

## FAMILY, SEX, AND MARRIAGE IN A CONTRACEPTIVE CULTURE

JOHN L. THOMAS, S.J.

*Jesuit Center for Social Studies, Georgetown University*

**W** RITING ON population problems nearly a decade ago, I took occasion to remark that much past controversy in this field had been inept, repetitious, and fruitless because the discussants had not begun by making a comprehensive assessment of the real nature and comparative significance of the relevant issues. And I went on to add that I regarded current population-policy proposals as patently inadequate and ultra-conservative inasmuch as they were based on the implicit assumption that contemporary population problems were qualitatively similar to those of the past. In short, both moral polemics and public policies reflected the common fallacy of a misplaced problematic—the former by narrowly limiting the scope of concern to the choice of means of control, the latter by confining program objectives to the elimination of recurring numbers-resources imbalances. In neither could one discover an informed awareness that traditional interpretations of the population situation were no longer applicable or that feasible solutions for currently emerging problems would necessarily entail extensive readjustments in the major institutions of long-established sociocultural systems. While ignorance of the facts, as I would be the first to concede, can lead to some mighty exciting arguments, it is hardly conducive to further enlightenment.

Although there have been some notable advances during the past decade, particularly in clarifying the dimensions of our knowledge and ignorance regarding the complex relationships existing among the demographic, economic, social, and cultural factors involved in population dynamics, there is little evidence that moralists have outgrown their initial astigmatism or that policy makers have abandoned their segmented, topical approach. For example, is it not passing strange that when dealing with population problems, both religious and secular thinkers still reveal such minimal understanding of, interest in, or concern for the fate of the family and its associated institutions? All of them, of course, pay uniform lip service to the family, as they do to motherhood, but for the most part family institutions receive serious attention only to the extent that they are regarded as obstacles to the rapid lowering of the birth rate. Yet it should be obvious to anyone who even suspects there is some connection between coitus and babies that

the population trends, policies, and programs under consideration are bound to have far-reaching practical implications for existing sex, marriage, and family patterns. This lack of perspective is all the more remarkable in Catholic thinkers who are assumed to proceed on the basis of some fairly-well-defined normative beliefs regarding the morally appropriate form and functioning of a family system.

The aim of this paper is to explore some of these implications and also to speculate about likely outcomes. Since my approach is based on several assumptions that may not appear self-evident to all, it may prove helpful to state them in some detail at the outset. In the first place, I assume that population control, regardless of the form it may take, is such a complex phenomenon that its individual and societal implications can be interpreted adequately only in terms of the specific cultural context within which it occurs. In other words, population control becomes a comprehensive scientific fact only when viewed in relation to a given sociocultural system and only when defined within the framework of pertinent beliefs, values, and normative standards operative within that system. Hence, at the risk of appearing tiresomely academic, if not trite, I shall begin with a brief description of the conceptual tools I judge to be useful for present purposes.

Second, I assume that the emerging world-population situation includes several significant new aspects which make it historically unique in some important aspects and render our assigned task even more difficult. Briefly, in order to understand the implications of population control for existing sex, marriage, and family patterns, we must have some understanding of the complex interrelationships between population and these institutions. At best, however, anyone setting out to explore these reciprocal relationships must be prepared to proceed through largely uncharted territory without benefit of reliable guideposts or enlightening historical precedents.

Although past scholarly neglect as well as the doctrinal and scientific imbalances typically generated by controversy have contributed to the present unsatisfactory state of our knowledge and understanding in this regard, they are not the only or even the major sources of the difficulties we now face. The principal source relates to the fact that we must attempt to describe the complex interrelationships characterizing these basic components of the human condition while they are passing through a period of such radical transformation that the past throws little light on the present and the future appears increasingly unpredictable. Because these new features of the situation are apparently not clearly recognized or fully acknowledged, I feel it is necessary, given their significance, to analyze them in some depth.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For purposes of the present discussion, the term "contraception" will be used broadly to include the general practice of inhibiting or eliminating the potential reproductive outcome of marital relations, whether this purpose be accomplished by methods designed to affect the generative faculties, the act of intercourse, or the biological process subsequent to the act. Although methods may be distinguished by both the character and focus of their intervention, and these may have significant moral, psychological, and biological implications, the point at issue here is the availability of some technique enabling couples effectively to separate sexual relations and procreation.

The term "culture," as it will be used here, also requires some clarification if we are to avoid getting bogged down in useless semantic squabbles. When applied in its most comprehensive sense, the concept of culture is generally taken to signify social heredity, that is, all of the social past that remains operative and available in the present. Thus it includes not only a given society's accumulated fund of artifacts, knowledge, beliefs, values, and goals, but also its social institutions or approved patterns of relationships. In this sense culture provides both the content and the context of that necessary socialization process through which new group members are prepared for full participation in adult society. It is a useful construct in analyzing social continuity, for it reminds us that not even as infants did we get a pristine view of reality—all the objects in our expanding "world" were presented to us already stamped with a specific cultural label and interpretation, and we learned to act and react accordingly. As products of a specific cultural system, we all carry our own early-acquired and consequently built-in affective orientations, attitudes, biases, inhibitions, and prejudices—a point that those individuals or couples who claim to know all about human sexuality solely on the basis of their personal experience would do well to keep in mind.

Although this comprehensive definition of culture as social inheritance constitutes an indispensable conceptual tool for analyzing the total form and functioning of a society, the term "contraceptive culture" in the title of our article suggests that we can employ a somewhat less inclusive concept. Briefly, the aspects of culture with which we will be concerned relate primarily to the over-all system of patterned normative relationships or structured social arrangements developed around a society's basic needs and designed to provide for their orderly fulfilment. In any given society, such institutional patterns or structured subsystems indicate the ways these various needs are defined and interpreted, the comparative importance the society attributes to each of them, and the

ethically approved means to attain them. In other words, these various institutional arrangements embody important social values; at the same time they define the mutual rights, obligations, and expectancies of participants in the system.

This view of culture as a system of interrelated normative institutional patterns centered around a society's essential needs and constituting the basic structures through which the relevant activities of group members are ordered and directed to the attainment of various shared purposes or ends can be useful for our present discussion because it calls attention to several significant facts. In the first place, it reminds us that there are things that must get done, wants that must be met, in any society if it is to continue as a going concern. These functional prerequisites represent the basic conditions that are necessary for the maintenance of a social system; and while the specific cultural definition or interpretation of these requirements, as well as the varied social structures established to actualize them, can and do differ from society to society, they must be realized in one way or another if a society is to endure. Among the more obvious of such requirements are adequate provision for subsistence, defense, recruitment, co-operative endeavor, and control of disruptive social behavior.

Of particular interest here is the recruitment of new members. In human societies this involves the process of socialization through which each new generation acquires the necessary knowledge and skills, together with the desire, to perform the tasks that must be done if the society and its members are to survive. It should be noted that this process of socialization implies a three-generational spread or structured linking. Since each new generation must be socialized, there must be some members of the procreating generation who want to socialize them. But this in turn implies that these socializing members must themselves have been socialized to want to socialize their children. In other words, if a society is to endure, its process of socialization must include, in addition to the teaching of necessary knowledge and skills, the motivation not only to socialize the coming generation but also to socialize that generation to socialize the next. In all known societies this process has normally been confided primarily to a variously structured though identifiable social unit called the family.

Second, this view of culture reminds us that there exists a requisite functional relationship between various cultural components, in the sense that one cultural element involves others either as necessary conditions or as inevitable consequences. For example, the maintenance of a technologically advanced society requires, among other things, that the family, school, and political system not only provide for the adequate

motivation and increased formal education of youth, but also so structure the social relationships of young people that their time, energy, and interests are not unduly diverted from the pursuit of this required preparation.

Further, we note that inasmuch as the basic institutional structures through which human social activities are channeled, ordered, and integrated in a given society are regarded as normative, that is, as culturally determined directives for action, we should be able to identify or locate the source of their obligatory quality. Obviously, these structures embody values or objectives that are considered worth striving for and to which these structures relate as implementing means. Further analysis shows that they are endowed with an obligatory quality, however, because they are derived, or are thought to be derived, from the beliefs regarding the nature of man and society held by those members of the group who initially formulated them. Stated in summary terms, the values or objectives embodied in any given set of social institutions deal with basic human needs as these needs are defined by a given social group, who, in turn, necessarily define and interpret their needs in terms of their beliefs concerning the nature of man and society.

Finally, these somewhat abstract observations serve to remind us that three interrelated elements or components of a cultural or social system have major analytic significance: first, its underlying beliefs about the nature of man, the human agent, and of society; second, its set of normative institutionalized objectives which are centered around man's basic needs as these needs are defined and comparatively valued in terms of his underlying beliefs; and third, its various implementing social means or approved patterns of recurrent interaction which are designed to attain its institutionalized objectives and consequently derive their normative quality from these valued objectives. To complete my general remarks on culture, I need only add that social change, which is endemic to all human societies, may affect one or all of these components, and since they are meaningfully and functionally interrelated, a notable change in one requires corresponding adjustments in others if tension, stress, and frustration are to be avoided.

For example, modern industrialized societies are encountering special problems in this regard because their increasingly articulated, relatively autonomous economic, political, social, religious and familial subsystems are not capable of equal rates of adjustment. Moreover, when changes are extensive and rapid, there is a tendency to focus primary concern on making immediate, *ad hoc* adjustments, regardless of their broader, long-range implications. Although popular awareness of the resultant dissonance among traditional beliefs, valued institutional objectives,

and approved patterns of interaction has not yet proceeded far beyond a general state of confused malaise, the serious social maladjustments implied by such widely discussed phenomena as alienation, lack of commitment, group-think mentality, privatism, and normlessness, as well as by some aspects of the population problems we are discussing, indicate the pressing need for critical analysis and appraisal of current cultural trends.

#### MEANING OF A CONTRACEPTIVE CULTURE

With these admittedly schematic conceptions of culture, society, and social systems in mind, we are now prepared to consider what is meant by the term "contraceptive culture." Briefly, we may describe it as a culture within which the structured social arrangements centered around a given society's basic reproductive needs have been modified by the introduction of contraceptive practice, as we have defined that practice. Stated in other terms, it is a culture within which contraceptive practice has become institutionalized. In this context, to become "institutionalized" means that the practice has become so completely integrated or geared into these structured social arrangements that it has directly affected their form, functions, and meaning. In other words, the practice has not only gained widespread acceptance, availability, and use, but it has also led to modifications in the underlying beliefs, institutional objectives, and implementing relationships formerly associated with the social functions of sex and reproduction. In the practical order, this means that "social equilibrium," or the ongoing balance between accepted or expected patterns of interaction and desired social goals, has been established and is currently maintained in terms of this practice. If it were no longer available, the entire system would be thrown out of balance until suitable alternatives were developed.

We can use contemporary American society to illustrate this point. On the one hand, our society is characterized by a comparatively high proportion of people ever married, relatively early age at marriage, low maternal and infant mortality rates, and a high premium on satisfactory marital relations. On the other hand, since the majority of its population live in a highly industrialized urban environment, it is a society in which the positive and negative costs of bearing and raising children are steadily increasing, while changes in the family system and a high rate of mobility tend to restrict the amount of assistance young conjugal units receive from their extended kinship groups. Under these conditions contraceptive practice comes to play a key role in maintaining the balance between a high fertility potential and mounting costs. Thus the high proportion of married persons may not result in rapid population

growth, because the number of offspring can be controlled. Early age at marriage need not lead to increased family size, because pregnancies can be restricted. Young wives may remain in school or in the workforce if they choose, because first pregnancies can be postponed. Childbearing can be confined to the early years of marriage, thus freeing wives from the involvement in a long reproductive span, because later pregnancies can be avoided. Desired standards of living and life styles may more easily be attained or maintained, because young couples are free to choose the extent of their commitment to bearing and raising children.

Conversely, American couples who reject family planning yet accept prevailing cultural goals, values, and behavioral patterns in all other respects are bound to experience a good deal of strain and frustration, inasmuch as they refuse to make use of the key social mechanism or strategy through which social equilibrium or balance is maintained under current conditions. Unless such couples develop behavioral patterns, individual aspirations, and marriage goals that are consonant with, or that take fully into account, the normally anticipated consequences of unregulated family size in contemporary society, they will find themselves trapped in a series of contradictory expectancies, needs, and requirements.

Hence, when we characterize American culture as contraceptive, our major focus of concern is not on the fact that the majority of fertile American couples apparently employ some form of contraceptive practice in attempting to regulate or limit the size of their families. Rather, we use the term "contraceptive" to indicate that the general acceptance of contraceptive family planning has induced, or has been accompanied by, significant changes in the whole cultural complex of beliefs, values, normative standards and behavioral patterns traditionally associated with sex, marriage, and the family in American society. These changes merit serious study, for most of their far-reaching individual and societal implications have remained largely ignored, as I have noted above.

#### CHANGES IN THE OVER-ALL CONTEXT

Thus far we have been discussing the interrelationships between the family and contraception more or less abstractly, that is, without taking into consideration important new aspects of the wider over-all context within which these relationships are presently developing. Owing to changes in the world-population situation, the family and its associated institutions must now be adjusted and adapted not only to optional contraceptive practice but to drastic limitation of reproduction. Clearly this adds a new dimension to our discussion; and since it is relatively new, and there appears considerable reluctance to acknowledge its import, I feel it should be treated at some length here.

Even a brief review of the emerging world situation in regard to population and the family should suffice to convince us that key elements in the situation have been profoundly modified. Contrary to what some optimists apparently find it convenient to believe, the present situation is not merely the perennial old situation somewhat magnified or dressed up in modern statistical trappings. It is a qualitatively different situation. Its essential components have already undergone, or are in the process of undergoing, significant qualitative changes. Although it is difficult to discern the future shape of things during this critical period of transition, all who bother to scrutinize the signs of the times will not find it difficult to agree on one point at least. We must develop a new framework of concepts and value referents if we are to avoid continued irrelevance and deal effectively with the problems to which this new situation is giving rise.

To be specific, the drastic reduction in the family's procreative function, progressively rendered imperative by the recent continued rise in both the *absolute increase* of the world's population and the *rate of increase*, necessarily involves a number of basic structural and value changes that seriously challenge essential elements in traditional family patterns and makes the future of these systems highly problematic. Thus the real issue in regard to population and the family is not the specific means that may be employed to achieve and maintain this requisite radical limitation of human reproductive potential. Neither is it the distressing imbalances that may variously occur between rapidly expanding numbers and underdeveloped natural resources—modern industrialized man has already demonstrated that he is quite capable of effective curtailment of births and wasteful economic overproduction.

Rather, the central issue is the far-reaching individual and social implications of this limitation of reproduction considered as an essential component of the future human condition. In other words, given the eventual imperative need for a generalized drastic curtailment of procreation, what types of personality structure, sexual relationships, and marriage and family forms will be functionally feasible? What types are most likely to emerge? Frankly, we have no way of knowing for sure. In the present state of the social sciences, we must rest content with more or less educated guesses. Nevertheless, what we do know for certain is that we must now deal with a substantially new situation and that this entails, at a minimum, a comprehensive reappraisal and reformulation of long-standing conceptions of human sexuality, of the purposes and properties of marriage, and of the meaning of human fulfillment. In the practical order, it also entails a judicious redefinition and restructuring of masculine and feminine roles in marriage, society, and throughout the life cycle.



In light of this multifaceted challenge, it is indeed unfortunate that most social scientists and moral theologians alike continue to take such a segmented, topical, and remarkably myopic view of this emerging situation. Perhaps the most charitable explanation of their lack of perspective is that recent shocked awareness of world-population problems and personal involvement in related emotion-loaded controversies have temporarily blunted their critical acumen. At any rate, they appear to be so preoccupied with climbing the trees immediately at hand that they have no time to survey the forest. It should be obvious that limitation of reproduction, however necessary it may be or whatever form it may take, is only a means, albeit a significantly strategic social means, designed to deal with the problem of human numbers, and with only some aspects of the problem at that. Like every other social means, it is ambiguous, that is, it includes no built-in or inherent directives regarding the personal and social purposes it should serve, and with which it must logically and operatively be consistent. The personal and social purposes relative to reproduction limitation, of course, are formulated in terms of, and derive their motivational force from, the particular conceptions of sexuality and the family operative in society at the time.

Now, as I have suggested, traditional conceptions of sexuality and the family, at least as they are currently interpreted, functionally integrated, and structurally embodied in the major sociocultural systems of the contemporary world, are clearly incompatible with the generalized limitation of reproduction now progressively required. Briefly, since these conceptions and their implementing social embodiments were developed under conditions of perennially high birth and death rates, with all that such conditions imply in terms of world views, sex-role definitions, and life expectations, they are clearly not designed to meet the radically altered reproductive exigencies of the current situation.

Stated bluntly and in terms of practical consequences, particularly for contemporary religious leaders, this means that substantial elements in their traditional conceptualizations of, and currently official normative directives relating to, sex, marriage, and the family are becoming increasingly untenable, inasmuch as they no longer offer the faithful either an integrated, religiously meaningful interpretation of real-life experiences or reasonably workable moral guidelines for dealing with the daily problems they encounter in the present human condition. Hence one must regard as a serious dereliction of duty the continued refusal of religious leaders to re-examine critically and competently the various rationales or presuppositions underlying their official teaching in this respect, and thus to develop a coherent conceptual framework of

religious beliefs, derivative values, appropriate attitudes, and practical moral norms on the basis of which responsible believers may confidently proceed to construct the implementing social relationships required for their actualization in various concrete sociocultural environments. Because sexuality and the family are such significant components of the human condition and consequently give rise to such insistent, nonpost-ponable human questions, the faithful must turn to other sources if their religious system no longer provides intelligible answers. This is only another way of saying that the failure of religious leaders to reappraise their traditional teaching on sexuality and the family when the faithful are confronted with a qualitatively new situation is to relegate their religious message to a wholly peripheral role in a profoundly significant sector of human endeavor and during a crucial turning point in human history.

Although it is encouraging that religious thinkers are showing an increasing awareness of the urgency and complexity of the currently pressing and perplexing problems relative to population, pollution, poverty, and scarce resources, they tend to avoid facing the central issue by relying on some untenable assumptions or rationalizations. For example, some apparently feel that world conditions are changing so rapidly and our information is so inadequate that it is the part of prudence to wait until all the facts are in. Others make a competent descriptive analysis of these problems but then state, almost in passing, that solutions must be developed in terms of traditional objective moral values and norms, as if these were self-evident, wholly appropriate, and applicable. Perhaps the most common and groundless assumption is that once generalized limitation of reproduction is somehow achieved, existing sexual and family patterns will be more or less automatically modified and adapted accordingly; for such an assumption reveals little understanding of either the radical transformation in man's basic relationship to procreation that this would entail or the extensive psychological, social, and moral readjustments that would become necessary were such a transformation to occur.

To conclude, I feel it is no exaggeration to maintain that the human species is approaching a crucial stage in its historical development. As nation after nation around the globe begins to apply the scientific health-care knowledge and techniques developed in the industrialized West, death rates are lowered precipitously, particularly among the reproductively significant younger age groups, and population bases consequently expand rapidly. With the passage of time, the need to slow down the population growth rate comes to be recognized by the more perceptive members of the group, but past experience shows that owing to

various theological or political presuppositions, both religious and secular leaders are reluctant to admit this need, with the result that effective steps in this direction are uniformly delayed until drastic limitation becomes imperative.

At this stage every society faces a substantially similar challenge. Since birth and death rates must somehow be brought into some manageable correspondence in a finite world, it is inevitable that reproduction must and will be curtailed effectively. On the other hand, since existing conceptions of sexuality, marriage, and the family, together with their varied sociocultural implementing embodiments, are incompatible with this generalized limitation of reproduction, they must be coherently reformulated and restructured, if serious individual and social disorder is to be avoided. But history offers no successful models or precedents in this regard. No known society has yet been able to develop and maintain a type of family system within which the majority of married couples drastically curtailed procreation while remaining sufficiently motivated to bear and rear the limited number of children needed for replacement.

In this connection it should be noted that numerous alternatives to the family have been attempted in the past. All have proved to be ephemeral and inefficacious. Further, contrary to the contentions of some social scientists, our increasingly chaotic Western family situation, reflected in the so-called "sexual revolution," steadily increasing avoidance of parental responsibilities, and soaring rates of marital breakdown, is much more than a mere "cultural lag"—a transient lack of appropriate attitudinal and institutional adjustments. Rather, it represents a classic case of massive cultural discontinuity or dissonance—a prolonged failure or inability to develop and institutionally embody a coherent system of sex relationships, marriage, and the family consonant with the need to limit reproduction but maintain sufficient motivation to assure responsible replacement.

#### SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES

There are several additional factors relating to our present unsatisfactory understanding of the interrelationships between population and the family that merit some attention because they are still operative. In the first place, the field of population studies has been perennially bedeviled by aberrations of a theological, philosophical, political, and even folklorish provenance. This is explained partly by the fact that such studies stand at the crossroads of the social and moral sciences, and partly by the fact that they are more or less directly concerned with dynamic human capacities of a peculiarly perplexing character. Man has always been ill at ease in dealing with sexual phenomena. Attitudes

have run the gamut from worship to contempt. Controls have ranged from the relatively permissive to the maximally restrictive. No known society has succeeded in developing a wholly balanced, markedly rational approach.

In the second place, our knowledge of man's past family experience is minimal. Although the human body and brain have apparently not changed significantly in the last 50,000 years or so, and we may thus safely assume that the reproductive capabilities and related familial needs of the paleolithic hunter and the neolithic farmer were substantially similar to those of contemporary man, we know next to nothing about the procreative and family patterns of these distant ancestors. Indeed, the currently available information regarding the actual form and functioning of the major family systems of the recent past is highly limited, often of questionable validity, and at best pertains only to the ideals and practices of the various comparatively small upper or ruling classes. Specifically, throughout the nineteenth century, with the exception of French sociologist Le Play, the fate of the traditional Western family under the impact of industrialization attracted little serious attention from contemporary social scientists. Scholarly scientific interest was focused primarily on economic and political factors, apparently on the assumption that society was composed only of the state and individuals or that intermediate social institutions like the family had no analytic significance and could be regarded as wholly peripheral.

A further difficulty we face relates to the fact that social scientists have not yet developed a satisfactory theory of social change in general or of family change in particular. Yet most major societies around the world are presently characterized by unprecedentedly rapid and extensive change. Under these conditions, predictions relating to future trends in sexual and family patterns must be regarded as highly conjectural, inasmuch as our analysis of these trends must be largely descriptive. In other words, although we can indicate the main factors or forces that appear historically or currently related to these trends, we are generally able to identify only the major lines of interaction rather than the directly measurable causal relationships needed for prediction.

Closely related to the above difficulty is the fact that population and the family do not exist in a social vacuum. As we have indicated, they are constituent elements or aspects of an ongoing social system, that is, of that social complex comprising the characteristic ways in which societies or subgroups organize their activities to achieve specific goals. Now inasmuch as the resultant institutions or behavior patterns are meaningful and functionally interrelated, changes in one com-

ponent or area of the system are necessarily accompanied by regular and determinate changes in others. In the practical order, this means that programs designed to affect population trends or family systems must take into consideration the interaction among all the relevant variables involved; that is, they can be nothing less than a social policy at large. Unfortunately, given the current state of the social sciences and the evolving complexity of contemporary social systems, this essential requirement can seldom be met. As a matter of fact, public-policy makers seem unable or unwilling to acquire a comprehensive view of the manifold factors, trends, and consequences associated with any major twentieth-century social problem, whether it be poverty, pollution, or population. A review of the policy-making process in existing programs reveals that successive decisions are based on a strategy that is sequential and incremental (doing more and more of the same—"escalation") rather than on one that is comprehensive in scope.

Finally, I would like to emphasize a consideration in this connection that religious "policy makers" must keep clearly in mind. This inter-relatedness of all aspects and components of an ongoing social system makes it difficult, short of complete withdrawal from participation, for individuals or religious minority subgroups to ignore changes in the system or avoid full exposure to its dominant trends. Particularly in matters relating to sex, love, marriage, and the family, the influence of the regnant culture, together with its social arrangements and instrumentalities, is all-pervasive in shaping the life cycle of the individual as well as the operative ethos of the minority subgroup. To fully appreciate this point, it is helpful to reflect that adaptation to change in an industrialized urban environment is primarily a collective (organizational) achievement. Most of the options open to individuals consist in making choices among, or in using or not using, the kinds of goods, services, occupations, and avocations made available by the type of social system (technologically advanced, bureaucratically structured, highly specialized division of labor) within which they initially were socialized and presently must operate. Although individuals are free, the degrees of freedom in their decision-making are fixed in the structure of society, while the criteria used in making decisions are profoundly conditioned by the practical exigencies of the environing sociocultural system.

#### SPECIFIC POINTS FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

In the previous two sections, I have indicated what I consider to be the central issue emerging from the changing interrelationships between population and the family in contemporary societies, and I have pointed out some of the difficulties we face in trying to identify and comprehend

the practical implications of this qualitatively new situation. Viewed from the perspective of traditional conceptual frameworks or systems, this new situation is giving rise to more questions than we are presently prepared to answer. Hence prudence suggests that we should begin our deliberations by surveying the dimensions of our relevant knowledge and ignorance. This requirement has special significance for Catholic thinkers, who proceed on the basis of some long-accepted, fairly clearly defined conceptions regarding the nature and purpose of sex, marriage, and the family.

Nevertheless, as members of a religious minority, we may not proceed as if the population problems of the wider community were not our concern or as if the political consequences of our ethical stances could be ignored. Although all politically mature citizens in our pluralist world agree that public-policy decisions should be determined by reasons derived from the exigencies of the common welfare rather than by reasons based on individual religious convictions, this platitude obscures the very significant fact that our conceptions of what constitutes the common good tend in large measure to be shaped and determined by our underlying religious beliefs and consequent moral convictions. I have called attention to this point for the following reason. If competent analysis of the changed interrelations between population and the family shows that these changes have practical implications that should lead us to call in question the adequacy or validity of some of our traditional conceptions, we must have the courage and sincerity to give this fact due consideration in all our deliberations.

In offering the following points for special consideration, I have tried to combine brevity and comprehensiveness. Hence these statements are meant to be both substantive and suggestive. In short, this means that they include generalizations that require more detailed development than can be given here, together with particulars whose relative significance can be judged only in terms of their relationships to other elements in the total context.

To begin with the pertinent dynamic aspects of the emerging world situation, a glance at the major countries around the globe reveals that the social forces of industrialization and urbanization are now directly or indirectly affecting every sector of their societies and every aspect of their family systems. To be sure, the total, long-range import for the family of these world-wide developments is problematic. There is no simple correlation between this set of influences and particular kinds of family types and relationships. Nevertheless, it is the uniform experience of all modernizing societies that wherever these dual social forces are expanding, traditional family relationships undergo profound

changes. Among other things, extended kinship ties become tenuous; established lineage patterns and their related authority structures dissolve; sexual and marital role-definitions and practices are modified; and some type of the highly vulnerable conjugal family system begins to emerge; that is, the nuclear family (husband, wife, and immature offspring) becomes a more independent kinship unit. Judging from the evidence available, these family changes are already an accomplished fact in highly industrialized societies and are presently well underway, though at different stages, in most of the others.

Since the specifically demographic changes associated with the expansion of these social forces have been amply documented and are rather generally known, they require no further comment. The major family, or family-related, problem-areas emerging from these changes obviously vary from country to country and from one stage of socio-economic development to the other. To generalize for developing countries, the increasingly extensive migration of rural workers to the cities, uniformly accompanied by rapid disintegration of traditional family structures and controls, is generating serious problems relative to marital stability, parental responsibility, and sexual mores in general. As a result of the remarkably rapid lowering particularly of infant and maternal mortality rates and continued high natural growth rates, the housing, medical, and educational facilities available to the masses have become utterly inadequate, so that conditions fostering such practices as abortion, child abandonment, and contraception are becoming widespread. Finally, we must also note the continued incapacity of societies trapped in these circumstances to ameliorate the persistent, endemic conditions of illiteracy, unemployment and underemployment, and sub-human poverty characterizing ever-increasing numbers of their working-class populations and consigning them to a marginal status in society, that is, to a status of social, economic, and political powerlessness or impotency within which the daily struggle for subsistence, of necessity, takes precedence over concern with the attainment of stable marriage or the fulfilment of parental responsibilities.

The emerging family problem-areas associated with population changes in highly industrialized societies are not primarily or directly related to rapidly expanding numbers or scarcity of material resources but to failure or inability to develop sexual and family patterns that are consonant with the need for generalized limitation of reproduction. In other words, the drastic reduction of family size has now become institutionalized in these societies without much concern for the corresponding changes that must be made in regard to sexual values, attitudes, and practices, masculine and feminine roles, the meaning of conjugal rela-

tions, and the structure of marriage and the family. As I have indicated, it is not at all clear that workable solutions can be found.

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the complexity of the situation is to point out some of the questions it raises. For example, is there a necessary, essential relationship between the humanly developmental use of sex and the status of marriage? To what extent does sex in an enduring monogamous relationship derive its continued significance from the couple's commitment to, or orientation toward, parenthood? Will the easily achieved separation of sex from reproduction affect general attitudes and practices relating to premarital and extramarital sexual relations? What are the implications of small family size for the balanced development of children? What solutions can be offered for the increasing ambivalence of woman's status and roles under conditions of limited motherhood and increased longevity? These questions could be multiplied, but they suffice to indicate the nature of the difficulties we face, particularly if we view these problems from the perspective of Christian beliefs and values.

Precisely because we are deliberating about these issues from a Christian perspective, and there has been continued reluctance on the part of most religious leaders to admit the urgency and complexity of the problems we face, I feel it bears repeating that at this critical stage in history no serious person who is aware of past and present world population trends can deny that the human species faces radically new problems in regard to population control. As I have noted, the basic challenge is not merely the need to balance numbers and resources, but the rethinking and redefining of the meaning and implications of human sexuality in the present human condition. It will help in this matter to keep the following points in mind.

First, given present nuptiality rates, age at marriage, and advances in maternal and infant health care, no modern technologically advanced nation can long make reasonable provision for its population increases unless a good percentage of its fertile couples take effective steps to regulate family size.

Second, normal men and women are endowed with a procreative capacity providentially designed to meet the reproductive needs of the human species under all the various historical contingencies through which mankind has passed. Although there is evidence that age at menarche and menopause may vary among different groups, there is no evidence that this reproductive capacity has varied greatly in the past or now varies greatly among different peoples.

Third, the requirements of parenthood do vary greatly, however, either because of differences in maternal and infant death rates, or because the



extent and length of training necessary to prepare children for mature participation in various societies obviously differ. Hence there exists no necessary correlation between the changing requirements of parenthood and a nation's reproductive needs or an individual couple's procreative capacity.

Fourth, in contrast to most higher mammals, human sexual response and receptivity are not directly dependent on seasonal or cyclical physiological changes relating to the partners' glandular systems; the human female does not experience the typical mammalian seasonal or cyclical estrus during which period alone she becomes sexually receptive; and according to present knowledge, only the human female experiences menopause or the complete cessation of the functioning of her reproductive faculty shortly past mid-life. Hence the Author of nature has made marriage partners capable of being sexually responsive and receptive at all times, that is, regardless of whether conception may be possible or not.

Fifth, conception results from the fusion of two cells, ovum and sperm, each of which contains equal parts of genetic materials. A physiologically developed human female normally produces but one mature ovum during each monthly cycle, while the male production of sperm is continuous. Since the mature ovum remains capable of being fertilized for only a relatively few hours and male sperm normally retain their ability to fertilize an ovum for only roughly two days, it is obvious that even prescind- ing from such "sterile" periods as pregnancy, the first several months of nursing, and postmenopause, relatively few individual acts of sexual intercourse are designed by nature to result in conception.

In other words, considering the stable quality of sexual responsiveness in marriage, the cyclical character of ovulation, and the fact that the human couple have not been made directly aware of the precise time of ovulation during the monthly cycle, we must conclude that nature has designed procreation to result not from the individual act of sexual intercourse but from what might be termed the "process" of operations and exchanges normally shared by the cohabiting couple during each cycle. We must also conclude that this process of marital relations is designed by nature to serve not only a procreative but a uniquely unifying (relational) function throughout the entire marriage.

Moreover, since the shared affective fulfilment resulting from the ongoing sexual exchange built into the very "board and bed" intimacy of the marriage state has mutually supportive, health-giving qualities highly significant for the development and fostering of conjugal love, companionship, and communication, we must conclude that forced observance of absolute or prolonged marital continence may seriously jeopardize the essential "goods" of marriage (*fides, proles, sacramentum*).

Sixth, a sense of realism and relevancy forces us to give serious consideration to the sobering historical fact that the peoples of no economically developed Western nation have been able to achieve the necessary regulation of family size by means of methods currently approved by the Church, and given the state of pertinent knowledge available, it is difficult to conjecture by what means they could accomplish this. Moreover, both past and present experience makes it distressingly clear that once changes in a social system generate serious pressures to limit family size, even the majority of normally faithful couples take matters into their own hands, and for lack of better means, resort to abortion, sterilization, child abandonment, and various types of contraception.

This is the history of the Christian nations of the West during the past several centuries; it is currently being re-enacted throughout the rest of the world as one developing nation after the other experiences a lowering of infant and maternal mortality rates with resultant rapid increases in population. In light of these painful facts, responsible thinkers must recognize that the Church's official stance regarding the morally licit means for regulating family size is a feasible solution only under conditions of high infant and maternal death rates. At a minimum, this should lead them to question whether premises of values and moral principles developed on the basis of a different definition and view of the human condition really represent authentic interpretations of divine law.

Finally, I would emphasize that the prolonged tendency of religious leaders to ignore the real dimensions of the cultural challenge posed by the necessary introduction of widespread family limitation has meant that the practical adjustments and adaptations associated with the gradual institutionalizing of this practice have been made with little awareness of their far-reaching implications. It bears repeating that family limitation profoundly affects one of man's basic historical concerns: his relationship to reproduction. Now inasmuch as this relationship was traditionally formulated in terms of the framework of beliefs and values relating to sex, love, marriage, and the family current at the time, it should be obvious that the acceptance of any pattern of sexual conduct that radically affects this relationship logically requires a comprehensive reappraisal of this framework if man's sex-associated activities are not to be deprived of their meaning and significance in his total scheme of life.

I have indicated the major issues and questions to which this changed relationship has given rise, but I must also point out that these cannot be dealt with as long as primary concern remains focused only on the problem of contraception. The Council fathers of Vatican II laid the foundation for a much broader approach, though it should be observed that their work marks only the initial stage of a long overdue critical

reappraisal of the specifically Catholic approach to human sexuality. From the beginning, the Church's teaching in this regard constituted a prudent attempt to define, foster, and protect basic values relating to sex, love, marriage, and the family as these values were currently understood. This aim must remain paramount. What the present reappraisal involves is the careful reformulation of these values in the light of contemporary cultural and theological developments, together with a searching reassessment of the normative means formerly judged necessary to assure their attainment.

To conclude, our present understanding and appreciation of sex and marriage are the result of a long historical development characterized by marked changes in the family system and consequently in the statuses and roles of family members; by extensive scientific advances in our knowledge of man's generative faculties and sexual behavior; and by new theological insights regarding the inherent dignity of the human person and the meaning of the Christian's vocation in the present economy of salvation. Thus the unique human significance and value of conjugal love, the specially unifying, affective, relational importance of sexual relations in expressing and fostering this love, and the crucial, greatly expanded function of parenthood under contemporary conditions are gradually emerging into clearer Christian perspective and must now be fully integrated into the Church's total conception of human sexuality.

Because the mature full use of sex necessarily involves a relationship not to things but to persons, serious Christians are rightfully concerned with exploring and clarifying its morally acceptable expressions within their constantly evolving cultural contexts. A responsible judgment in this regard must be grounded on a balanced consideration of the functions that sex is designed to serve in promoting the integral development and fulfilment of the human person throughout the life cycle. Human experience, revelation, and reason strongly suggest that since sexual relations are designed both to unite the partners in a mysterious two-in-one-flesh solidarity as persons and to provide for the continuity of the race through parenthood, sex can be used responsibly only by married couples, that is, only by a man and woman who have irrevocably committed themselves to maintain an exclusive community of love and life within which they can strive for mutual happiness and fulfilment and thus create the human environment within which children can be fittingly reared.

This high aim, combining sex, love, and shared responsibility, remains an ideal to be attained. Men and women are not endowed with a sex instinct innately directing their sexual behavior toward clearly defined goals; nor do human sexual relations automatically become expressions

of love, for sex can be used to express a wide range of emotions and to achieve a variety of purposes. The human attribute of sex merely endows the individual with the potential capacity of becoming sexually mature and relating to a partner in a loving, uniquely fulfilling, mutually responsible way.

At the present time, Catholic thinkers are beginning to tackle the difficult task of reappraising the conceptual framework of beliefs, value premises, attitudes, and assumptions within which their distinctive sexual ethics historically developed. Like most religious leaders in the Western world, they have long failed to understand the radical implications of the sociocultural changes that have been profoundly reshaping modern man's conceptions of sex, love, marriage, and the family. Under the circumstances we must not be surprised if their efforts to cleanse the Church's essential gospel message of its accumulated cultural accretions and render it relevant to our present human condition will reflect some uncertainty, confusion, conflicting viewpoints, and controversy. This is perhaps inevitable but need not be exaggerated. If we may hazard a prediction, the major result of the current reappraisal will be to place greater personal responsibility on marriage partners and require that they mutually foster an ever-deepening awareness of both the natural and supernatural dimensions of the vocation they have chosen as their personal way of loving God and neighbor.