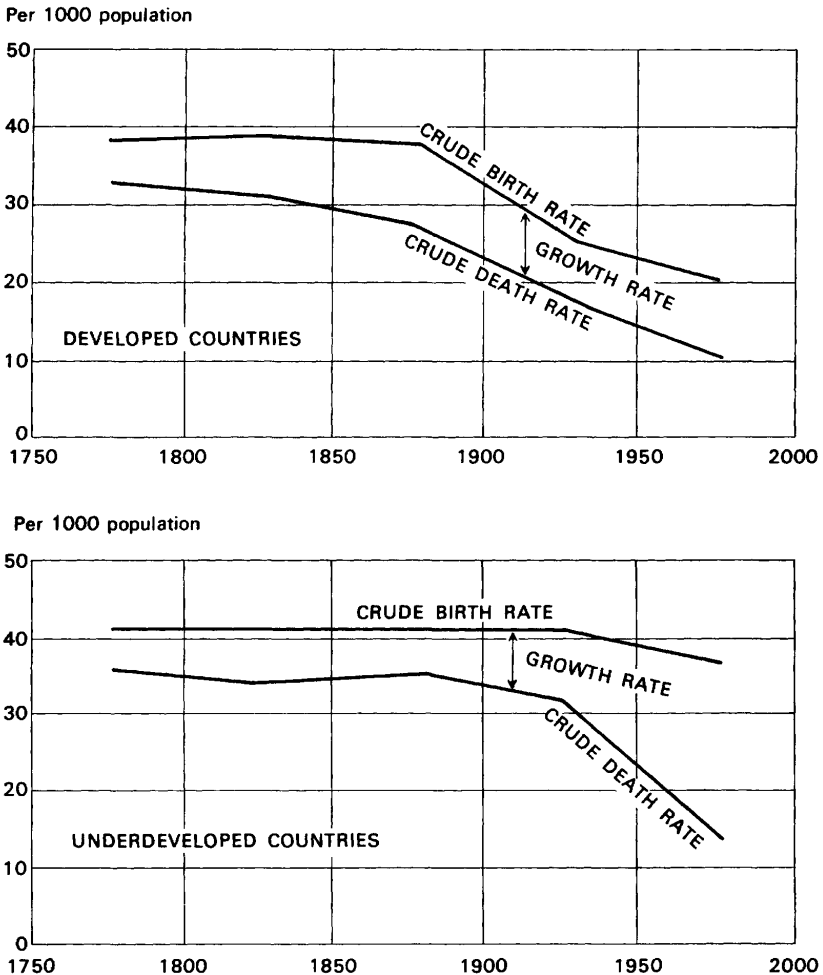


FIGURE 1

Source: United Nations. A Concise Summary of the World Population Situation in 1970. New York: United Nations, 1971.

In developed countries, decreased mortality was more gradual and accompanied by dropping fertility; mortality drop was abrupt in underdeveloped countries.

and industrial development has had time to take place, and development is trying to catch up with the effects of a lowered death date.

The population explosion, then, is a reality; it is the most serious population problem of our time; its seriousness is heightened by the fact that

it is mainly taking place in the developing countries, least able to cope with it.

In the developing world, numbers are already very large, especially in Asia, with its 2,200 million people. There lack of food and malnutrition are constant problems affecting tens of millions. Grinding poverty is prevalent and social and economic progress painfully slow for the bulk of the people, even when Gross National Product increases; and the progress is made even slower by rapid population increase. Appalling slums abound in this Third World, unemployment is rife, underemployment is endemic, and education is the privilege of only half of those ready and anxious for it.

Families live in conditions that make it almost impossible for their members to develop physically, mentally, and morally in keeping with human dignity. Even in those regions of the Third World where there are comparatively empty areas, political conditions prevent migration in meaningful numbers. Java, for example, is very densely populated, over 1,000 per square mile, while other parts of Indonesia are sparsely populated, but little has been done to redress the balance. Lack of financial resources and technical know-how often prevent new regions being opened up.

Of course, there are problems of underpopulation, especially in Africa and parts of Latin America. This causes considerable development problems. There are not enough people to exploit the resources of their lands. Thus, there are twenty-five countries in Africa with fewer people than London. But one may query if some of these countries, sometimes carved out of marginal desert land for political reasons, are economically and socially viable even with their present small populations. A country like the Congo, however, with a rate of increase of 2.2 percent (according to UN estimates) and a density of 7.5 people per square mile, really needs many more people, even though obviously the average density needs to be adjusted for forests and mountains from that very low figure. Lack of sufficient people has obvious drawbacks (e.g., large industrial enterprises would soon come up against saturation of demand), and there is no real possibility of opening up the country completely because remote areas have so few people and could not justify roads or railways. In South America, Brazil, the fifth largest country in the world, is very sparsely populated. If France, according to its land area, were to have the same density as Brazil, it would only have 500,000 people (whereas it has over 50 million and a high standard of living).

It is important to take into account the great differences in the different regions of the world and to study each country's problems so that an appropriate population policy may be worked out for each. Nevertheless,

the developing world as a whole is facing grave problems because of the population numbers and high rate of increase. At present it has 2.8 billion people out of a world total of 3.7 billion. By the end of the present century the developing world will have nearly 5 billion at present rates of increase, which are on average near 3 percent annually. That means a doubling of the population in just over twenty years. Even those countries which need more people find high rates of growth a problem, especially as (e.g., in South America) the increase often goes to swell the numbers in the cities, and especially the slums, some of which due to natural increase and migration from the countryside will double their populations at present rates in ten years.

Asia, of course, has the biggest problem. It is sometimes difficult to breathe life into dull statistics. Listening to the "country statements" of delegates from the developing countries of Asia at the Second Asian Population Conference in Tokyo November 1972 brought home to me the magnitude of the population explosion and the problems it actually causes more vividly than many books I have read. As they discussed every aspect of the subject, one did not hear, as one sometimes does (though more rarely nowadays) in African and South American circles, the charge that the population explosion is an invention of the developed countries to keep the numbers of other races down. There the matter was too serious for easily refutable debating points, especially since the First Asian Population Conference at New Delhi in 1963 was recalled with pride by some delegates as the meeting which alerted world opinion to the seriousness of the problem and had considerable influence on the Second World Population Conference at Belgrade in 1965.

As a matter of fact, it was the Asians who had drawn attention in the fifties to the dangers of overpopulation, though towards the end of the decade it was regarded as Anglo-Saxon Scandinavian neo-Malthusianism, a view one sometimes still meets in polemical literature. The Asians, too, were to the fore among the thirty countries that signed the Declaration on Population by world leaders on Human Rights Day, December 10, 1967. Of these 30, 19 were developing countries with populations amounting to 1122.9 millions compared to 11 developed countries with populations of 444.7 millions.

No doubt the Tokyo Conference will have a similar importance with regard to the World Population Conference in 1974. An important document emerged from this conference: an extremely well-balanced declaration, full of wide vision, which recognized the need for population control but situated the whole population problem in the perspective of development. The very title of the Declaration, "A Population Strategy for Development," indicated this.



## POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Preoccupation with population increase as an obstacle to development has grown in recent years. There are still academic arguments whether rapid population increase really is such a hindrance. Sometimes, rather defiantly, advocates of the idea that it is a help to development produce selected statistics to show that Gross National Product is high or increases where rates of population growth are high. But on analysis these arguments are found not to hold water. For example, Kuwait has the highest rate of population increase in the world; it also has the largest GNP per head. Of course, the latter is in spite of, not because of, population increase and is due to huge oil revenues. Statistics do not lie but they do not tell the full truth. And the ordinary people of Kuwait know as well as the most sophisticated economist that the Gross Social Product, i.e., the amount of real welfare, bears little relation to Gross National Product and that average income per head is not the same as actual income per pocket.

In another place I have spelled out the relationship which I believe exists between population increase and economic growth, food, employment, housing, family life, education, the environment, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Here I merely repeat what Lord Caradon, formerly British Delegate to the United Nations and, as Sir Hugh Foot, Governor of Jamaica for ten years, said in a speech to the American Association of Journalists in Washington on May 1, 1972. He described his term as last colonial Governor of Jamaica and his high hopes for the development of that poor overcrowded island because the discovery of bauxite and the tourist boom had given him great financial resources. He had put all his energy and faith into development to improve the social welfare of the people, building more hospitals, schools, etc. Now and then people reminded him of the high population growth but he disregarded them. At the end of his ten years in office, there were more people not able to get into hospital, more children not at school, than at the beginning of his governorship, more poor people in the country, due to population increase.

Lord Caradon's experience is a simple illustration of the findings of an OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation for Development) Report written by the Swedish economist Goran Ohlin.<sup>3</sup> He points out the difference between the situation of developed and developing countries and examines critically the view which used to be prevalent in industrialized societies that population increase is a stimulus to economic growth. He

<sup>2</sup> Arthur McCormack, *The Population Explosion—A Christian Concern* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> Goran Ohlin, *Population Control and Economic Development* (Paris: OECD, 1967) p. 51.

points out that this view has never been universally true, though in certain circumstances and in certain epochs it has had a certain validity. In other words, sometimes population increase has had beneficial effects—for example, the transition from a hunting to an agricultural civilization, the opening up of new territories, etc. Sometimes it has been the cause of poverty and wars.<sup>4</sup>

Ohlin's conclusions with regard to the present situation of developing countries are as follows. First, on the effect of population growth in relation to food and economic growth:

The gravest prospect to be feared in the underdeveloped countries does not seem to be a failure to provide for continued food supply at present levels. One must face the more probable and equally far-reaching problem that excessive population growth will make the hopes of diminishing international inequalities futile, will be a hindrance to the economic growth which would rob the food situation of its menace and keep whole countries in economic backwardness.<sup>5</sup>

Leaving aside the academic controversy on population increase as an obstacle to economic growth, he feels with the great majority of economists that *in the present circumstances*, whatever the theoretical possibilities, too rapid rate of increase does in fact hinder development and that this is the opinion of those engaged in development:

The stress and strain caused by rapid population increase in the developing world is so tangible that there are few, and least of all the planners and economists of those countries, who doubt that *per capita* incomes would be increased faster if fertility and growth rates were lower—indeed, in some cases they might otherwise not increase at all.<sup>6</sup>

There are indeed some, though a diminishing number, who maintain that economic growth is helped by population increase. But while what they say has often been true in the past and in certain circumstances and in special areas may have a certain validity today, it tends to be too optimistic and too academic. One of their main points is that the world could support many more people than it does. Mathematically speaking, this is quite true, and even from a practical point of view much more land could be made available without too great cost or effort. But to exploit this potential assumes that already we have one world, a huge reservoir of land to which every man is welcome. This is very far from being the case.<sup>7</sup> We live in a world divided into nations and countries with conflicting in-

<sup>4</sup> For a full treatment of this point, cf. also Arthur McCormack, *The Population Problem* (New York: Crowell, 1970) chap. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ohlin, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53. Cf. also pp. 57-58.

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller treatment, see McCormack, *The Population Problem*, chap. 3.

terests and barriers against foreigners for racial, economic, and other reasons. The Sahara could indeed be made fertile, as it once was, and this enormous task should be undertaken. But in present circumstances does anyone believe the new land will be offered to overcrowded Asians?

A slowing up of rates of population increase would therefore, in the opinion of most, be a help to economic and social progress. No doubt, too, high rates of population growth make all the more urgent the task of development, the reform of social structures, land reform, agricultural transformations, etc. The fact that population-control measures take time to become effective makes development more urgent still. No serious economist or demographer regards population increase as the only cause of poverty, or population control as a panacea. There are many other causes, as the UN has been insisting for years. But population increase, in many cases, is one of the main causes of poverty, as *Populorum progressio* itself admitted; and, as Lord Caradon found, to neglect it may nullify or diminish the effects of developmental efforts. In brief, where population control is necessary, development should be pursued simultaneously.

Because family programs such as those of India have not been as successful as was hoped, some have thought that such a program cannot be successful until development and social justice take place. The reason given is that desperately poor marginalized people cannot exercise responsibility in deciding family size because motivation is lacking; in fact, for really poor persons it does not matter whether they have six or twelve children, since they cannot look after any number. Common sense suggests a flaw in that reasoning; and it goes against my experience of seeing for myself many poor people in many rural and urban slums throughout the world. Besides conflicting with the facts, the reasoning betrays a pessimistic assessment of the situation. Reduction of the rate of population growth is urgently needed in some countries *now*; if it is not possible until social justice and development come, the prospect of slowing down the population expansion is bleak. It takes time—to judge from the models we have, a long time—for development which reaches all classes to happen; and population increase is one of the retarding factors.

However, actual surveys indicate that in the developing countries even the very poorest want fewer children than they have or expect to have. In many countries of the developing world—Latin America, West Africa, Iran, for example—women who have not perhaps been included in sociological surveys have nevertheless answered the question as to whether they want more children in the most horrible but most realistic way there is: by having abortions often in horrible conditions, with terrible suffering and risk to life.

True, birth-control campaigns have had limited success; but a rethinking of the approach and a new methodology is suggesting that, in India for example, learning from past mistakes may bring a more rapid decline in fertility. The latest experiences in India suggest that where family planning is integrated into a comprehensive health care of mother and child, quite remarkable results are achieved. The former Director General of Health Services told me on a recent visit to India of such a scheme near Bombay which was linked to primary health care, where a drop in fertility of over ten per thousand had been registered in six years.

There is an erroneous view that dies hard especially in Catholic circles: the population problem could be coped with by migration. Recently at a conference of Catholic organizations on population, a delegate from a developing country castigated the rich countries (in which he impartially included the U.S.S.R.) for not opening their uninhabited areas to relieve the population explosion in Asia, and threatened that there would be a political or even armed revolution if they did not. His solution to population problems was development, including reform of world trade, and migration. As professor of economics at an Asian university, he had obviously given much thought to development problems. He was what one of the other participants called an economist *engagé*. I was in sympathy with much of what he said. But to suggest such an unrealistic solution as migration jeopardized the chance of a hearing for his genuine concerns. For example, India's population is increasing by 13 million people per year. Merely to transport them would need a fleet of more than 2,250 jumbo jets, with a capacity of 400 passengers each, per month. To provide settlements for over a million people per month in decent conditions would be a well-nigh impossible task anywhere in the world. While recognizing this, however, it is important to identify the underlying cause behind such a wild statement: resentment at immigration policies which are racist or selfish. And in certain regions, migration, even internal migration, could bring some relief.

It is important, especially in Latin America, to realize the difference between artificial overpopulation and real overpopulation. Artificial overpopulation, one of the causes of much of the influx to the towns, occurs when an area can no longer support its people, because farmers' holdings are too small, while absentee landlords own huge estates in the neighborhood. In such cases, to insist on birth-control measures without remedying the abuse, without working for authentic development, would be using such measures to condone and support injustice. Nevertheless, those who are driven out in this way and settle in the slums of the big cities often need access to family planning. A couple need to know what they are going to do tonight, not when social justice finally comes.

## POPULATION CONTROL AND FAMILY PLANNING

This brings up the important distinction between population control and family planning. While it is true that population control needs to be implemented by family planning, the latter implies a much wider concept than population control. There may be many reasons for family planning which are valid apart from population considerations: health of the mother, requirements of the present number of children, etc. In the developed countries, where the need for population control is not so urgent, there is still the need and even the duty of practicing responsible parenthood through family planning. Indeed, family planning of some sort is needed for most couples of the world. In very few cases would a couple be able or want to have the number of children that is possible from a physiological point of view.

The World Health Organization, which for many years had adopted a rather cautious attitude to population policies and indeed to birth control, in May 1971 at the World Health Assembly had many delegates noting the important role of family planning in improving maternal health. Dr. M. C. Candau, the Director General, remarked:

There is accumulating evidence that repeated pregnancies place a heavy burden on mothers and relate to both maternal and infant mortality. . . . In all W.H.O. assisted programmes and in many appraisals of national programmes undertaken last year, the rationale of integrating family planning as part of the general health services was stressed. . . . The number of countries requesting assistance for their national family planning programmes increased considerably: 23 countries in 1969, 40 in 1970.

Lack of family planning does cause serious health problems, especially in countries burdened with great numbers increasing at an excessive rate. Doctors have told me it is almost impossible to prevent malnourishment and other ailments in such a situation.

Further health hazards and moral problems arise from the prevalence of abortion in some parts of the developing world, especially in Catholic countries. Again, one must not exaggerate the role which population pressures play in creating this vast social scourge of illegal abortions, often enough carried out in appalling conditions. There are other causes. As we have seen in the developed world, abortion almost on demand is claimed as a right in situations where there are no serious population pressures, for many other reasons, mostly of a personal nature. It must be constantly stressed also that conditions of poverty and misery completely contrary to social justice drive many women to such a step. But in Latin America abortion is often the recourse of people, especially in the slums, in the face of population rates of increase of 2.5 and 3 percent

(and in the slums, even 4 and 5 percent). In Chile, where abortion statistics are more available than in other Latin American countries; 1968 saw an estimated total of 140,000 abortions, about two thirds of which were induced. In the largest hospital in Santiago, abortions accounted for 50 percent of the maternal death rate and 50 beds in the maternity section were reserved for abortion, spontaneous and induced.<sup>8</sup>

These facts show that many women are prepared to go to almost any lengths to avoid another pregnancy. Secondly, it shows that, contrary to widespread belief, people in developing countries do not now want as many children as they used to. It also shows that many millions of women do not need to wait to be educated in order to practise a form of birth control which only the most extreme population thinkers would advocate to restrict population increase.

All this gives point to the courageous pastoral letter of the Mexican bishops published on December 12, 1972, which stresses the need for responsible parenthood in the excruciating emergency, the population explosion, often caused by irresponsible parenthood combined with socioeconomic injustice. The liberation of women from the consequences of irresponsible parenthood should surely be a priority in any theology of liberation or liberation movement, and it could start at once. It should not need to wait for the reform of social structures or the spin-off from eventual revolutionary change.

#### WORLD POPULATION YEAR AND THE CHURCH

All aspects of the population explosion and many other population problems will be studied at the UN World Population Conference in Bucharest in August 1974 and will constantly come up in World Population Year. Can the Church give a lead? To suggest that the Church can "give a lead" is perhaps triumphalistic. I would rather say that it could throw the weight of its spiritual influence behind this great endeavor of the human community. It could, if its preoccupation with *Humanae vitae* does not blind it to the wider issues where it has a substantial contribution to make.

The UN plans show how wide the concerns of the Year and the Conference are. For example, four preparatory symposia of experts are being held: on population and development; on population and the family; on population and human rights; on population and the environment. All these areas are of great concern to the Church; it has much that is valid and necessary to say on all these subjects.

I know the international community is eagerly awaiting the Church's

<sup>8</sup> Detailed data for Chile and other developing countries can be found in Daniel Callahan, *Abortion: Law, Choice and Morality* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970).

co-operation. I know also, through my contacts with the UN, that top officials there as well as many other concerned experts and members of other participating bodies are quite willing to accept the Church on its own terms, to respect the fact of the teaching of *Humanae vitae* and not to raise doctrinal problems.

The Church could give powerful support to those who wish to see human rights respected in any population policy and program. It could insist that wholesome values expounded once again in *Humanae vitae* with regard to love, sex, marriage, and the family be safeguarded. Its stand at the Stockholm UN Conference on Human Environment in June 1972 was widely admired and had great influence. With regard to development, Pope Paul has been the champion of the developing countries since the beginning of his reign, and at Vatican II over seventy speeches on world poverty showed that the bishops of the world were behind him. His Encyclical on *The Development of Peoples* of March 26, 1967 was a landmark; it is quoted widely outside the Church and is an inspiration to those inside the Church who are fighting for international social justice and development.

With this attitude the Church can help the whole population question to be seen, not in isolation, but in the very wide vision with which the UN is approaching the subject. The Church could show how this issue fits into Pope Paul's concept of the integral human development of all men and of every man. The attitudes of those who fear population concern as menacing the teaching of *Humanae vitae* or of others who feel that this is one more chance to attack the Encyclical seem parochial and counter-productive before the vision of a planetary society, the vision of one world, where not only are all human persons brothers and sisters, but they act as such.

If the Church honestly admits the seriousness of the population problem and faces its implications and at the same time links it with these wider concerns of the human family, it will have rendered a signal service to humanity. This would be made even more effective if it were joined with the witness of other churches. Although doctrinal difficulties stand in the way of complete unanimity of approach, there is a wide area of Christian concern on which full agreement would be possible.

The lead of the American bishops given in their November 1973 statement is in line with all I have said. It shows a breadth of vision and an international concern sometimes lacking in Catholic consideration of this problem. Often international concerns, the plight of millions overseas in dire poverty, the fact that the population explosion is taking place in developing countries arouse isolationist attitudes, and even those most concerned feel at times that they have to approach these problems by

starting at home. Unfortunately, sometimes action stays at home; in any case, circumstances are so different that this line of approach can cause confusion instead of enlightenment.

But the U.S. bishops in their statement have shown a forthright appreciation of the facts and of the moral values and moral imperatives, without watering down the international vision of one world, where all are brothers and sisters and responsible for one another under the Fatherhood of God. The reaction to the statement, even in circles outside Catholicism where the Church's credibility was at low ebb, has been very marked, in some cases enthusiastic. It shows that the Church has nothing to fear if it adopts an honest, concerned attitude; indeed, it has everything to gain and can make a genuine contribution through the moral force which it still has, despite controversies and difficulties of the recent past.

The Church can indeed give a lead or strengthen what is already being done to make sure that the solutions to the vast human problem of population are human solutions. This should not be on a narrow basis. The impression should not be given, for example, that the Catholic Church has a monopoly on human values, that the UN has no values, no moral concern, no wide vision; that is why it is important for Catholics to be familiar with UN material for World Population Year and the World Population Conference. A great deal of research and effort has gone into the preparations for these events. While the UN is not complacent about this, and while the nations will make their own contributions which may modify and supplement it, Catholics should not get into the position of giving advice to the UN about things which the UN has already done, and perhaps done better. The Population Conference at Bucharest will be different from the Environment Conference at Stockholm, in that Bucharest will have the experience and expertise of the Population Division of the UN (which as the Population Commission was founded October 3, 1946) to support it.

An illustration of my point that the Church will not be working in a vacuum is provided by a speech which Mr. Shri G. S. Pathak gave at an All-India Seminar on Population Growth and Human Development organized by Fr. A. de Souza, S. J., and sponsored by the UNFPA and the International Educational Development organization November 19-22, 1973, in New Delhi. After asserting that there is a growing consensus that population growth is one of the major problems facing mankind today, Mr. Pathak made three main points: (1) "We must seek and find human solutions to the problem of population." (2) "No population policy can be effectively formulated and implemented in isolation, but always as an integral part of total socioeconomic development." (3) "This Conference



is a sign of the increasing realization that population problems cannot be solved except through *international cooperation*.”

I think the Church could elaborate a policy which would be a great contribution. Such a policy might contain the following elements:

1) An honest acceptance of the facts of the population problem in all their complexity. This would include the recognition that, while some countries are underpopulated and need more people, other countries do have great difficulties either with the sheer numbers of their population or with the rate of increase and that, in these situations, a population-restriction policy would be needed.

2) The need for population policies and programs to be placed in the context of our planetary society with responsibility for the whole world to be considered and not selfish national and sectional interests.

3) The need and urgency for a genuine partnership and co-operation for development between developed and developing countries which will provide especially for the developing countries the food and goods needed for their increasing populations. Liberation should be seen in its basic human-rights perspective, namely, freedom from hunger, poverty, illiteracy, disease, unemployment, as well as in its political context, precisely because of the urgency of the population problem in some areas.

4) There is a need for population restriction policies where required to be framed with regard to the true values of love, sex, and marriage and the family and in accordance with religious beliefs and convictions and wholesome cultural insights.

5) Without belittling the values of the large Christian families of the past—nurseries of Christian self-sacrifice and generosity—the ideal of smaller families in keeping with responsible parenthood *in the present era* should be presented as the ideal in many areas of the world.

The above are only some elements of a possible policy, and they call for elaboration. But such a policy would not only restore the Church's credibility in certain circles where it is at a low ebb; more positively, it would be an authentic response to one of the great human problems of our day.