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ABSTRACT

The bulletin provides information on the position of the Catholic Church on population issues. The purpose is to help responsible thinkers and world organizations understand the Catholic perspective. The booklet focuses on religious, human, and ethical dimensions of the demographic situation and is presented in seven chapters. The first chapter examines the Papal perspective, world hunger, the abortion movement, and the Catholic belief in the sanctity of human life. The second chapter traces traditional Catholic teachings on contraception from the Roman Empire through the 19th century. The phenomenon of birth control is traced in the third chapter, followed by a discussion of the Catholic love ethic versus contraception in the fourth chapter. The reorientation of moral thinking after World War II is discussed in chapter five, with a focus on Vatican Council II, the Papal Birth Control Commission, and the Encyclical "Humanae Vitae." The theological, popular, and political reaction to the Humanae Vitae is chronicled in chapter six. The last chapter discusses the liberal/conservative polarization within the church as a result of the Encyclical, the resulting confusion among Catholics, and the introduction of the laity into the thinking and witness of Catholic doctrine. References are included. (Author/DB)

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Catholic Perspectives On Population Issues

By
Francis X. Murphy, C.SS.R.,
Holy Redeemer College,
Washington, D.C.
and
Joseph F. Erhart,
University of Rhode Island

The specter of too many people over against too little food and too few human resources no longer awakens the fears that inspired the Paddocks' *Famine—1975!* and Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* a decade ago.[1] Nevertheless in the last 10 years, literally millions of people have died as the result of malnutrition in the Sahel of Africa, in Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, the slums of modern cities, and the neglected rural areas of developed as well as developing nations.[2] The enormity of this human disaster has gradually disappeared from the public consciousness. It has not, however, been forgotten by the experts, nor by a tremendous number of people in all walks of life who feel helpless before the complexity of the issue.

The most obvious solution to the problem of overpopulation versus inadequate human resources would seem to be an immediate, drastic cutback in the number of births on a world scale. But not merely is this an impracticality since the disproportion between the number of mouths to feed and the distribution of food is a problem now; but it is a practical impossibility.[3] The immediate problem is a matter of distribution of human resources; and this factor introduces political, economic, social, ideological, and religious considerations that change the nature of the world's demographic problem from a simple matter of population control to complications revealed by the confused and entangled results of the UN World Population Conference in Bucharest in the summer of 1974 and the UN World Food Conference in Rome in November of that same year.[4]

Most responsible thinkers and world organizations today encourage programs for population control. A major exception seems to be the Roman Catholic Church, which officially—although recognizing the dangers of unrestricted population growth—teaches that most contraceptive procedures are contrary to the laws of nature established by God. This teaching is traditional and prevailed in all Christian churches, and most societies, almost without challenge until the late 1800's.[5]

Since 1930, a new attitude has developed in the Catholic Church that has given rise to a genuine, even fascinating debate within the Church itself. It has led thus far to a substantive change in the Church's teaching on the nature of marriage, which was promulgated by Vatican Council II. And by

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This Bulletin is the result of research embodied in two basic studies: Joseph F. Erhart's *The Birth Control Debate in the Roman Catholic Church* (University of Pittsburgh, 1973, University of Michigan Xerox Publications) and F. X. Murphy's "The New Population Debate" in *Theological Studies* 35 (1974) pp. 20-47.

involving the Church more directly in the great debate over the population phase of the future of mankind, it has brought into new prominence the fact that the Catholic Church still influences a considerable proportion of the world's thinking.

Although the literature on the Catholic Church and birth control is voluminous, many people still have an erroneous understanding of the values and arguments involved in the current discussions and debate. Whether loved or despised, as Pope Pius XII told a group of historians in 1955, the Church is still an enormous force for good or evil in the world's well-being. If the developmentalist hypothesis—that economic improvement induces motivation for small families—is valid, the Church's continued opposition to population control could be a fatal obstacle to effective demographic planning. Conversely, if the Church would give vigorous encouragement to responsible parenthood, her influence on effective family planning might be crucial in world development. (Despite increased scientific attention to demographic problems, the exact reasons for population growth and decline are not clear.)[6]

To understand the issues involved in this complicated social and religious situation, it is necessary to review the Church's traditional insights into the meaning of human sexuality, love, and marriage. Despite the supposition that Catholic doctrine is the one constant in an ever-changing world, this impression is not entirely correct. While the essentials of the Christian creed and the ten commandments have retained their immobility, the explanations of the Church's beliefs have shifted with the cultural patterns of the ages.

The one area where an almost inviolable ban has been observed has been in the prohibition, as an evil, of artificial birth control.[7] This fact gives a peculiar quality to Pope Paul's refusal to change the Church's traditional teaching, which he reiterated in his 1968 Encyclical, *Humanae vitae.* Despite the furor caused by that decision, he has refused to budge on the issue. The ensuing controversy within and outside the Church has shed new light on the human and ethical dimensions of the current demographic situation. A review of the Church's position, including its historical perspective, would thus seem imperative at this state of world development. As will be noted in this ***Bulletin,*** the world population problem is being reconsidered from numerous new angles. Not the least important in this reorientation are the positions being advocated by influential members of the Catholic Church.

In most cultures, sex has always had a religious and an ethical dimension. Though many individuals and people today treat sex as a purely personal matter, the Catholic Church is not alone in holding that the use of sex must be regulated in view of one's relationship with God, and hence that guidance from religious leaders is not merely appropriate but necessary. Not everyone attaches the same importance to achieving certitude in religious and ethical judgments as does the Catholic Church; nevertheless, the majority of mankind does acknowledge religious sanctions for human conduct, and up to contemporary times most peoples considered conception and birth within the sphere of the sacred. The current controversy over the use of contraceptives that has been brought into renewed focus by the Catholic Church is an attempt on the part of millions of its serious-minded faithful to discover the truth about a moral value—what is God's will in the matter of birth control? Unless this premise is understood, the debate has little meaning. Nevertheless, even in the totally secular order it is not without tremendous significance. Catholics

form between one-sixth and one-seventh of the world's population. Their influence in any country of the developing world is still enormous.[8]

This essay is not an apologia for Catholic teaching on birth control. In fact, it will trace the development of a responsible position within the Church favoring change in the traditional teaching. The major arguments on both sides within the Church will be evaluated in the light of history as well as in reference to the 1968 papal Encyclical *Humanae vitae*. An attempt will be made to see what is happening in the Catholic Church and the world of which it is a part—on the demographic level—right now.

The Papal Perspective

Of all the organizations intimately involved in the problems concerned with human life and development, the Roman Catholic Church has adopted an approach to the population problem that is both enigmatic and controversial. Since at least the end of World War II, the Church has been using the vast resources of its faithful in the so-called "First World" to bring aid and development programs to down-trodden peoples in every accessible country of the globe.[9] (Organized in 1943 to assist refugees and war-torn areas, Catholic [War] Relief Services had a substantial part in distributing U.S. aid in Latin America, Asia, and the Far East and in encouraging the hierarchies of these countries to get involved in development programs. Its representatives at Vatican Council II witnessed to the possibility of cooperation between various religious and secular voluntary agencies, and gave impetus to the formation of the Vatican's Secretariat for Justice and Peace.) Its agencies for sociological research, development, and welfare have been responsible for innumerable projects of self help among the destitute and have played a not inconsiderable role in the implementation of the "green revolution," particularly in the Philippines, parts of India, and Bangladesh. And in its more recent teaching regarding political, economic, and social justice, the Catholic Church has taken a radical stand condemning both the predatory enterprises of capitalism and the equally inhuman dictatorships of dialectical materialism.[10]

Nevertheless in its direct approach to the apparently catastrophic threat of overpopulation, its leadership seems caught in an unresolvable dilemma. On three important occasions, Pope Paul VI has made statements that have shocked not only the outside world but many of his own constituents intimately involved in demographic problems. Before the UN Assembly in New York, on October 4, 1964, he spoke of an "irrational control of births preventing the access of new mouths at the banquet of the Lord." And in 1970, speaking to the FAO conference in Rome, he made a similar reference. (However, in his 1971 FAO speech, the Pope also mentioned a "rational control of births.") Finally, addressing the UN World Food Conference in November 1974, he cautioned against population policies that were aimed at "preventing the poor from being born."[11]

Predictably, editorials in the *New York Times* reacted negatively to the papal remarks; one of the most recent characterized the Pope's statement as "half-baked moralisms."[12] Actually, the pontiff's speech was a balanced analysis of the extremely complex factors involved in the current demographic situation. In agreement with many population and food experts, the Pope emphasized the fact that population policies and birth control as such are not the only answers to the present impasse or the projected apocalyptic possibility of a doubling

of the world population by the year 2000. In concurrence with some social planners, he sees the solution in a total reordering of the world's political economy—a radical approach that appeared to put him on the side of the socialist nations at both the World Population Conference and the World Food Conference.

Revealing a detailed knowledge of the various aspects of world hunger, Pope Paul recognized the limits of the "green revolution," notably its dependence on fertilizer, now affected by inflationary prices, and drew attention to the great injustices involved in the maldistribution of world resources. He made concrete suggestions for the development of global agriculture and affirmed the need for an international stockpiling of food reserves. He showed a deeply sympathetic understanding of the damage of malnutrition to both bodies and minds, and expressed horror at the prospect of millions now facing starvation. After all this, however, he still could not see the need for population control. "Will men blind themselves obstinately to their proper destiny," he asked, "and search for alibis, for example an unreasonable and unilateral action against demographic growth instead of going to the essential?" [13]

Behind the Pope's animadversions on these questions is his belief, bordering on the mystical, that as the spiritual leader of at least one-sixth of the world's population he must witness to the absolute sanctity of human life. He sees the current breakdown of the older Christian morality in the pornographic and sex revolution, the abortion movement, and the legitimization of homosexuality. He is convinced that what he terms a "contraceptive mentality" is aimed at the denigration of human life—a return of Manicheism. For this reason he feels bound to hold the line so insistently on birth control.

In so doing, he is witnessing a tradition that goes back to the Church's origins.

The Traditional Teaching

Projected into the Greco-Roman civilization, the early Christians found themselves confronted with the sexual dissipation that characterized the Later Roman Empire. This was mordantly satirized by Martial and Juvenal and was at least partially rejected by official government policy.

The Early Christian Church

In its struggle for survival during the first three centuries of its existence, the Christian church had not merely to insist upon the value of life and its transmission—and the positive aspects of love and human dignity—in the face of the so-called pagan vices, but it was called upon to oppose a religious denigration of the material side of man's existence.[14]

In the Gnostic sects both inside and outside the Church, the value and dignity of procreation was repudiated by groups of zealots alienated from the physical universe. Gnosticism despised the world's creator as a god of evil. It rejected the Jewish Old Testament, claimed an absolute freedom from moral law, and designated procreation as a wicked perpetuation of the material world. These attitudes are attacked in the New Testament writings, particularly in I. Corinthians (5.1-8), Galatians (5.1-26), Jude (12 and 13), II. Peter (2.17), and the Book of Revelations (2.6-15).

Gnosticism continued to affect the Church's moral teaching during the first three centuries. It received a definite rejection in the works of the second-century Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons, and it elicited a positive approach toward procreation and mar-

riage from Clement of Alexandria and the first Christian school of theology.[15] In reaction to the Gnostic prohibition of procreation (either through a total abstinence from sexual activity or an extreme libertarianism that separated intercourse from procreation), Clement insisted that sexual intimacy found its justification in marriage. He also said that procreation was something not merely good but sacred since it involved cooperation in the work of the Creator, who was the supreme and only God.

To strengthen the Christian position, Clement adopted the Stoic ethic, which insisted that the sole lawful purpose for initiating conjugal intercourse was procreation. Considering man's passions and emotions as strictly distractions from his intellectual pursuits—the contemplation of the One, the True, the Good, and the Beautiful—the Stoics justified marriage and sexual indulgence as an obligation connected with the need to continue the human race. This general attitude toward the legitimacy of marital intercourse was adopted by the early Christian thinkers known as the Fathers of the Church and became the dominant opinion of the medieval theologians. Thus, from the beginning, contraception was looked upon as an evil, since it violated the primary purpose of marital intercourse and called into question the legitimacy of procreation.[16]

It was the great, fifth century Christian convert, Augustine of Hippo, who introduced a truly dour note into the Christian attitude toward sex in his controversies with the Manichees—the Gnostic sect of which he had been a member from his nineteenth to thirtieth years—and more particularly with the Christian theologian Pelagius. In his battle with the latter, Augustine seems to have been influenced in large part by the sexual excesses of his own youth and early manhood which he describes vividly in his *Confessions*. He adopted a particularly pessimistic note in regard to man's sexual propensities in contrast to the optimistic attitude of his opponent.[17]

Pelagius maintained, as would the French freethinker Jean Jacques Rousseau a millennium later, that man's evil propensities were due mainly to bad example received from his elders during infancy and childhood.[18] Augustine, by way of refutation, insisted that human concupiscence was the result of the sin of man's first parent, Adam, and that although Eve was the occasion and cause of man's downfall, original sin and its consequences were actually transmitted in the form of concupiscence through the male seed. In Augustine's thinking there seems to have been, likewise, the unwitting notion that the male seed contained the new life—the *homunculus* or little man—and thus, interference with its nitidation in the woman's body was actually a form of abortion or murder. To strengthen his assertions about the evil of contraception, Augustine is the first churchman to cite the Old Testament condemnation of Onan who spilled his seed on the ground rather than impregnate his dead brother's wife—a sin for which he was struck dead by God (Gen. 38.7-10). Thus contraceptive practices became known in Catholic moral thought as the sin of Onan or Onanism.[19]

A further consideration seems to have motivated the early churchmen in their condemnation of contraception. St. Paul in I. Corinthians (7.3-6) asserted the fundamental equality of the spouses in sexual matters, and in so doing affirmed the personal dignity of the wife. Though contraception was not mentioned explicitly in the list of sexual aberrations he condemned as evil, its practice was usually associated with fornication or adultery; hence, its prohibition as unnatural could be considered a defense of marital fidelity. This is definitely Augus-

tine's view in his treatise *Marriage and Concupiscence.*

The Middle Ages

By the sixth century, Church teaching on sex and marriage agreed more generally that—while good and certainly legitimate—conjugal intercourse contained dangers of too great a distraction from man's ultimate purpose, which was the contemplation of Almighty God expressed in this world through prayer and pious meditation. Hence, the pleasure motive as such could only be justified by a direct intention to procreate. The theologian Clement of Alexandria went so far as to state that the Holy Spirit absented himself from the soul during the climax of conjugal intercourse.

In the course of the next thousand years, a slow but considerable evolution took place. Questions concerning the right to marital intercourse during pregnancy, for the aged, and the sterile, that at first were answered negatively, were gradually given a positive response. Eventually, it was admitted that marital intercourse to avoid fornication could be legitimate without a procreative intent; and thus, the pleasure motive came to be seen as justifiable in itself, and not merely as an incentive for continuing the human race.

These considerations were given *droit du cité* in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, the great 13th century theologian. But while correcting much of the pessimism about marital relations due to Augustine, Thomas did not develop a true theology of love and marriage. What is so strange about this is the fact that St. Paul had provided an explicit text for such a development when he said (Eph. 5.23-32), "Husbands love your wives even as Christ loves the church. . . . This is a great mystery." It was not until the 20th century that this text began to receive its proper evaluation.

Meanwhile, down the centuries, ordinary Christians tended to consider themselves second-class citizens of the Church. While they accepted the official teaching that marital relations were somehow tainted (particularly in their relation to the transmission of original sin and sexual concupiscence), their life style, folklore, and entertainments exhibit an almost total disregard of marital ideals preached from the pulpit. Nevertheless, contraception was hardly an issue among the ordinary Christian people. They lacked knowledge of contraceptive methods to begin with, and they also needed a plentiful progeny to assure the survival of one or more children to provide for their old age.

In the development of the Church's teaching during the Middle Ages, the influence of several Manichien sects—the Bogomils, originally from Bulgaria, the Cathars (or pure) in Western Europe, and the Albigensians in France among others, occasioned a repeated insistence on the goodness of procreation and the evil of contraception. Pope Gregory IX enacted the first papal legislation against contraception, declaring null and void a marriage entered into with a condition to avoid offspring. And an ancient canon was quoted in the Decretals of Gratian to the effect that it was homicide to prevent generation or to cause sterility.[20]

While the Catholic Church has long been considered the proponent of large families, the fact is that this ideal was a concoction of the 19th century rather than of the early or medieval Church, in which virginity outside marriage and continence in marriage were considered higher ideals than procreation. Nevertheless, the Church had inherited from Judaism the tradition that numerous offspring were a definite sign of divine blessing; and in its liturgical prayers surrounding marriage as well as in its popular preaching, it insisted on the generosity involved in

having a large progeny. It was not difficult to convince most people of this ideal in an age when infant mortality was the rule rather than the exception.

Likewise, the Church insisted that the procreation of children brought with it the duty of education. From Clement of Alexandria in the third century to Peter the Lombard and Aquinas in the Middle Ages, Church authorities insisted that procreation and education in the Lord were inseparable. While a conflict between begetting more children and perfecting the formation of those already born exists today, this problem does not seem to have arisen in the early Church or down to modern times.[21]

The Phenomenon of Birth Control

Actually, the controversy over birth control as a problem is a comparatively new phenomenon. The practice of contraception on a large scale began in France in the 18th century.

Decline in the Birth Rate in France

Between 1750 and 1800 the French birth rate dropped by 17 percent. A leading French demographer, Alfred Sauvy, described this decline as "the most important fact in all France's history." Fatal diseases were a factor, but there is evidence that birth control also contributed to the decline. Since there was no public advocacy of the practice, the drop in the birth rate resulted from an extensive series of individual decisions to limit births. It seems obviously connected with the rise of the *bourgeoisie* in the cities, the industrialization that brought this about, and the new type of freedom occasioned by the French Enlightenment that strongly affected the status of women, whose civil position had been altered so greatly in the political upheavals of the 18th century.[22]

The French Revolution had upset the whole of Europe, destroying many ancient ideals and traditions along with the seminaries, theological faculties, and other religious institutions. Hence, Catholic theology was in a disastrous state, and the Church was ill equipped to cope with the situation. Roman authorities, who were called on to take a stand on the increased practice of birth control, restated the traditional teaching. Their statements did not show great concern about the problem and were marked by tolerance and sympathy for the faithful.[23]

The Birth Control Movement

The upsurge in the practice of birth limitation in France in the 18th century had no organized theoretical underpinnings. But with the rise of the birth control movement in the 19th century, especially in England and in the United States, the Church for the first time since the 12th century revival of Manicheism, was confronted with people systematically teaching that the prevention of birth was good. Unlike the 12th century Cathars, the new advocates of contraception were not opposed to all procreation, but only to uncontrolled procreation. The motives proposed were economic, medical, social, and moral.

The advocacy of birth control began before the discovery of effective mechanical and chemical means. Though countless ineffective methods had been known since the beginning of history, the most widely used method seems to have been *coitus interruptus* (withdrawal). Only in 1843 with the vulcanization of rubber did inexpensive condoms become available.

Malthusianism

Concern about population growth was stimulated by the work of Thomas Malthus in 1798. Malthus asserted that,

when unchecked, population would increase in geometric progression while production of food and alimentary resources would increase only in arithmetic progression. He cited war, pestilence, famine, and vice as the factors that checked uncontrolled fertility. The solution recommended by Malthus was not contraception but moral restraint, by which he meant the postponement of marriage.

Public advocacy of birth control began in the 1800's with the Englishmen Jeremy Bentham, James Mili, and Francis Place, their American counterparts Robert Dale Owen and Charles Knowlton, and with Aleta Jacobs, Holland's first woman doctor.[24]

The real founder of the birth control movement in England was Francis Place, a tailor, labor leader, and father of 15 children. He termed moral restraint an absurdity and adopted an attitude toward contraceptive practices that came to be called neo-Malthusianism.

George Drysdale, an American physician, maintained that only by contraception could society escape the three primary social evils: poverty, prostitution, and celibacy. American free thinkers from Fanny Wright to Robert G. Ingersoll advocated contraception in association with social reforms such as women's suffrage, temperance, relaxed divorce laws, and some added free love and anarchism. Meanwhile, Anthony Comstock, a Congregationalist, succeeded in having the Comstock Law passed by the U.S. Congress to close the postal service to contraceptive literature and devices and to prohibit their importation from England. The 1873 trial of the American physician Edward Bliss Foote for contravention of this law served to greatly publicize the whole question of birth control. The following year in England, the notoriety attending the trial of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant for disseminating a pamphlet originally published in America by Charles Knowlton favoring contraceptive practices occasioned the wide circulation of the treatise and apparently caused a decline in the British birth rate.[25]

It was these aspects of the birth control problem as a moral issue that aroused the grave concern of the Catholic Church during the last half of the 19th century.

Response of the Catholic Church, 1879-1930

Faced with an unprecedented international movement, and with birth rates falling in many countries, the Catholic hierarchy reacted vigorously. The reaction came in the form of pastoral letters by bishops, statements from Roman authorities, writings of theologians, and more explicit preaching and instructions to the people. Catholic preachers against birth control felt they were dealing with an act that was intrinsically evil, which therefore could not be justified by even the noblest of ends. Hence, they disparaged the genuineness of personal and social motives and imputed selfishness, materialism, and a desire for luxury as the reasons for recourse to contraceptive practices. Birth control was portrayed as a hedonistic indulgence in mutual masturbation.

Contrary to popular impression, the Church did not officially teach that large families were desirable, but the opposition to birth control easily allowed that idea to develop. Producing a multitude of offspring had not been considered virtuous in itself. However, avoiding the sin of birth control and providing for many children did entail sacrifice and virtue, and so large families came to be praised and blessed.

If spouses doubted their ability to care for more children, and could not face up to abstinence, they were advised to run the risk of pregnancy and

trust in divine providence. If pregnancy involved danger for the wife, the only option was heroic continence.

The typical response to the objection that this was an incomprehensibly harsh teaching was that of Arthur Vermeersch, the Belgian Jesuit, who dominated Catholic moral teaching for many years and who was largely responsible for drafting Pope Pius XI's Encyclical *Casti connubii* in 1930. "Why should it be astonishing that conjugal chastity, like all the Christian virtues, claims its martyrs?" Christ had suffered, and the necessity of suffering for salvation is an integral theme of the Christian message. Spouses in the anguished conflict between the desire to make love and the fear of having too many children were told to bear their cross by abstaining from intercourse.[26]

Margaret Sanger

In the early 20th century it was Margaret Sanger, a public health nurse, and originally a Catholic, who was the most effective proponent of birth control. As a result of her experiences among the poor on New York's East Side, she became convinced that birth control was the only realistic solution to the horrors of life experienced by the urban destitute.

Indicted in New York City for disseminating a magazine called *The Woman Rebel*, she fled to England before the trial but after surreptitiously publishing a pamphlet called *Family Limitation*. Violently attacked for her views after the quashing of the indictment in 1916, she was made the target of both Catholic and non-Catholic anti-contraceptive vehemence. Her jailing for opening a birth control clinic in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1916 served to give her movement wide publicity; but in sustaining her conviction, an appellate judge interpreted the State law as exempting physicians from restrictions in giving married persons birth control information "for the cure and prevention of disease." This was an unhoped for victory favoring her cause.

In 1921, Margaret Sanger organized the first major birth control conference in New York City and was jailed overnight by the police at the instigation of Archbishop Patrick Hayes. Again, the accompanying publicity aided her efforts to launch a worldwide campaign, which began in Japan, China, Hawaii, and India and resulted in the foundation of numerous leagues and associations for the spread of contraceptive information and devices.

By the close of World War II, she had become so renowned an expert as to be employed by General MacArthur as a chief adviser in enabling the Japanese to reorient their defeated nation in its population problems.

Unwittingly, the Catholic Church in the United States had elevated Margaret Sanger into a prominence that enabled her to defy its teachings even in many parts of the world where the Church's influence was considered almost absolute.[27]

Organized Medicine

Organized medicine in the United States had been reluctant to accept birth control as within its province. As late as 1932, a past president of the American Medical Association (AMA) assured a congressional committee that whenever man departed ever so little from natural laws, destructive influences creep in and that nature provided no contraceptive devices.

Though requested repeatedly by its membership to interfere in the argument about birth control, the AMA steadfastly refused. Despite frequent appeals, the Association gave only sporadic attention to the subject until 1937 when its House of Delegates was authorized to study the problem in all its aspects. They resolved that contraceptive advice should only be given

in properly licensed agencies under medical control. Only in 1963 did the Association's Committee on Human Reproduction abandon its official neutrality in favor of cooperating with "child-spacing measures for patients who need them, consistent with their creed and mores." [28]

The United Nations

Despite the involvement of agencies of the United Nations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in fertility research and policy-processing studies during the 1950's, proposals for the introduction of family planning programs by the General Assembly were consistently opposed by delegates from Roman Catholic and Communist countries. A projected WHO study of contraception in 1952 was opposed by Catholic delegates and was eventually abandoned. Instead, a program to teach the rhythm method was undertaken in India between 1952 and 1954; but it failed abysmally. At the UN World Population Conference in Rome in 1954, it was agreed that cooperative action by the members required respect for different ethical and religious values and the promotion of mutual understanding in regard to population problems.

In 1963, delegates from France, Argentina, Liberia, and Peru passed a motion for the deletion from a General Assembly resolution of a clause authorizing assistance for "national projects and programs dealing with problems of population." And at the UN World Population Conference in Belgrade in 1965, the undersecretary for Economic and Social Affairs reiterated the policy of neutrality "out of respect for all beliefs." [29]

The General Assembly in 1962 had debated the question of population growth and economic development. But the role of the United Nations was confined strictly to the processing of national policies, although a resolution in 1966 called on member nations to "assist" in training, research information, and advisory services in the field of population.

On December 17, 1966, a General Assembly resolution made reference to a principle stating that the family was entitled to decide freely and responsibly concerning the number and spacing of its children. This action followed a declaration by 12 heads of states on Human Rights Day, 1966, proclaiming "the opportunity for individuals to decide the number and spacing of their children as a basic right." [30] Although the resolution and the declaration were stimulated by an interested group of voluntary agencies, there is little doubt that the decision to make them was influenced by the favorable attitude toward family planning expressed at Vatican Council II in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.[31]

The principles developed in the United Nations over the past decade concerned with the contemporary world's confrontation of population and family problems acknowledge a legitimate variety of goals in population policies. Some nations are satisfied with current levels of fertility. A few are seeking increases. Still others are strenuously working to reduce fertility in the hope of achieving social and economic development. While some countries are concerned more with problems of sterility and subfecundity, the majority seem most anxious to control fertility and to persuade their people, particularly in the developed areas, to reduce human reproduction to be in keeping with current food and energy supplies.

Basically, the approach of the United Nations to the population problem is

founded on its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts that men and women "have the right to marry and found a family." This fundamental prerogative locates relevant human rights and responsibilities in the family, which "as the basic unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, especially children and youth, should be assisted and protected." This doctrine also acknowledges that there is considerable diversity in the concept of the family. In many societies, *de facto* unions far outweigh formal marriages. A large portion of the female population enters into more or less permanent consensual unions or casual "visiting" arrangements in which child-bearing is accepted and begins early. This pattern is prevalent in many parts of the developing world in both Catholic and non-Catholic nations and is not rare in some urban slum areas.

The documents of the United Nations also indicate that the responsibility for children involves both parents although the impact devolves more directly on the woman, whose physical involvement in bearing the child and in caring for its immediate wants and needs during infancy and childhood is substantive. In the clarification of women's rights recognized by the United Nations, the equality of the wife with the husband is explicitly asserted. This recognition contradicts ancient and traditional customs whereby male domination prevailed in decisions affecting the family.[32]

Women's Rights

Vatican II focused attention on the situation of women in the Church and gave impetus to the Catholic wing of the women's rights movement. The emancipation of women from *Kirche, Küche und Kinder* and their involvement in policy making as well as in official positions in the Church are slowly being acknowledged. The effect on family structure and on the problem of fertility is substantial. The exercise of independent judgment in regard to having and spacing children is becoming more noticeable.[33]

In 1955 a reliable study on the extent of family limitation in the United States was made from carefully drawn national samples of white married women aged 18 through 39 years. The investigation concluded that 83 percent of fecund couples had used some means of family limitation prior to the interview, and only 4 percent did not intend to use any contraceptives at any time. Among couples married 10 years or over, 92 percent had attempted family limitation. Economic and educational differentials showed that 78 percent of wives in the 35-to-39-year bracket who had no more than a grade school education had practiced birth control at some time in their married lives. The percentage rose to between 91 and 97 percent for those with more than a grade school education.

Among fecund Catholic wives, 81 percent had already practiced family limitation before the interview or expressed the intention to do so. While among all Catholic couples, 70 percent had either not tried to limit their family or used the rhythm method, 50 percent of those married at least 10 years had used some method other than rhythm. Overall, 47 percent of Catholics, 89 percent of Protestants, and 96 percent of Jews had used chemical or mechanical means.[34]

By 1960 Catholic authorities had to acknowledge the good faith of those whom they considered to be in moral error because of their approval of contraception. The fact that Catholic fertility rates in the United States, however, continued somewhat higher than non-Catholic birth rates suggested that the fairly well-to-do Catholic's values included a preference for large

families.[35] Most recent studies indicate that while the official Church still exerts a strong conservative influence in the areas of population policy, radical changes have taken place among the faithful in the last 10 years. In 1965, research had indicated that a majority of Catholic couples were using illicit means of birth control. By 1970, the proportion of Catholics employing contraceptives had grown even higher.[36] Meanwhile, the Encyclical *Humanae vitae* had appeared and served as a catalyst in forcing the liberal group of theologians and clergy to stress the teaching of *Gaudium et spes,* or that companionship and conjugal love are equally valid purposes of marriage and have to be balanced against the procreative functions.

While a large majority of Catholics are still opposed to unrestricted availability of abortion services, between 1965 and 1970 the proportion of Catholic women who endorsed the idea of abortion in cases of rape increased from 43 to 63 percent.[37] However, the recent reiteration of the Church's hard line against abortion and the stirring of Catholic consciences through pronatalist movements in developed countries may be having some impact on the attitude of the faithful. Many advocates of abortion as a method of birth control feel it is the lesser of two evils when compared with bringing unwanted or defective children into the world. While they would prefer to have people utilize contraceptive means, they feel that abortion should be available as a backup for accidents that result in unwanted pregnancies. While the Catholic Church remains unalterably opposed to abortion, a nuanced attitude toward its advocates is being suggested by many Catholic thinkers.

The gradual awareness of a legitimate pluralism in respect to public issues was acknowledged by Vatican II in the Decree of Ecumenism and in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. It is supported by Pope Paul's Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniente* of May 14, 1971, where the Pope says, "In concrete situations, and taking account of solidarity in each person's life, one must recognize a legitimate variety of options. . . . From all Christians who at first sight find themselves in opposition as a result of starting from differing options [the Church] asks an effort of mutual understanding of the other's position and motives."

Awareness of this development is gradually penetrating Catholic thinking, so that the faithful can respect their opponents on this and similar issues, and while continuing discussions in the hope of achieving a better appreciation of each other's viewpoint, they can continue to cooperate in confronting the larger issue of population control and the social and economic development essential to its achievement.[38]

Meanwhile, accomplishment of the United Nations in hammering out a detailed list of human rights in regard to the family and human reproduction is a remarkable advance. There seems to be an obvious conjunction between its declarations and the teaching of Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in terris,* where the Pope insists upon human dignity as the foundation for human rights.

What is obvious from these considerations is that the Roman Catholic Church, while considered a chief obstacle to an effective local or world population control policy, is far from alone in its doubts and difficulties about the human right or ability to arbitrarily interfere with what it considers the laws of nature in order to provide a pragmatic solution to the problem of a population increase that threatens to overwhelm the world in the next two or three decades. These difficulties have been highlighted by

the controversy that followed Pope Paul's attempt to deal with one angle of the population problem in his 1968 Encyclical on human life.

The Teachings of Other Churches

Until 1930, opposition to birth control was almost total among religious societies. Among Jews and Christians, generally speaking, the biblical condemnation of Onan (Gen. 38.7-10) was interpreted as a strict prohibition of artificial birth control practices. The first religious proponents of birth control were the Universalists, the Unitarians, and the adherents of Reformed Judaism. Then, in 1930, the Lambeth Conference of the Church of England recognized abstinence as the ordinary means for limiting births but allowed contraceptive methods where abstinence proved impossible. In 1931, the Committee on Marriage and Home of the Federal Council of Churches in the United States allowed a "careful and restrained" use of contraceptive devices. This precedent was gradually accepted by all major Protestant denominations with the exception of some Lutheran and most fundamentalist churches. In 1930, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reformed) approved contraceptive practices for economic, social, and health reasons. This example was followed by the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly in 1935; and in 1958, the Rabbinical Alliance indicated that such practices could be performed by women for reasons of health and family welfare.

No similar development is met with among Muslims or some other major religious groups. Mohammed counseled his followers to be fruitful and multiply, and most Muslims are disposed to believe that whether or not a person has children is a matter of the will of Allah. While the Hindu and Buddhist traditions have no rigid religious preconceptions in regard to fertility, all three favor a plentiful progeny controlled by the extended family structure. In addition, they tend to reject birth control methods and family limitation based on a feeling that such considerations are an affront to both personal pride and physical modesty involved with male virility and female fecundity. For a woman in these societies, both social and personal modesty prevents the exposure of her body to any man but her husband. Even where medical clinics are conducted by women, there is great reluctance to submit to physical examination.

In some Asiatic and African countries, polygamy is still legitimate. But its effect on birth rates is not known.[39]

The Catholic Position

The Roman Catholic position on birth control has been badly confused in consequence of Pope Paul's Encyclical *Humanae vitae* of July 26, 1968. Traditionally, the Church had opposed both the notion of birth control and the use of artificial means to interfere with fertility processes. The teaching that procreation was the primary end of marriage led to the conviction that interference with procreation was to be discounted. The condemnation of contraceptives was given harsh reformulation in Pope Pius XI's Encyclical *Casti connubii* of December 31, 1930, which said, "Any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of grave sin."

However, the Pope did uphold the legitimacy of periodic abstinence under certain circumstances as a means of child spacing and family limitation. "Nor are these to be considered as acting against nature who in the married state use their right in

the proper manner, although on account of natural reasons, either of time or of certain defects, new life cannot be brought forth." In 1951, this teaching was reaffirmed by Pope Pius XII.[40]

The Love Ethic

Over the centuries a curious dichotomy had developed in the Christian ethic regarding marriage and the family. The tension between the rights of the individual and the common good was not analyzed sufficiently from a sociological viewpoint. The moralists presumed that individual rights had to cede before the requirements of society; and this principle was applied specifically to the regulation of marriage. The preservation of the family as an institution was given precedence over all personal rights.

One consequence of this doctrine was a failure to take into consideration the well-being of the individual married person, particularly in his or her striving for the harmony and affection needed to consolidate the marriage bond. Instead, full emphasis was placed in conjugal obligations—in Augustine's analysis, *proles, fides et sacramentum*—offspring, fidelity, and sacrament. Because of this, almost no headway was made in confronting the psychological and human difficulties leading to the breakup of marital unions.[41] Total attention was focused on the obligation of "rendering the debt," particularly by the woman. Individual roles and desires were suppressed in favor of the family and of safeguarding the sacrament. The latter was taken in an almost mechanical sense as completed once the marriage ceremony had been duly celebrated and the coital act performed.

A significant change in this regard was registered in Pius XI's Encyclical *Casti connubii* (1931). While vigorously condemning artificial birth control, it developed an ethic of love between the spouses as essential to the proper ordering of marriage. This development was practically ignored by the Vatican juridical offices dealing with marriage. It was not allowed to affect the legalistic approach to the sacrament that was incorporated into the schema on marriage put together by the antepreparatory commission of Vatican II. The word "love" was used once in an appendix to this document.

However, the teaching of Pius XI was developed by a number of "personalist" theologians led by Dom Hubert Doms in his book *The Meaning and End of Marriage,* where he made a careful distinction between meaning and end. For Doms, the meaning is the realization of unity by the two persons, the scriptural two-in-oneness. It has an objective that is both personal and specific. The personal end is the perfection and mutual completion of the spouses on every level of their existence. The specific end is the child. But just as marriage has meaning in itself, so the sex act is first and always a union of two persons that finds its highest expression in the way that husband and wife entrust themselves to one another physically. Thus, the sexual act is far more than an act of generation; it is the fulfillment of the two persons.

In the controversy that followed the publication of Doms' book, Roman-trained theologians reacted unfavorably. A decision of the Holy Office in 1944 declared that the traditional teaching of the Church regarding the primary and secondary ends of marriage was still obligatory. However, in a talk to Italian midwives in October 1951, Pius XII asserted that the 1944 Holy Office pronouncement should not be interpreted as diminishing or minimizing the personal values in marriage that are essential and of substantial worth. Parents are not simply progenitors. They are personal beings, and their sexual activities are more than

mere biological acts. They are personal commitments expressing loving and mutual surrender.[42]

The Rhythm Method

It was in this context that Pope Pius XII approved the rhythm method as a legitimate means of preventing a new pregnancy when such an event would interfere with the family well-being. He taught that using the rhythm method without a serious reason was sinful; but he explicitly recognized medical, eugenic, economic, and social factors as worthy motives.

The Pope's words and attitude symbolized a new spirit. In effect he approved the humane reasons advanced by the birth control advocates now that a method was available that he viewed as consistent with Catholic moral principles. The rhythm method was held to be different from other methods in that it consisted in **not** performing an act to interfere with conception. Refraining from intercourse during the fertile period was viewed as the nonplacing of an act rather than a positive interference with an act in progress.[43]

The Pill

Contraceptive pills first became available commercially in the late 1950's. Immediately, they were the focus of attention by theologians, and entered into the Catholic birth control debate. The discussion among theologians from 1957 focused on the pill insofar as it was an anovulant, i.e., a substance whose effect was to prevent conception by postponing or preventing ovulation.

The first reaction of the moral theologians was to reject the anovulant pill as contraceptive and sterilizing. However, further consideration caused them to conclude that its use for therapeutic reasons could be approved. Since theologians generally had already permitted sterilizing surgery on pathological organs—such as the removal of the fallopian tube in an ectopic gestation or of a diseased womb—a principle was available for permitting the sterilization caused by the anovulant pill for medical purposes. Although sterility was induced, if the direct intention was therapeutic, both the end and the means were lawful. The contraceptive effect, though foreseen, was not directly intended but permitted. Thus, the anovulant pill was approved for treatment of endometriosis, excessive menstrual bleeding, and similar maladies.

But what of cases where the pill was to be used to regularize the menstrual cycle with a view to predicting the time of fertility? There were two types of cases. One was that of the couple who wished to use a regularization of the menstrual cycle in order to conceive. Few theologians opposed the using of the pill for procreative purposes. Another situation would be to take advantage of the safety injected into the rhythm method of birth control. In spite of an initial negative reaction, theologians tended to agree that it was legitimate to use the anovulant pill to support rhythm. There was a general agreement that in this case there was no more interference with "nature" than when using the same pill to treat endometriosis. Its use was viewed as an effort to correct the defects of nature rather than as an interference with nature.

Unconvinced by this theorizing, Pius XII in 1958 disapproved use of the anovulant pill as a contraceptive. For 4 years most theologians accepted this position, contending that use of the anovulant pill as a contraceptive was an immoral interference with the generative process.[44]

However, cracks developed in the wall of the theologians' analysis. For centuries, contraception itself had been condemned as an immoral act. All forms of birth control known before

the pill (*coitus interruptus* and mechanical and chemical devices) were judged to be morally evil. But since the theologians and the Pope himself now allowed the use of anovulants to treat pathologies and to regulate the menstrual cycle, the act itself of using them could not be logically judged as intrinsically evil. So if using the pill to prevent conception was immoral, the moral specification of the act must come, not from the act itself, but from the intention of the user.

However, a deliberate intention of avoiding conception was not always immoral, for Pius XII had explicitly approved the rhythm method for that purpose. Why, then, was it not lawful to suppress ovulation without appeal to rhythm? If pregnancy could legitimately be avoided by pill plus rhythm, why not by pill alone? Such questions did not receive satisfactory answers.

Pope John XXIII

Obviously influenced by the fear of the population explosion and by the realization that in many societies children were no longer an asset but an economic liability, Catholic thinkers not involved directly in the debate over the steroids and anovulants were asking whether the Church's teaching on contraception might not be changed to adjust to the conditions of modern life. Some argued that a newer understanding of man and his control over his biological nature required a revision of the Church's interpretation of the natural law and its requirements. While refraining from interfering in the debate and reaffirming the traditional prohibition, Pope John in 1962 appointed a small committee of theologians to consider the problem in the context of family life.

In 1963 John Rock, an American Catholic physician who had been one of the leading developers of the pill, published a book in which he contended that the use of anovulants was equivalent to a "pill-established safe period, and would seem to carry the same moral specifications." Rock proposed a thought-provoking analogy. During pregnancy ovulation is naturally inhibited by secretions of progesterone; thereby, nature prevents a new pregnancy from endangering the existing fetus. Why should man not imitate nature by inhibiting ovulation when a new pregnancy could endanger the existing offspring?[45]

Most theologians rejected Rock's position. But in keeping with Rock's contention, some European theologians and bishops defended the direct use of anovulants to regulate births. In 1963 Louis Janssens of University of Louvain published an article whose implications were ominous for the continuing validity of the traditional prohibition of all so-called artificial contraceptives.[46]

Janssens drew an analogy between space and time. Time is an important factor in human acts—just as important as is space. For a hunter, time is important for his shot. Placing a temporal obstacle to procreation by using the rhythm method is no less an interference with the natural generative process than placing a spatial obstacle by using the anovulant pill. If the rhythm method is legitimate, why isn't the pill legitimate? Janssens spoke directly of the pill. However, it was not a long logical step to apply his category of "spatial obstacle" to other methods of birth control although he did not defend artificial interference with the act of intercourse itself.

Janssens gave logical shape to an objection being made in ever widening circles. "What is the difference between the rhythm and other methods of birth control?" Since the rhythm is a nuisance at best and ineffective at worst, the question was extremely real for conscientious Catholics. But to accept Janssens' argument had grave implications from

the Church's point of view, for his analysis implied that many forms of birth control could not logically be forbidden and that the age-old prohibition was an error. Could the fear of having to recognize the need for change in so ancient a traditional moral teaching allow a genuinely objective criticism of Janssens' analysis?

In June 1964, Pope Paul VI announced that the Church was studying the subject. He confessed in a journalistic interview that, faced with the complexities of the problem, he did not know the answer himself. In several announcements the Pope asked that the *status quo* be preserved, but he refrained from any direct condemnation of the pill.

A twofold commission was established. First, under the chairmanship of Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani of the Church's Doctrinal Congregation, a group of cardinals and bishops was constituted. Then the papal commission on fertility and the family was established, consisting eventually of some 64 experts—theologians, doctors of medicine, demographers, sociologists, and family counsellors. These reported to the cardinals and bishops.

Meanwhile, on his own the Pope consulted experts on every aspect of the problem from family planning to biological experimentation in every part of the world, including Soviet Russia. At the same time, in theory and in practice, there was a growing acceptance of the pill in Catholic circles. Increasingly it was thought that the question was open on the pill, and that opening grew larger and larger until Pope Paul tried to close it in his Encyclical in 1968.[47]

A Reorientation of Moral Thinking

In the period following World War II, a call was sounded to reorientate the Church's moral teaching. German and French theologians sought new ways to accommodate the Church's traditional attitudes and teachings to the new philosophies and life styles. In 1954 Bernard Häring provided a concrete model of the new approach in *The Law of Christ*. Then, with the discovery of the anovulant pills in 1957—despite the immediate attempt by Pius XII to solve the ensuing moral dilemma by referring to the action of these drugs as sterilants—a great debate broke out among theologians that continued down to 1968 and was faithfully chronicled by A. Valsecchi.

Meanwhile, Vatican Council II in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World had changed the nature of the argument by introducing a new frame of reference. In the older theories, since sexual pleasure was evil, suspect, or secondary to the procreation and education of children, where was its place in the sacramentality of marriage? At best, sexual pleasure was a reward for the responsibility of bearing children. The modern theory resolves this anomaly.

Since matrimony is a sacrament, as much as the Eucharist, it is likewise a means to holiness or growth in sanctifying grace. In other words, matrimony, including its distinctive act of union, at once reveals God's love for his people and effects a union of love between them (God and his people). Intercourse is sacramental because its exercise, including its mysterious pleasure, is a revelation to the spouses of the kind of self-giving love God has for them and the kind of self-giving love He wants from them in return. The physical union completes the moral union between the spouses just as the physical union with Christ in the Eucharist completes the moral union between Christ and the communicant.

John Noonan describes the work of the theologians who contributed to the

developing theology of marriage between 1850 and Vatican Council II.[48] The major features were abandoning the early theories, which insisted on the procreative purpose, distrust of sexual pleasure, and indifference to love. Love became central to the theology of marriage and intercourse, and married sex without love came to be considered sinful. The marital act not only had the function of generating children, it was considered the expression and fulfillment of wedded love and community of life. Furthermore it was recognized that there were sometimes valid reasons for limiting the number of children.

Nonetheless, although the modern Popes came to recognize the personalistic values in marriage, these values were considered secondary to procreation, which remained the primary purpose. Only with Vatican II did the Church abandon the terminology of "primary" and "secondary" and accept love and related values as being on a par with procreation.[49]

Vatican Council II

In a real sense, the whole of Vatican II was relevant to the birth control controversy. Pope John XXIII had issued an invitation for more open lines of communication—first among Catholics themselves and then between Catholics and all other Christians, other believers in God, agnostics, and the world. The Pope thought such openness was a necessary condition for the Church to have an impact on the world, and he recognized that the Church had much to learn from sources outside herself. Pope John's goal was a restatement of the Christian message in a form that would make it most meaningful to contemporary man. The doctrine on marriage had been evolving in such a direction, but the teaching on birth control seemed archaic to many within the Church and to most outside it. Running through all the Council's documents were the themes of collegiality, ecumenism, and the Church as Pilgrim. The spirit engendered by such emphases contributed to an atmosphere in which the teaching on birth control could be confidently reconsidered. The most immediately relevant documents were the Constitution on the Church, the Decree on the Lay Apostolate, and especially the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

What the Council actually taught about birth control is a matter of some dispute, but the teaching on marriage is clear, embracing the developments recorded in this Bulletin. The most explicit passages appear in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes,* which in its teaching on marriage ended the domination of the primary and secondary ends. The conciliar fathers, after a spirited debate, described marriage as a "community of love," and—carefully avoiding the terminology of primary and secondary ends—spoke of the natural ordering of marriage and conjugal love to procreation. The Council assured parents that they alone had the right to make a judgment on the number of children they should have. But in so doing, it cautioned,[50] "They will thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which may be foreseen. For this accounting they will reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they will consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself."

This teaching was further nuanced with a caution against "breaking off the intimacy of married life" when they "find themselves in circumstances where at least temporarily the size of their families should not be in-

creased." Insisting that the moral aspects of any procedure to be used in regulating the transmission of life depended on objective standards, the Council refrained from entering the debate over the problem of methods, deferring to the decision of the Holy Father, whose Commission for the Study of Population and Family Life had this matter under consideration. But the Council declared that the moral evaluation of sexual conduct should be based on the consideration of "man's person and his acts." In *Humanae vitae* the Pope chose to ignore this innovation and returned to the traditional bases of "marriage and its acts." This reversal gave weight to the accusation that the papal decision repudiated the Council teaching and returned to a biological foundation for its moral evaluation.

In dealing with the population problem as such, the Council acknowledged the obligation of government officials to deal with demographic matters, particularly in social legislation as it affects families, in migration to the cities, and in information relating to the conditions and needs of the nation. Finally, however, while asserting that human beings should be judiciously informed of scientific advances in the exploration of methods whereby spouses can be aided in arranging the number of their children, the Council stated, "In view of the inalienable human right to marry and beget children, the question of how many children should be born belongs to the honest judgment of parents. The question can in no way be committed to the decision of government."

Of great pertinence to the problem of fertility control, of course, is the attention the Council paid to the "material and spiritual conditions of the times and to the interests of the family and temporal society." This teaching would seem to indicate clearly that parents have an obligation not to beget children when they are convinced by their own circumstances or the advisement of public authorities that the exercise of their reproductive rights would be a definite detriment to the well-being of local or global society.[51]

The Papal Birth Control Commission

In June 1966 the papal Commission for the Study of Population and Family Life submitted its report to the Pope. In April 1967 the *National Catholic Reporter* and *Le Monde*, in a journalistic coup, published without authorization, the full texts of the Commission's report. As far as can be determined, the experts voted for a change in the Church's teaching by a majority of some sixty to four, the cardinals and bishops by nine to six.[52] Thus the world knew that a substantial majority of the double Commission had recommended liberalization on birth control, with a solid theological justification for doing so, and without restricting the contraceptive methods that could be licitly used. The report's publication put severe pressure on the Pope, but he delayed another year before issuing his Encyclical, *Humanae vitae*.[53]

The Encyclical, Humanae vitae

Although expectations had been growing that the Pope might liberalize the teaching, his July 1968 Encyclical restated the traditional condemnation. Referring to the Commission's report proposing liberalization, the Pope said "certain criteria of solutions had emerged which departed from the moral teaching on marriage proposed with constant firmness by the teaching authority of the Church."

Essentially, the Encyclical was an authoritative statement relying on tradition and the Pope's doctrinal supremacy rather than on arguments from the Scriptures or human reason

in supporting the contention that "every conjugal act had to be open to the transmission of life." Asserting his right to interpret natural law, Pope Paul said the morality of the conjugal act had to be taken from ***"the nature of marriage and its actions,"*** apparently contradicting the Council's teaching that its moral value should be determined by objective standards taken ***"from the nature of the human person and his activities."***

In justifying his stand, Pope Paul said that:

> . . . teaching the prohibition of contraceptives is founded upon the inseparable connection, established by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the unitive and the procreative meanings, both of which are present in the conjugal act.
>
> For in its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, also gives them the capacity for the generation of new life, according to the laws inscribed in the very being of man and woman. By safeguarding both of these essential aspects —the unitive and the procreative—the use of marriage preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination to man's exalted calling to parenthood (#12).

By asserting that the unity between the couple and the procreative end of the conjugal act are by divine design inseparable, the Pope insisted that "whoever deliberately renders coitus sterile attacks its meaning as an expression of mutual self-giving."

The trouble with the Pope's analysis of the marital act is that it is a repetition of assertions made by Pius XI in *Casti connubii;* these had come to be considered by theologians and even by Pius XII as incomplete and imperfect. Pope Paul's argument is based on an obsolete concept of biology that attributes to every act of coitus a possibility that happens only relatively rarely—namely, the transmission of life. The Encyclical admits that coital acts during infertile periods are legitimate. But, by their very nature, such coital acts are not directed toward procreation, and thus they do actually separate the unitive meaning of conjugal intimacy from the possible transmission of life. This means that at one point the Encyclical itself unwittingly accepts a factual separation of the unitive and the creative aspects of individual coital acts during the infertile periods.

The second great difficulty pointed out by theological opponents of the Encyclical is that it measures the meaning of the human act by examining its physiological structure. In a number of places in the document, biological organisms and the processes of nature are accepted as the determinants of moral meaning. They are said to represent God's plan, and therefore to be morally normative.[54]

The Reaction

The publication of the Encyclical came as a complete surprise to the two men who had served as vice presidents of the Pontifical Commission, Cardinals John Heenan of Westminster (London) and Julius Doepfner of Munich. Heenan had earlier advised the Bishop of Albi in France to make ready a preface for any future decisions by the Pope that would be a justification for a change in the traditional teaching. And, when statements were made that the Pope had followed the "minority report," the British cardinal vehemently denied that any such document existed. The two commissions had presented their conclusions to the Pope; the dissenters had simply not been represented. On their own, at the insistence of Cardinal Ottaviani, the four theologians who had adhered to the traditionalist view had prepared statements that were collated and presented to the Pope by Ottaviani. But in no sense did this document represent a minority report.

What is evident in a careful reading of the Encyclical is that it is a truncated document. This fact was acknowledged by Fr. Jan Visser, one of the four traditionalists who was instrumental in forcing the Pope to restore the paragraph on the therapeutic use of steroids and progesterone chemicals against the advice of the diehard advisors who wanted to eliminate all possibility of a loophole in the condemnation of contraceptive practices.

Actually, what the document amounts to is an assertion by the Pope that, as the supreme interpreter of natural law, his *fiat* in expressing the Church's moral viewpoint is final.

This argument is particularly inappropriate when applied to the sex act. It is not always "open to the transmission of life" as the Pope asserted. Biologically, his statement could not be sustained; hence the moral evaluation had to be taken from the personal involvement of the couple indulging in the coital act.

In the Commission's earlier debates, theologians had confessed that no argument from reason was definitive in outlawing contraceptive practice. As there was no incontrovertible Scriptural prohibition either, the Pope had to resort to assertions whose validity was quickly challenged.[55]

American and Other Theologians

A group of American theologians at the Catholic University of America prepared a statement within 48 hours challenging the papal arguments. It received the signature of over 600 Catholic scholars. Despite the speed with which this document had been achieved, it did touch upon the main weak points in the Pope's teaching.[56]

The American theologians pointed out, to begin with, that his concept of natural law had been challenged by serious scholors over the past few decades; and that insofar as he based his principal argument on the biological structure of the sexual act, he was not allying himself with the authentic teaching of Vatican Council II. In defining the final criterion for the moral evaluation of human sexual activity, the Council said that its morality had to be determined from "the nature of the human person and his activities." The Pope, instead, had returned to preconciliar teaching in stating that the criterion stemmed from "the nature of marriage and its actions," thus reintroducing the biological structure as the basis on which to consider the moral value. While the physiological function of the sex act was important, its significance had been sharply lowered when the Council refused to define procreation as the primary end or purpose of marriage. Besides, the physical components of any act—such as theft or lying—are not evil in themselves. The malice arises from the misuse made of these material acts by their user. This argument was particularly appropriate when applied to the sex act since it was not always "open to the transmission of life" as the Pope asserted. Biologically, his statement could not be sustained; hence, the moral evaluation had to be taken from the personal involvement.[57]

In his insistence that the unitive and the procreative aspects of conjugal intercourse could not be separated without grave fault, the pontiff exposed himself to a contradiction. For he readily admitted that conjugal coitus was legitimate during sterile periods, thus upholding the legitimacy of the rhythm method of birth control. He also recognized the many situations when coitus was legitimate but there was no possibility of impregnation because of age or natural defects.

What the Pope was actually trying to achieve was a marital ethic regarding sex that would offset the break-

down in contemporary moral values represented by free love, the pornographic revolt, and the hedonistic revolution that predominated in the contemporary world. Far from making any impression on this situation, the Encyclical seemed to elicit a determination on the part of the Church's critics to downgrade Catholic moral teaching in all spheres, and particularly that of sex.[58]

Within the Church, the Encyclical caused grave problems of conscience for millions of Catholics who had been convinced that the Pope would liberalize the Church's prohibition on contraception.

The furor that greeted the appearance of the Encyclical within and outside the Church is well known. What is also evident is that national conferences of bishops in various parts of the world felt obliged to offer clarifications of the Encyclical's moral teaching regarding contraceptive usages. In short order, the episcopates of Canada, The Netherlands, West Germany, Austria, Scandinavia, and Belgium went on record as accepting the papal teaching but modifying its application in favor of the right of the individual to make up his or her conscience. In particular, the French bishops declared that whereas every contraceptive act was always a disorder, it need not always be considered a sin. And the Italian bishops, while supporting the papal position as an ideal, indicated that people could not be compelled to live up to ideals; while struggling to conform, they should not consider themselves guilty of sin if they did not always succeed. The bishops in the United States were less clear. They repeated the papal teaching verbatim but then indicated that in the final analysis people had to follow their consciences. But an episcopal spokesman interjected his opinion that good Catholics could hardly make up their consciences in opposition to the mind of the Holy Father.

The diversity of reactions to the Encyclical by lay and clerical theologians and activist laity, particularly in the United States, helped to soften the adverse reaction of the other Christian churches and secular organizations. Many groups were frankly shocked by the papal decision, particularly since it had not reflected the conclusions of the Papal Commission for the Study of Population and Family Life in favor of change in the traditional teaching. But the bishops of England, Ireland, Australia, the Iron Curtain countries, and of most of the developing regions supported the Encyclical almost without question. Overall, the document tended to confuse the issue of commitment to responsible parenthood enunciated by Vatican Council II. It also caused considerable anguish among Catholic couples who had made up their minds, in keeping with the conciliar directive on the right of parents to decide the number of their children, that contraceptive practices were licit. But the document had little effect on a widespread movement among married Catholics who felt themselves obliged to resort to artificial birth control practices.[59]

Only a few bishops took drastic action against priests and theologians who publicly dissented from the papal teaching. One was Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle of Washington, D.C., whose intransigent stand eventually forced some 25 priests out of the ministry. It was ironic that his neighbor, Cardinal Lawrence Shehan of Baltimore, faced with a similar rejection of the Encyclical by a number of his priests, did not press them for a retraction. Nor did the Pope exercise punitive measures against priests and bishops who took a public stand against the papal condemnation of birth control. For example, taken by total surprise, the Archbishop of Durban, South Africa,

Dennis Hurley, told a group of reporters that the papal decision was defective in that it was the doing of an individual bishop, even though he was the Pope, whereas the solution to the problem should have come as the result of free and open debate between the bishops as had happened at the Council. Only thus was the truth of the matter to be reached; for only thus was there a guarantee that the Holy Spirit would be involved in the solution of the matter.[60]

Theological Evaluation

Actually at the Council the Pope had closed off debate on what he deemed a most delicate subject; now it was no longer possible to hold off discussion of this matter of contraceptive means at all levels of the Church's consciousness. While the Council did change the Church's teaching on the substantive question of the purpose of marriage, and this legitimized the deliberate spacing of the number of children a couple desired, the Council was prevented from settling the peripheral problem of the morality of the means to be used. The resulting shock to the Church's system was thus the consequence of a deliberate decision by the Pope.

As it stands now, the Church officially teaches that artifical birth prevention is sinful. This teaching has been contested by a sufficient number of bishops and responsible theologians and parents to give rise to a doubt as to the final value of the Pope's decision. In the past, Popes have made erroneous judgments in important matters—as when they authorized the burning of witches or claimed that since the spiritual authority was obviously superior to the temporal, the Pope possessed the two powers and could depose a civil ruler for grave injustice.[61]

In promulgating the Encyclical, Pope Paul purposefully refrained from designating its teaching as infallible; his spokesman, the present Archbishop Ferdinand Lambruschini, said explicitly that it was not irreformable. Nevertheless, zealots in the Church concerned with papal authority have attempted to categorize the document's teaching as incontrovertible. But tradition, bolstered by the explicit teaching of Vatican Council II, allows for freedom of conscience and academic dissent in such matters. Actually, the Pope himself has informally told several theologians that he has no intention of interfering with their freedom to dissent as long as they refrain from public outcries.

The papal decision and the Pope's stubborn insistence on the rightness of his stand has greatly reduced the Catholic Church's ability to take a leading role in solving the current population problems confronting the world. What the Pope has insisted upon is an essential value that has been largely lost sight of in the sexual and libertarian revolutions of the current age. There is a sacred quality to sex and marital fidelity that is being jettisoned by modern society to the detriment of human dignity and the destruction of many civilizational values. Unfortunately, the Pope's witness to this fact has been obscured by the bluntness of his refusal to confront the problems of overpopulation either on a family or a world scale. While he insists upon the evils that he attaches to what he calls a contraceptive mentality (by which he means irresponsibility in sexual behavior, a hedonistic culture, and the breakdown of fundamental family values), he seems unmindful of the evils that the Council pointed to as readily occasioned by the attempt to practice sexual continence in married life.[62]

He seems unaware of the civilizational breakdown occasioned by too many people in too little space with

too few human resources as outlined by the population expert, Professor Philip Hauser.

Demographic Evaluation

In approaching the demographic crisis, Philip Hauser speaks in terms of a "social morphological revolution."[63] The phrase includes: the concentration of people on relatively small portions of the earth's surface, or urbanization; the intergroup conflicts due to the diversity of culture, language, religion, values, and life styles of people who live in too close contact, mainly in urban areas; and finally, the technological advances in the use of energy, means of transportation, and communication. Hauser employs the terms "implosion" for the rapid urbanization process, "displosion" for the conflict of aspirations between the disparate groups, and "technoplosion" for the rapid introduction of advanced services. He concludes his analysis of the population situation by stating that implosion and displosion will probably create more human misery before the end of the century than will population increase. But he acknowledges that the demographic explosion presents a grave danger to the food, energy, and resources potential and threatens environmental degradation while presenting severe obstacles to the aspirations of the developing peoples and their nations.[64]

In a spirited attack on the prophets of drastic solutions, Hauser criticizes the advocates of "population criteria" as concentrating too narrowly on high-fertility growth rates and economic development, leaving out of consideration human and political facts. He chides the Paddocks, Ehrlich, Hardin, and the Meadows *et al.* of *Limits to Growth* for failing to consider the many factors beyond population that limit a nation's growth potential. He cites a pre-Newtonian outlook, the power control exercised by the elite, structures guiding the allocation of income and resources, political corruption, work ethic, religious and cultural values, national aspirations, and the ability of a government to mobilize collective action. In relation to these and other pertinent factors, he maintains that population growth must be evaluated in keeping with the weight it deserves. By way of illustration, he cites the examples of success in family planning achieved by Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong. But he maintains that these areas had achieved significant decreases in fertility long before large-scale family planning programs were introduced.

There is a striking parallel between these prescriptions and the official attitudes of the churches, particularly in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Pope John's and Pope Paul's social encyclicals, and the policy statements of the World Council of Churches. Pope Paul's solution is contained in the idea of development. It includes the reorientation of all factors affecting human life—social, economic, political, medical, cultural, and religious. This approach does envision the need for fertility control, but it takes exception to what it considers illicit means, such as artificial contraceptives, abortion, and sterilization. The Protestant churches, as represented by the World Council of Churches, agree with the holistic approach but accept artificial contraceptives as a reasonable solution at the family level. Some non-Roman churches, with the exception of the Orthodox, concede that abortion could be a legitimate resolution in special cases.

The policy of development is considered outmoded by recent theologians and activists, particularly in Latin America, who promote an ideology of total liberation. Proceeding from a perception of society locked into a pattern

of domination and dependence, this theology attempts to liberate man from social and economic servitude. The evil it opposes resides less in the malice of individual men than in unjust political structures and systems, monopolistic capital economies, and international trade. Establishment violence must be resisted by revolutionary violence. In this perspective, developmentalism without radical change in the structure of political and financial power is rejected as self-defeating gradualism. Foreign aid and investment without radical change in the organization of government power and economic potential will only increase the domination of the rich nations and classes over the poor. As an ideology, this approach is greatly influenced by the Marxists; but it is fundamentally Christian in origin and inspiration. Characteristic of the New Left in Latin America, it has been acknowledged by papal social thinking with caution.[65]

Nevertheless, the Pope has contributed positively to the debate over ecological and environmental problems connected with population. In his message to the participants of the UN Conference on the Environment (June 5, 1972), Pope Paul VI acknowledged the fact that "man and his environment shape the life and development of man." On this premise, the Pope called for a respect for the laws that govern nature's dynamism and its capacity for regeneration. He condemned the use of atomic, chemical, and bacteriological weapons outright and signaled the dangers in the upheavals in the biosphere caused by the undisciplined exploitation of the planet's physical resources, including the pollution of soil, air, and water and the waste of unrenewable raw materials. He recognized the danger of self-destruction attendant upon further exploitation of natural resources.

The Pope said that just as the population problem is not to be solved by limiting access to life, so the problem of the environment cannot be coped with in terms of technology alone. "Technological measures," he asserted,"will be ineffective unless accompanied by a radical change of mentality." Calling for a discovery in time of the way to master material growth, Paul said that both public and private agencies must regulate the environment for the well-being of mankind.

The significance of this papal awareness seems obvious. While recognizing the obligation of people to use the earth's goods moderately, the Pope indicated the right of governments to intervene in preventing further abuse of the earth's riches. But this can only be accomplished by limiting man's rights to an overuse or exploitation of material things. The obligation of the state to interfere directly in curbing what has been considered a natural right in the use of property introduces the question whether this principle can be extended to the problem of fertility control when it becomes evident that high population intensity is proving a direct danger to the environment. The immediate negative reaction, based upon the assertion that "the environment is for man, not man for the environment," must be modified by the Pope's acknowledgment that "man and his environment shape the development of man." This fact could lead to an interference with human liberties in procreation in favor of the common good of a state or the community of nations.[66]

Conclusion

In the argument that developed within the Church following the Encyclical, a polarization of conservative and liberal viewpoints quickly became apparent. Advocates of strict adherence to the papal teaching cited the Council's doctrine on the obedience due to the Pope's decision as the

supreme teacher and head of the Church's *Magisterium,* or Teaching Authority. They controverted the objections raised against the papal arguments—particularly those that challenged the Pope's right to interpret the natural law, his rejection of the recommendation of the pontifical commission, and his contention that by separating procreational and coital activity the way was being opened to a breakdown in sexual morality on all sides. Some population experts challenged the effectiveness of birth control in confronting the world's demographic problems; and arguments were even advanced to prove that the grave concern over food and human resources for the forseeable future were alarmist.[67]

The opponents of the Encyclical granted that the traditional teaching in the Church condemned birth control. But they maintained that with the jettisoning of so much of earlier theories regarding the nature of the sex act itself and of marriage and the revolutionary teaching of the Council in regard to marital love and parental responsibility for the spacing of their children, the Pope's decision was questionable to say the least. They felt he had not done justice to any of these considerations, which were the official doctrine of the Church defined by the Pope himself and the bishops at Vatican Council II.

Thus a principal phase of the argument was concerned with the nature and binding force of papal authority in such matters. And, here again, the clash has resulted in a considerable development in theological thinking. Although Pope Paul has obviously no intention of backing down on the principal contention of his Encyclical, he has admitted a pluralism in theological opinions that goes a long way toward accommodating both sides within the Church and presents a healthy lead toward solving the possibly negative effect of the Encyclical on ecuminism.

In the Church's concern for the survival of the human species, it took grave measures in the past to promote pronatal policies. Now that natality has reached a danger point, it would seem that the Church is called upon to present the world with an equally sensitive attitude. Pope Paul has been accused of flying in the face of human destiny by denying the legitimacy of contraceptives. What he has actually achieved is the awakening of Catholics to the fact that they must take personal and immediate responsibility for their judgments and acts in sexual and other moral matters by following their own well-formed consciences rather than almost blindly doing what they are told by their pastors and bishops. Among non-Catholics and others involved in solving the world's population problems, the papal cautions have helped achieve a renewed determination to reorient the population debate within the parameters of actuality as it expresses itself in the diverse cultures and beliefs of contemporary mankind. With the United Nations, the Catholic Church repudiates any notion of physical force or moral coercion in compelling people to cut back on the number of children they desire.

The polarization of views within the Church between those who demand an absolute adherence to the papal teaching and those who challenge the Pope's solution has added to the confusion already troubling the vast body of Catholics caught in the debates and tensions following Vatican Council II. It was obvious that a small group of intransigent papal advisors had been attempting to undo the work of the Council by insisting that papal supremacy should predominate over the decisions of the Pope and the bishops solemnly gathered under the guidance of the Spirit. That the Pope seemed to cede before the pressures of this de-

termined group came as a considerable shock to many thinkers within the Church. Instead of strengthening papal power, the Encyclical—by eliciting deep and widespread opposition to Roman teaching—actually called into question both the nature of papal predominance in the church and the claims to papal infallibility defined at Vatican Council I and II. In a sense this has proven to be a healthy development. It is actually in line with Pope Paul's own desire to internationalize the Church's leadership at the top and decentralize its overall control. On the one issue of contraception, however, the Pope has proven recalcitrant, forcing the Church's thinkers and theologians to face the issue and work out a more realistic Catholic attitude toward population policies and birth control.

At the same time, by forcing Catholics and the world to examine anew and in depth many of the aspects of the population problem and the solutions posed by various experts, nations, and ideologies, the Encyclical may prove to have been a benefit to mankind. On the strictly Catholic level, it emancipated millions of educated faithful from a too subservient reliance on clerics and counselors in making up their consciences. This liberation has enabled them to give authentic witness to their convictions in helping to form the "mind of the church," thus making much more actual the Council's teaching that "the people of God" and not the Pope and hierarchy as such constitute the Church. This, in turn, gives a new thrust to the nature of the Church's *Magisterium* or Teaching Authority, which is no longer to be considered uniquely the function of the hierarchy.

With the full weight of the laity finally being introduced into the thinking and witness to Catholic doctrine, the contribution of the Roman Catholic Church to the settlement of such pressing world problems as that of population control will become more substantive. For an institution that still affects the intimate thinking of between one-sixth and one-seventh of the world's population, this is no mean consideration.

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