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VATICAN
DOCUMENTS

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR THE FAMILY

Ethical
and Pastoral
Dimensions
of Population Trends

Instrumentum Laboris



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INTRODUCTION

1. In publishing this text, the Pontifical Council for the Family wishes to present points for consideration concerning population realities. The first part of this document examines populations *trends*. The second part describes *attitudes* regarding demographic realities. The third part sets out *ethical principles* in the light of which the Church analyzes these realities. This examination forms the basis for proposing *pastoral guidelines*.

2. In order to understand concrete situations better, population trends are currently the object of reflection, studies and meetings at international, national and regional levels. This document will help Episcopal Conferences and Catholic organizations to be well-informed on these realities, to draw up guidelines for pastoral action.

3. This working document prepared by the Pontifical Council for the Family is the fruit of patient work, after consultation and dialogue with specialists such as theologians, pastoral workers and demographers. Its scope is to make persons aware of the values upon which a truly human understanding of demographic realities is founded. These values are the dignity and transcendence of the human person, the importance of the family as the basic cell of society, solidarity between peoples and nations, and that humanity is called to salvation.

Given the Pontifical Council for the Family's competence in ethical and pastoral fields involving demography, it proposes the present document to help form guidelines for the Church's *pastoral work*.

Ethical principles must particularly guide pastoral work in the area of demography because population questions affect the family with regard to the freedom and responsibility of married couples in their task of transmitting life. With realism, the Church recognizes the serious problems linked to population growth, in the forms these take in various parts of the world, with attendant moral implications.¹ At the same time, the pastoral work of the Church must take into account different current and future effects of the declining birth rate in many countries. Therefore, one must begin by examining different demographic trends in an objective and dispassionate way.

¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22 November 1981), 31; *AAS* 74 (1982), p. 117.

PART ONE

DEMOGRAPHIC REALITIES TODAY

Chapter I

DIFFERENT TRENDS

4. During this century the world population has grown steadily. It has been estimated for 1993 at 5,506,000,000.² Population increase must be interpreted in the light of well-identified and thoroughly understood factors. The most important of these factors is completely new in human history: the *increase of the average life-span*. In many countries the average life-span has more than doubled in a century. This increase results from improved health care conditions and standards of living, from better food production and more efficient policies. In less than two centuries, we have witnessed an almost general lowering of the infant mortality rate, by more than 90% in many countries. At the same time the maternal mortality rate has also fallen in unprecedented proportions.

1. Population Growth and Population Geography

5. The world population has doubled between 1950 and 1991. Nonetheless, the demographic growth rate decreased

² Cf. Population Reference Bureau, *World Population Data Sheet*, 1993.

after reaching a maximum during the years 1965-1970.³ This slowing down in the evolution of world population is in harmony with what population science calls the "demographic transition". This term signifies the lowering of the mortality-rate and birth-rate while countries benefit from improved health care and/or economic conditions. However, *depending upon the country*, it must be kept in mind that population trends are *very different*. The so-called developed countries have experienced a very significant lowering of the synthetic fertility indices.⁴ In almost all these countries, this index is at a lower level than is actually needed simply to ensure that generations be replaced. On the other hand, in so-called developing countries, these same indices are at a level which allows for the replacement of generations, taking into account their health care conditions and mortality rate.

But even if there is a great contrast between the trends from the 1960's to the present, the *fall of fertility*, very significant in almost all parts of the world, is *irrefutable* and *evident* from the facts published by specialized organizations. It is, nonetheless, frequently *disregarded*.

6. Another important trend is *population geography*. There is a *growing urbanization*, above all in developing countries, as an effect of rural emigration and international migrations,

³ DANIEL NOIN, *Atlas de la population mondiale*, Paris, Reclus, La Documentation française, 1991, p. 22.

⁴ The synthetic fertility index, calculated by adding up the fertility-rate according to age, allows a comparison in time and space of fertility behaviour because it practically eliminates the effects linked to the differences of age groups in the population.

almost always directed towards urban regions. It is true that certain policies, notably in the area of finance and/or agriculture, arising from national and/or international pressure, have the effect of discouraging rural development. Urbanization is further explained by the evolution of structures of production and by the desire to have access to the greatest possibilities for employment, to manufacturing markets, shopping, educational institutions, health facilities, recreational activities and the other advantages offered by the city.

7. Understanding population trends also requires the study of *migrations*. Various factors help understand their importance. Unfortunately each day brings the news that people are forced to move to escape wars or massacres. These sometimes cause massive exoduses.⁵ Other persons, hoping to better their living conditions, leave their homes for economic reasons: to avoid unemployment and find better paying work. Because of structural changes in methods of production, economic situations also bring about significant migrations: rural emigration, emigration from once-industrialized regions, emigration toward regions considered to have a future. Migrations have effects on the physiognomy of countries, their evolution, the geography of their population. This is true for both the countries of emigration and the countries of immigration.

⁵ Cf. Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1992.

2. A "Second Demographic Revolution"

8. How are behavioral trends regarding the birth-rate in "developed" societies to be understood? The importance of the *fall in fertility* leads some to claim that there is a "second demographic revolution". Here one deals with as considerable a change as in the "first demographic revolution", even if in a different sense. This first revolution in some way helped to "curb" the *mortality rate*, and especially the three rates which previously controlled demographic patterns: birth, infant and adolescent mortality.

9. This second demographic revolution has different causes which belong primarily to the moral and cultural order: materialism, individualism and secularization. Consequently, many women are forced to work more and more outside the home.⁶ This results in unbalanced structures according to age. This imbalance brings about present political, economic and social problems. However, there is a risk that these problems are only perceived clearly when they have run their course because population trends are long-term. For example, a greater number of aged persons will find themselves depending upon pensions which could only be assured by the work of an active population, which is certainly decreasing according to demographic projections. In various advanced countries there is a "demographic winter" which is becoming more and more severe. The authorities

⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens* (14 September 1981), 19; AAS 73 (1981), p. 625.

are beginning to be concerned: today there are more coffins than cradles, more elderly persons than children.

10. One of the more serious consequences of the aging of the population is the risk of *damage to solidarity* between generations. This could lead to real struggles between the generations for a share in economic resources. Perhaps discussions about *euthanasia* are not extraneous to these conflicting trends.

11. This “second demographic revolution” is often misunderstood for three reasons. The first reason is that these societies, living on advantages gained during periods of sufficient fertility, benefit from the *age-rated structures* which up to now *favour their active population*. This is one of the reasons which still makes high productivity possible. The negative effects which the falling birth-rate will produce in the economic and social domains are just beginning to be felt. Following upon this, the presence in these societies of the *immigrant* work force also helps delay the recognition of this falling fertility and its possible consequences. Finally, translated into less investments in human resources, hence in education, the fall in the birth-rate releases financial means in the short term. These are seen as advantageous but they benefit present generations *to the detriment of the future*.⁷

12. What happened to *Eastern Europe* after the collapse of the Communist system? A widespread and significant lower-

⁷ This phenomenon can be seen in the various European countries, in particular: Italy, France, Germany and Spain.

ing of the birthrate took place in certain countries, leading to a trend similar to that in some regions of Western Europe — less births than deaths. For decades, the people of Eastern Europe suffered from different demographic policies. Often these did not respect the human person; they were very authoritarian, inspired by the *a priori* requirements of the Marxist-Leninist ideology and the imperatives attributed to the “necessities” of history. The present demographic behaviour of the countries of Eastern Europe cannot be understood without taking into account the lingering effect of the situation into which they were plunged. Moreover, these countries are exposed to the influence of consumer models coming from Western Europe.

3. The Developing Continents

13. According to most recent estimates, *Africa* is a continent with a high fertility. However, it is also underpopulated, with weak population densities in the greater part of its territory. Moreover, the uncertainty of specific demographic data has been particularly evident in this continent.⁸ Poor health care conditions and policies often limit in some countries and even stop the expected fall of the mortality-rate.⁹ Attention must also be given to the future demo-

⁸ Considered by observers as reliable, the census of November 1991 in Nigeria, the most populated country in Africa, registered 88.5 million inhabitants. The previous official estimate indicated 122.5 million inhabitants, that is, an over-estimation of 34 million people!

⁹ This phenomenon can be seen in various countries. However, in Rwanda, a small country, there is a very strong concentration of population caused by immigration to a fertile region and maintained by a high rate of procreation.

graphic effects of AIDS, effects which could prove quite disastrous in certain regions.

In Northern Africa a lowering of the fertility-rate seems to be an established phenomenon from now on, even if, with a very young population structure, the play of inertia common to all demographic phenomena has a potential for population growth.

14. If one considers *Latin America* in relation to other developing continents, a first characteristic is to be found in weaker mortality-rates with birth-rates less high in temperate South America than in tropical South America and Central America. A second specific feature of some of these countries is the lower proportion of married women than in Asia and Africa. The specific consequence of this is a high number of births outside marriage.¹⁰

The lowering of fertility, largely correlated with the lower mortality mentioned above, leads to a population growth inferior to Asia (ex-USSR not included) and Africa.

15. The immense continent of Asia contains the major part of the Russian Federation and two of the most populated countries on earth: China and India. While the demographic evolution of Russia seems somewhat comparable to that of Eastern Europe, the other Asian countries present very different situations, not only between but even within the na-

¹⁰ The importance of the relationship between fertility and distribution of the population seems to be illustrated by Bolivia which has the most significant fertility index in Latin America, but also one of the weakest population densities.

tions themselves. The Asian countries which are among those known as "the new industrial nations" seem to be entering the "second demographic revolution". Other nations have not yet completed the phase of the "first demographic revolution" and combine rather high fertility with equally high mortality. Thus, in a world trend marked by a lowering of fertility following a lowering of mortality, Asia experiences very great demographic differences. Even within China and India, fertility can vary twofold, or even more, whereas the urbanization-rates are twice as low as Europe.

16. Therefore, the evolution of world population cannot be examined without taking into account an almost general fact: *the relationship between fertility and mortality rates*,¹¹ and the *very strong demographic contrasts*, not only between continents, but even within continents and countries where very great regional differences are at times recorded. Thinking globally in terms of world population tends to gloss over the diversity of mortality rates, the different phenomena of migration, the difference in population growth rates, which are even negative in certain regions. Without a knowledge of these differences, one can only misunderstand the reality of population trends.

¹¹ In the "first demographic revolution" in developing countries, medical progress reduced general mortality and births increased (inverse relationship). In the "second demographic revolution", for example in Europe today, medical science has reduced mortality even more, but births are decreasing.

Chapter II

POPULATIONS AND SOCIETIES

17. Bearing in mind the quantitative data provided by major statistical institutions and the causality of calculated trends, the demographic realities are in fact very different according to regions. Moreover, they are very complex.¹² Every population study should take into account the history of the peoples under consideration, the changes which took place in the demographic pattern, as well as the sometimes considerable difference between regions. However, many people are led to believe there will be a "world population crisis", especially those whose experience is limited to living in cities. To justify "population control", they have talked about a "population bomb", a "population explosion", an "overpopulated world" with irremediably limited resources. They say that there is a "world consensus" about the urgency of the situation. However, the slogans spread about these matters cannot stand up to analysis because the history of human development shows that it is simplistic to affirm that controlling population growth is necessary to achieve or maintain a certain level of prosperity. Therefore, a serious and lucid examination of demographic trends is in order.

¹² See, for example, *World Population Monitoring, 1991*, Population Studies, No. 126, United Nations, New York, 1992; *The Sex and Age Distributions of Population, The 1990 Revision of the United Nations Global Population Estimates and Projections*, Population Studies, No. 122, United Nations, New York 1991, and *1991 Demographic Year Book*, United Nations, New York 1993.

1. Demographic Growth and Standards of Living

18. Development problems in the relevant countries are not only to be sought in the increase of the number of their inhabitants. Many of these countries have considerable natural resources which would often be able to sustain populations larger than the ones they currently have. Unfortunately, too often this potential is presently either not sufficiently exploited or badly exploited. More often than not, the earth possesses materials which, thanks to man's inventiveness, have been shown throughout history to be decisive resources for human progress. In the first place, the source of the difficulties of so-called Third World countries is to be sought in *international relations*. These difficulties have often been examined and even denounced by the Church.¹³ With regard to these causes which have bearing on the problem of development, *solidarity is shown to be necessary*, but *this presupposes a change in the policies of developed nations*.

There are also other *internal causes* in developing countries. The low standards of living and the scarcity of food, even to the point of famine, can be the result of bad political and economic administration, often accompanied by corruption. To this must be added: exaggerated military budgets, in contrast to the small amount set aside for education; wars — sometimes instigated by other nations — or fratricidal conflicts; glaring injustices in the allocation of revenues; the concentration of the means of production for the profit of a

¹³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (30 December 1987), 11-26; AAS 80 (1988), pp. 525-547.

privileged group; discrimination against minorities; the paralyzing burden of foreign debt accompanied by the flight of capital; the weight of certain negative cultural practices; unequal access to property; bureaucracies blocking initiative and innovation, etc. In reality, if objective conditions explain under-development in certain regions of the planet, *a lack of development is not inevitable since all these causes can be overcome* when suitable measures are applied, even if this is difficult.

2. Food, Resources and Population

19. According to those who assert that world food and other resources are limited, would an increase in population inevitably result in poverty and want? It must be kept in mind that *the amount of resources at the planet's disposal is neither pre-defined nor unchangeable*. The history of societies and civilizations shows that during certain periods some peoples were able to exploit hidden resources or resources neglected by previous generations. Thus, throughout the centuries, humanity's resources have neither stagnated nor diminished. Instead, they have increased and become more diversified. People have augmented resources; some examples of this would be: the cultivation of new crops such as the potato, which really revolutionized nutrition; the use of new techniques such as irrigating rice fields or greenhouse cultivation; the ability to utilize resources which before had been neglected, such as coal, petroleum, fertilizers, the atom, and sand. Such progress can also be seen in the fields of agriculture and breeding where modern methods increase possibilities.

People still have great potential at their disposal for the development of the planet; from solar energy — largely under utilized today — to under-water capsules, not to mention the centres of the “green revolution” announced by agronomists, also taking particular note of the progress made in animal and vegetable genetic engineering.¹⁴

20. Moreover, if the use of agricultural technologies in the most advanced countries is studied, it is apparent that *from now on* people are able to produce sufficient food for the world’s population — even if the hypotheses of international organizations were to be verified according to their highest projections. All this does not even take into account the technical progress yet to come.¹⁵

This confirms the fact that the most critical food shortages are *remediable* as long as people are equipped to confront them and are animated by solidarity.¹⁶

The food shortages publicized by the mass media in recent years resulted from wars, fratricidal conflicts, seen today in different countries, or from poor public or private administration, far more than from adverse climatic conditions or other natural causes.

¹⁴ In 1991 the Pontifical Academy of Sciences studied the relationship between resources and population, see below 56, 57.

¹⁵ To speak of an agricultural “crisis” in the United States or in the European Community, is to speak of a crisis of over-production rather than under-production.

¹⁶ Cf. *World Declaration on Nutrition*, International Conference on Nutrition, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, World Health Organization, 12 December 1992.

3. Environment and Population

21. According to a frequently repeated affirmation, the number of earth's inhabitants will cause growing pollution or the *degradation of the environment*. Environmental concern was raised during the World Conference of the United Nations on Population of 1974.¹⁷ It was addressed again at the World Conference on Population in Mexico in 1984,¹⁸ and at the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.¹⁹ However, no one has ever shown any direct cause and effect relationship between population growth and the degradation of the environment. On the other hand, the developed countries with great population density have less signs of pollution than the very elevated ones verified not long ago in countries formerly under Communist regimes.²⁰ In these countries, the system of production proved to be extremely polluting. These models of production and consumption, as well as the kind of economic activities, determine environmental quality. The degradation of the environment is often due to mistaken policies which can and should be corrected by reasonable and joint efforts on the part of public and private sectors.

¹⁷ Cf. *Report of the United Nations World Population Conference*, Bucharest, 19-30 August 1974, United Nations, New York, 1975 Resolution 9, pp. 50, 95-106.

¹⁸ *Mexico City Declaration on Population and Development, Recommendation 4*, in *Report on the International Conference on Population 1984*, United Nations, Department for Technical Cooperation for Development, 1984, p. 16.

¹⁹ Cf. *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, United Nations, New York 1992, Vol. I, pp. 8-12.

²⁰ For example, the disaster of Chernobyl in 1986.

22. It is no less true that certain patterns of consumption should be corrected in developed societies. These patterns do not respect the environment nor do they take into account the responsibilities of people today towards the generations which are yet to come.

23. The problem of the environment should always be seen in the light of human development, taking into account its economic and social aspects. For this reason all these matters have ethical implications. Facts confirm that industrialized countries are making, and are willing to make, a real effort to protect their environment. This requires using non-polluting techniques of production and having a deeper sense of the responsibilities of these countries. The environmental problem also exists in developing countries. In this case, the greatest problems arise from the badly controlled exploitation of natural resources, recourse to antiquated agricultural methods which exhaust the soil, or the disorderly introduction of industries, often foreign, which are highly polluting. In these regions, the adoption of appropriate technologies could prevent the degradation of the immediate environment. In any case, it would be simplistic to accuse the populations of these regions of being responsible for the acid rain or the fears raised at times about the ecological balance of the planet.

PART TWO

ATTITUDES TOWARDS
DEMOGRAPHIC REALITIES

Chapter I

POPULATION CONTROL AND DEVELOPMENT

24. Citing the rates at which population trends occur often causes a strong reaction. Raw statistics are brought up to explain the relationship between demographic growth and births. According to this kind of thinking, birth control is the indispensable pre-condition for the “sustainable development” of poor countries. By “sustainable development” is meant a development where the different factors involved (food, health, education, technology, population, environment, etc.) are brought into harmony so as to avoid unbalanced growth and the waste of resources. The developed countries define for other countries what must be, from their point of view, “sustainable development”. This explains why certain rich countries and major international organizations are willing to help these countries, but on one condition — that they accept programmes for the systematic control of their births.

Those who react in this manner have generally not understood the logic of demographic processes, and particularly the phenomenon of self-regulation evidenced in data.

They consequently ignore or underestimate both the importance of the lowering of fertility in the developing countries as well as the demographic decline seen in industrialized countries.

25. It would be difficult to find an example in history of a country which underwent a prolonged trend (more than twenty-five years) of falling population and enjoyed substantial economic development at the same time. It has even been shown that population growth has often *preceded* economic growth. Attentive to current facts and the lessons of history, the Church cannot accept that the poorest populations be treated as "scapegoats" for under-development. The Church regards this attitude as particularly unjust considering that some countries are undergoing grave economic difficulties when, at the same time, they have a low population density and abundant exploitable resources. Furthermore, the Church can no longer ignore the *negative* demographic trends of industrial countries, all the more because the effects of these trends cannot be neutral. At the same time, the Church wishes to maintain a constructive dialogue with those who remain convinced of the necessity of setting up imperative population control, and with governments and institutions concerned with population policies. There are real demographic problems, even though they are often envisaged from an erroneous point of view and perverse solutions to them are often proposed.

26. It is now useful to explain the principal methods of those who promote limiting population growth as one of the

first conditions for economic and social development. Special attention will be given to the problem of abortion.

Chapter II

METHODS OF POPULATION CONTROL

27. It is well known that there is a *vast international network* of wealthy organizations which direct their efforts towards reducing population. In different degrees, these organizations share a similar perspective and they publically commend anti-natalist policies. Certain of these organizations often collaborate with companies which experiment with, produce and distribute contraceptive substances or devices (such as the intra-uterine device) or which recommend sterilization or even abortion. These organizations counsel, promote and often impose this variety of methods for reducing population.

28. The Holy Father himself has denounced these “systematic campaigns against birth”.²¹ In fact, certain campaigns are developed and financed by international organizations (public or private), which, in turn, are often controlled by governments. These campaigns are frequently made in the name of the *health and well-being of women* and are also di-

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 25; AAS 80 (1988), p. 543.

rected at young people under the forms of *anti-birth sex education programmes*. It should be noted, in passing, that in many countries there is a factor which controls population and, although indirect, is no less significant: a *lack of adequate housing for families*. Nevertheless, *methods developed for directly controlling births* are actually the principal means employed for population control.

Recently developed methods of birth control will be presented here, noting, however, that "traditional" methods (mechanical and *coitus interruptus*) are still largely used. All of these artificial methods raise important ethical problems regarding both human life and the rights of the person and the family.

1. Hormonal Contraception

29. Hormonal contraception is one of the modern methods for limiting population which has been widely diffused at the international level. Certain reports of international organizations regularly publish statistics on the number of women having access to this type of contraception. Other reports also speak of initiatives taken by some of these organizations to encourage and finance research on these products and their promotion on a wide scale.

30. In certain recent applications, hormonal contraception poses *new problems*. It is known that the first generation of these pills — oestroprogestitives — have essentially a contraceptive effect: they make conception impossible by blocking oocyte release. However, among the pills presented today as

contraceptives, there are some which have several different effects.²² The pill acts either to impede conception or to prevent the implantation of the fertilized egg, that is, of an individual of the human species. In this latter case, notwithstanding the euphemisms used, these pills bring about an abortion of the fertilized egg. Thus, the woman who uses this kind of pill, or certain other new methods of hormonal contraception,²³ is never able to know exactly what has happened and, particularly, whether she has aborted.

2. Sterilization

31. Another method of population control which is also widely encouraged in many countries is male or female *sterilization*. The way in which it is promoted raises serious questions concerning human rights and respect for persons. In particular, these questions have bearing on the honesty and

²² 1. They modify the structure of the cervical mucus, making it impenetrable to spermatozooids. 2. They modify the motility of the Fallopian tube, impeding the passage of the fertilized egg from it to the uterine cavity. 3. They alter the normal development of the endometrium, making it unfit for the implantation of the embryo. These last two effects are *abortive* and are prevalent when the oestro-progestatin pill does not block ovulation and cannot consequently work as a contraceptive.

²³ Besides the oestroprogestitive pill, other hormonal products, wrongly defined as contraceptives, are sold. In reality, they work by impeding the continuation of pregnancy, which terminates in abortion. These are pills or injectable or implantable substances (such as Norplant) which alter the endometrium and the motility of the tubes, without stopping ovulation and, therefore, act as abortifacients. These substances may be administered to the woman in a continuous fashion, or in the case of presumably fertile relationships ("the morning-after pill").

quality of information given about sterilization and its consequences, as well as the degree of informed and free consent obtained from the persons concerned. The question of *competent consent* is often posed when dealing with persons with little formal education. Here, as in other cases, euphemisms are often used: for example, describing tubal ligation as “voluntary surgical contraception for women”.

On the moral level, because sterilization is a *deliberate suppression of the procreative function*, it violates not only human dignity, but also removes all responsibility from sexuality and procreation. Sterilization programs have already provoked many strong protests, with direct political repercussions in certain cases. Because surgical sterilization is usually irreversible, it can have more serious long-term demographic effects than contraception and abortion.

3. Abortion

32. Despite certain denials, *abortion* (surgical and pharmaceutical) is being promoted more and more, openly or in a hidden way, *as a method of population control*. This tendency is true even of institutions which, when they began, did not have abortion as part of their programme. After the International Conference on Population held at Mexico City in 1984, one is bound to ask to what extent an agreed Recommendation — approved by the Conference — has been honoured which rejects using abortion as a method of population control.

33. Recommendation 18 of this Conference states that: “All efforts should be made to reduce maternal morbidity

and mortality”; and with precise reference to women’s health: “Governments are urged... to take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning, and whenever possible, provide for the humane treatment and counselling of women who have had recourse to abortion”.²⁴

34. This Recommendation was accepted by the general consensus of the nations participating in the Conference. The Recommendation was addressed to governments, some of which provide funds for population control organizations. However, the activities and research of a number of these organizations indicate that in practice they do not apply Recommendation 18. Many of these organizations include abortion, at least *de facto*, among methods of family planning.

35. In developed countries, some women consider abortion as a fall-back solution in the case of contraception failure. In developing countries, there is a tendency to facilitate easier access to abortion as an effective method of population control, especially among the poorest sectors of the population.

36. Besides different surgical methods, *chemical methods* have also been developed to bring about abortion. Among

²⁴ *Report on the International Conference on Population 1984, op. cit., Recommendation 18*, pp. 20, 21. In the French text the following phrase is missing: “which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning”.

these are the anti-pregnancy vaccines,²⁵ injections based upon progestogens such as Depo-Provera or Noristerat,²⁶ the pro-toglandins, or high dosages of oestro-progesterone (commonly called the "morning-after" pill) or the abortion pill RU486, developed by the Roussel-Uclaff Laboratory, a subsidiary of Hoechst. Moreover, the intra-uterine device (IUD) can be included in the context of early abortion.

4. Infanticide

37. Finally, it should be recalled that infanticide is still practised in certain countries as a method of population control. Girls are more frequently the innocent victims.

²⁵ Anti hCG (human Chorionic Gonadotropin) vaccines.

²⁶ Depo-Provera = Depot-medroxyprogesterone acetate; Noristerat = Norethisterone enantate.

PART THREE

THE ETHICAL AND PASTORAL POSITION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

38. Far from being indifferent to various population trends, the Church closely evaluates their significance and complexity. Nevertheless she proclaims that *among the attitudes which are envisaged, all are not morally acceptable*. The Church's position in this matter can never be dictated by simple quantitative considerations. Her stand begins with the truth about man,²⁷ with a specific concept of the human person and society.

39. The main lines of the Church's position will be set out here. In the first place, papal teachings on this matter will be summarized. Then the principles will be enunciated which the Church uses to make her contribution to understanding the data relative to population. Finally, timely courses of action will be presented which should be encouraged.

²⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, (1 May 1991) 25, 29; AAS 83 (1991), pp. 822-824, 829, where the Holy Father presents the truth about man in the context of the collapse of the Communist regimes.

Chapter I

PAPAL TEACHINGS

40. The teaching of the Popes on moral questions relative to population is written in a *body of doctrine comprising several sections*: teaching relating to sexuality and the family, and also teaching relating to society and public authorities. This body of doctrine is itself under-pinned by the total vision of the human person as the centre of creation and called to salvation.

The Church has always considered that the *systematic control of births*, using directly or indirectly coercive means to limit population size, *does not contribute to authentic human development*. Moreover, anticipating certain contemporary criticisms of population control theories and practices, the Popes have regarded what is sometimes called the "population crisis" *only with great prudence*. However, it should be noted that the Supreme Pontiffs have closely followed the different population trends, paying the same attention to the population growth observed in some countries as to the declining population observed in other places. At the same time they have vigorously striven to promote justice, peace and development. By *attacking the problems of poverty and hunger at their source*, they wished to help resolve these problems. This papal teaching is set out in different documents. The most prominent will be mentioned here, but limited to the teachings of the most recent Popes and the Second Vatican Council.

1. From John XXIII to Paul VI

41. In his Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII referred in 1961 to the problems of food and demographic trends. He stated: "But whatever be the situation, we clearly affirm that these problems should be posed and resolved in such a way that man does not have recourse to methods and means contrary to his dignity, which are proposed by those persons who think of man and his life solely in material terms".²⁸

42. Referring to population trends, in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965), the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the rights of the family and rejected dishonorable solutions, including abortion and infanticide.²⁹ They also advocated the right and duty of "responsible parenthood", which is licit only within the context of marriage. "Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby cooperating with the love of God the Creator and are, in a certain sense, its interpreters. This involves the fulfillment of their role with a sense of human and Christian responsibility and the formation of correct judgments through docile respect for God and common reflection and effort; it also involves a consideration of their own good and the good of their children al-

²⁸ Pope JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961), 191; *AAS* 53 (1961), p. 447.

²⁹ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, (1965), 5, 8, 47, 51.

ready born or yet to come, an ability to read the signs of the times and of their own situation on the material and spiritual level, and finally, an estimation of the good of the family, of society, and of the Church. It is the married couple themselves who must in the last analysis arrive at these judgments before God".³⁰

43. This same conciliar document devotes an important paragraph to the population growth of certain nations. The Council Fathers affirm: "International cooperation is vitally necessary in the case of those peoples who... are faced with the special problems arising out of rapid increases in population. There is a pressing need to harness the full and eager cooperation of all, particularly of the richer countries, in order to explore how the human necessities of food and suitable education can be furnished and shared with the entire human community".

Finally the Council recalls the limits of the intervention of "public authority" and "exhorts all men to beware of all solutions, whether uttered in public or in private or imposed at any time, which transgress the natural law".³¹

44. In his historic address to the United Nations General Assembly in 1965, Pope Paul VI said: "You proclaim here the fundamental rights and duties of man, his dignity, freedom — and above all his religious freedom. We feel that you thus interpret the highest sphere of human wisdom and,

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 50.

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 87.

we might add, its sacred character. For you deal here above all with human life and the life of man is sacred; no one may dare offend it. Respect for life, even with regard to the great problem of birth, must find here in your assembly its highest affirmation and its most reasoned defence. You must strive to multiply bread so that it suffices for the tables of mankind, and not rather favour an artificial control of birth, which would be irrational, in order to diminish the number of guests at the banquet of life”.³²

45. In 1967, in his Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, Pope Paul VI again wrote about demographic realities: “It is certain that public authorities can intervene, within the limits of their competence, by favouring the availability of appropriate information and by adopting suitable measures, provided that these are in conformity with the moral law and that they respect the rightful freedom of married couples. Where the inalienable right to marriage and procreation is lacking, human dignity has ceased to exist.

“Finally, it is for parents to take a thorough look at the matter and decide upon the number of their children. This is an obligation they take upon themselves, before their children already born, and before the community to which they belong — following the dictates of their own consciences informed by God’s law authentically interpreted, and bolstered by their trust in Him”.³³

³² Pope PAUL VI, *Address to the United Nations General Assembly* (4 October 1965), 6; AAS 57 (1965), p. 883.

³³ Pope PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum progressio* (26 March 1967), 37; AAS 59 (1967), p. 276.

46. In his Encyclical *Humanae vitae* (1968), Pope Paul VI confirmed these teachings. He explained "responsible parenthood": "Hence conjugal love requires in husband and wife an awareness of their mission of 'responsible parenthood', which today is rightly much insisted upon, and which also must be exactly understood. Consequently it is to be considered under different aspects which are legitimate and connected with one another.

"In relation to the biological processes, responsible parenthood means the knowledge and respect of their functions; human intellect discovers in the power of giving life biological laws which are part of the human person.

"In relation to the tendencies of instinct or passion, responsible parenthood means that necessary dominion which reason and will must exercise over them.

"In relation to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised, either by the deliberate and generous decision to raise a numerous family, or by the decision, made for grave motives and with due respect for the moral law, to avoid for the time being, or even for an indeterminate period, a new birth.

"Responsible parenthood also and above all implies a more profound relationship to the objective moral order established by God, of which a right conscience is the faithful interpreter. The responsible exercise of parenthood implies, therefore, that husband and wife recognize fully their own duties towards God, towards themselves, towards the family and towards society, in a correct hierarchy of values.

"In the task of transmitting life, therefore, they are not free to proceed completely at will, as if they could determine

in a wholly autonomous way the honest path to follow; but they must conform their activity to the creative intention of God, expressed in the very nature of marriage and of its acts, and manifested by the constant teaching of the Church”³⁴.

Responsible fatherhood and motherhood include not only the couple’s prudent decisions but also the refusal of artificial methods of birth control and, when there are serious reasons, the choice of the natural regulation of fertility.³⁵

47. In *Humanae vitae*, Pope Paul VI called attention to the fact that public authorities might be tempted to impose artificial methods of birth control.³⁶ For this reason he appealed to these authorities: “To rulers, who are those principally responsible for the common good, and who can do so much to safeguard moral values, We say: Do not allow the morality of your peoples to be degraded; do not permit that by legal means practices contrary to the natural and divine law be introduced into the fundamental cell, the family. Quite other is the way in which public Authorities can and must contribute to the solution of the demographic problem: namely, the way of a provident policy for the family, of a wise education of peoples in respect of the moral law and the liberty of citizens”³⁷.

³⁴ Cf. Pope PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae vitae* (25 July 1968), 10; AAS 60 (1968), pp. 487, 488.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 11-16, AAS 60 (1968), pp. 488-492; see below 76.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 17, AAS 60 (1968), p. 493.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23, AAS 60 (1968), p. 497.

48. In 1971, in his Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens*, Pope Paul VI examined the phenomenon of urbanization.³⁸ Regarding demographic growth he wrote: "It is disquieting in this regard to note a kind of fatalism which is gaining a hold even on people in positions of responsibility. This feeling often leads to Malthusian solutions inculcated by active propaganda for contraception and abortion. In this critical situation, it must on the contrary be affirmed that the family, without which no society can stand, has a right to the assistance which will assure it of the conditions for a healthy development".³⁹

49. In the sixties, it was evident that rich nations thought population control was the indispensable tool for development. On November 9, 1974, Paul VI addressed the participants of the World Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). He denounced "an irrational and one-sided campaign against demographic growth". He forcefully added: "It is inadmissible that those who have control of the wealth and resources of mankind should try to resolve the problem of hunger by forbidding the poor to be born, or by leaving to die of hunger children whose parents do not fit into the framework of theoretical plans based on pure hypotheses about the future of mankind. In times gone by, in a past that we hope is now finished with, nations used to make war to seize their neighbours' riches. But is it not a

³⁸ Cf. Pope PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens* (14 May 1971), 10-12; AAS 63 (1971), pp. 408-410.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18; AAS 63 (1971), pp. 414, 415.

new form of warfare to impose a restrictive demographic policy on nations, to ensure that they will not claim their just share of the earth's goods?"⁴⁰

2. John Paul II

50. This papal teaching can be linked with the *Message to Christian Families in the Modern World* given by the Bishops at the close of the Synod on the Family, held in Rome in 1980. In this message, among other things, they said: "Often certain governments and some international organizations do violence to families... Families are compelled — and this we oppose vehemently — to use such immoral means for the solution of social, economic and demographic problems as contraception or, even worse, sterilization, abortion and euthanasia. The Synod therefore urges a charter of family rights to safeguard these rights everywhere".⁴¹

51. In 1982, in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Family *Familiaris consortio*, Pope John Paul II analyzed the birth of a secularist anti-life mentality: "One thinks, for example of a certain panic deriving from the studies of ecologists and futurologists on population growth, which sometimes exaggerates the danger of demographic increase to the quality of life. But the Church firmly believes that human life, even if

⁴⁰ Pope PAUL VI, *Address to the Participants of the World Food Conference*, 9 November 1974, 6; AAS 66 (1974), p. 649.

⁴¹ *Message of Sixth Synod of Bishops to Christian Families in the Modern World*, 24 October 1980, 5.

weak and suffering is always a splendid gift of God's goodness. Against the pessimism and selfishness which cast a shadow over the world, the Church stands for life... Thus the Church condemns as a grave offence against human dignity and justice all those activities of governments or other public authorities which attempt to limit in any way the freedom of couples in deciding about children. Consequently any violence applied by such authorities in favour of contraception or, still worse, of sterilization and procured abortion, must be altogether condemned and forcefully rejected. Likewise to be denounced as gravely unjust are cases where, in international relations, economic help given for the advancement of peoples is made conditional on programmes of contraception, sterilization and abortion.

"The Church is certainly aware of the many complex problems which couples in many countries face today in their task of transmitting life — in a responsible way. She also recognizes the serious problem of population growth in the form it has taken in many parts of the world and its moral implications.

"However, she holds that consideration in depth of all the aspects of these problems offers a new and stronger confirmation of the importance of the authentic teaching on birth regulation repropounded in the Second Vatican Council and in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*".⁴²

52. The Pope again spoke on this theme in 1984, in an address to the Secretary of the World Population Conference

⁴² Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 30, 31; AAS 74 (1982), pp. 116, 117.

held in Mexico City. He defended the rights of the individual, the family, women and young people: "The experience and trends of recent years clearly emphasize the profoundly negative effects of contraceptive programmes. These programmes have increased sexual permissiveness and promoted irresponsible conduct, with grave consequences especially for the education of youth and the dignity of women. The very notion of "responsible parenthood" and "family planning" has been violated by the distribution of contraceptives to adolescents. Moreover, from contraceptive programmes a transition has in fact often been made to the practice of sterilization and abortion, financed by governments and international organizations".⁴³

The Delegation of the Holy See at this Conference proposed a resolution which was adopted. This resolution asked governments "to take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning".⁴⁴

53. With the explicit approval of Pope John Paul II, the Instruction *Donum Vitae* appeared in 1987. The study of problems raised by new bio-medical practices provided an occasion to re-examine the right of society to intervene in the transmission of human life. Life must be transmitted in a

⁴³ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Address to Dr. Rafael M. Salas, Secretary General of the 1984 International Conference on Population and Executive Director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, 7 June 1984; Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII. 1, 1984, p. 1628.

⁴⁴ *Report on the International Conference on Population 1984, op. cit., Recommendation 18*, pp. 20, 21. See above 32 and 34.

context of interpersonal love. It is therefore necessary to protect the family cell. In the light of the principle of subsidiarity, it must also be reaffirmed that public authorities have the duty to protect the family. Far from intervening in an abusive way to control the transmission of life, they must, on the contrary, apply themselves to see that life is respected from its very beginning.⁴⁵

54. In his Encyclical Letter of 1987, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Pope John Paul II wrote: "One cannot deny the existence, especially in the southern hemisphere, of a demographic problem which creates difficulties for development. One must immediately add that in the northern hemisphere the nature of this problem is reversed; here the cause for concern is the *drop in the birthrate*, with repercussions on the aging of the population, unable even to renew itself biologically. Just as it is incorrect to say that such difficulties stem solely from demographic growth, neither is it proved that *all* demographic growth is incompatible with orderly development. On the other hand, it is very alarming to see governments in many countries launching *systematic campaigns* against birth, contrary not only to the cultural and religious identity of the countries themselves, but also contrary to true development. It often happens that these campaigns are the result of pressure coming from abroad, and in some cases they are made a condition for the granting of financial and

⁴⁵ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation, Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), Chapter III; AAS 80 (1988), pp. 98-100.

economic aid and assistance. In any event, there is an absolute lack of respect for the freedom of choice of the parties involved, men and women often subjected to intolerable pressures, including economic ones, in order to force them to submit to this new form of oppression. It is the poorest populations which suffer such mistreatment, and this sometimes leads to a tendency towards a form of racism, or the promotion of equally racist forms of eugenics. This fact too, which deserves the most forceful condemnation, is a *sign* of an erroneous and perverse idea of true human development”.⁴⁶

55. In his Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, marking the centenary of *Rerum novarum* in 1991, Pope John Paul II wrote on population: “Human ingenuity seems to be directed towards limiting, suppressing or destroying the sources of life — including recourse to abortion, which unfortunately is so widespread in the world — than towards defending and opening up the possibilities of life. The Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* denounced systematic anti-child-bearing campaigns which on the basis of a distorted view of the demographic problem and in a climate of ‘absolute lack of respect for the freedom of choice of the parties involved’, often subject them to “intolerable pressures... in order to force them to submit to this new form of oppression”. These policies are extending their field of action by the use of new techniques, to the point of poisoning the lives of millions of

⁴⁶ Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 25; AAS 80 (1988), pp. 543, 544.

defenceless human beings, as if in a form of 'chemical warfare' ”.⁴⁷

56. The address of the Holy Father on November 22, 1991, should not be forgotten. It was delivered at an audience granted to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. The Academy had just spent a week studying the relationship between “resources and population”. The Pope said: “There is a widespread opinion that population control is the easiest method of solving the underlying problem, given that a worldwide reorganization of the processes of production and a redistribution of resources would require an enormous amount of time and would immediately give rise to economic complications.

“The Church is aware of the complexity of the problem. It is one that must be faced without delay; but account must also be taken of the differing regional situations, some of which are the complete opposite of others: some countries show a massive population increase while others are heading towards a dwindling, aging population. And often it is precisely the latter countries, with their high level of consumption, which are most responsible for the pollution of the environment.

“The urgency of the situation must not lead into error in proposing ways of intervening. To apply methods which are

⁴⁷ Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus annus*, 39; AAS 83 (1991), p. 842. In his words “chemical warfare”, the Holy Father again uses the strong expression of Paul VI, *Address to the Participants of the World Food Conference*, see above 49.

not in accord with the true nature of man actually ends up by causing tragic harm. For this reason the Church, as an 'expert in humanity' (cf. Paul VI), upholds the principle of responsible parenthood and considers it her chief duty to draw urgent attention to the morality of the methods employed. These must always respect the person and the person's inalienable rights.

"The increase or the forced decrease of population is partly the result of deficiencies in social institutions. Damage to the environment and the increasing scarcity of natural resources are often the result of human errors. Despite the fact that the world produces enough food for everyone, hundreds of millions of people are suffering from hunger, while elsewhere enormous quantities of food go to waste.

"In view of these many different mistaken human attitudes, it is necessary to address first of all the people who are responsible for them.

"Population growth has to be faced not only by the exercise of a responsible parenthood which respects the divine law, but also by economic means which have a profound effect on social institutions. Particularly in the developing countries, where young people represent a high percentage of the population, it is necessary to eliminate the grave shortage of adequate structures for ensuring education, the spread of culture and professional training. The condition of women must also be improved as an integral part of the modernization of society".⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Pontifical Academy of Science*, 22 November 1991, 4-6; *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, N. 48, 2 December 1991, p. 6.

57. Calling for a responsible attitude regarding procreation, the Holy Father declared: "Thanks to advances in medicine which have reduced infant mortality and increased the average life expectancy, and thanks also to the development of technology, there has been a real change in living conditions. These new conditions must be met not only with scientific reasoning, but, more importantly, with recourse to all available intellectual and spiritual energies. People need to rediscover the moral significance of respecting limits; they must grow and mature in the sense of responsibility with regard to every aspect of life. (cf. *Mater et Magistra*, 195; *Humanae vitae*, *passim*; *Gaudium et spes*, 51-52).

"By not taking steps in this direction, the human family could well fall victim of a devastating tyranny which would infringe upon a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human, namely giving life to new human beings and leading them to maturity.

"It is the responsibility of the public authorities, within the limits of their legitimate competence, to issue directives which reconcile the containment of births and respect for the free and personal assumption of responsibility by individuals (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 87). A political programme which respects the nature of the human person can influence demographic developments, but it should be accompanied by a redistribution of economic resources among the citizens. Otherwise such provisions can risk placing the heaviest burden on the poorest and weakest sectors of society, thus adding injustice to injustice".

The Pope concluded: "Man, 'the only creature on earth whom God willed for its own sake' (*Gaudium et spes*, 24), is

the subject of primordial rights and duties, which are antecedent to those deriving from social and political life (cf. *Pacem in terris*, 5, 35). The human person is 'the origin, the subject and the purpose of all social institutions' (*Gaudium et spes*, 25), and for this reason authorities must keep in mind the limits of their own competence. For her part, the Church invites the human family to plan its future, impelled not just by material concerns but also and especially by respect for the order which God has placed within creation".⁴⁹

58. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro. In his discourse on June 13, the Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, declared: "It is not possible, from the moral point of view, to justify the attitude of that part of the world which highlights human rights but attempts to deny the rights of those in less fortunate circumstances by deciding in a 'devastating tyranny' (John Paul II, Speech to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 22 November 1991, n. 6), how many children they can have, and by threatening to link aid for development to that dictate".⁵⁰

59. In 1992, the Bishops of Latin America applied the teachings of John Paul II to the current situations in their countries. During the work of the Fourth General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, held at Santo Do-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰ Cardinal ANGELO SODANO, *Environment and Development in the Christian Vision*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, N. 25, 24 June 1992, p. 5.

mingo, some two hundred participating Bishops sent a message in defence of human life to the United Nations Organization and to its various bodies. In particular the message denounced systematic campaigns against birth, conducted by international institutions and governments.⁵¹

3. The Dignity of Man and Justice

60. When examining demographic trends, the Magisterium of the Church reaffirms the sacred nature of human life, responsibility for the transmission of life, the inherent rights of fatherhood and motherhood, the values of marriage and family life, in the context of which children are the gift of God the Creator.⁵² In answer to the supporters of population control and without denying realities, the Church takes the part of justice by defending the rights of women and men, of families and young people and those called with the beautiful term *nascituri*, i.e. babies who have been conceived and

⁵¹ Cf. *Message of the Latin American Episcopate to the United Nations Organization*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, N. 50, 16 December 1992, p. 10. "It is necessary to strengthen the culture of life against the culture of death which is claiming so many victims among our peoples. True progress, one worthy of the human person, is never made by offending the human being. It is urgent to say this to humanity in an unequivocal cry: Let us respect the sacred gift of life! This cry rises with new force from the heart of our people who received the Gospel of Jesus Christ 500 years ago. It is essential to have a clear awareness of the urgency of the ethical dimension for true human progress, safeguarding 'the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology' (*Centesimus annus*, n. 38). It is tragic that people are seeking an economic development which results in drying up the sources of life thus changing it into a culture of death".

⁵² Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, 50.

are yet to be born and have the right to be born. Noting how population control can in no way be a substitute for true development, the Popes affirm the right of all people to profit from the abundant resources of the earth and human intelligence.

61. The Popes cannot subscribe to alarmist views concerning the different world population trends. With the passing of the years the facts show the necessity of *compeletely re-examining this alarminst interpretation*. Ideologies which deny the possibility of teaching people a responsible management of their fertility and which maintain a sense of insecurity and fear, ideologies which base themselves on threatening “want” and/or the destruction of the environment, seem to ignore the diversity and the complexity of the different aspects of demographic realities. These ideologies underestimate not only natural resources, but, above all, the capacity of the human person to exploit these resources more judiciously — beginning with human resources. They underestimate the capacity of the human person to distribute resources better and to provide institutions for *human* society which can be both efficient and respectful of the demands of justice.

Chapter II

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR A PASTORAL POSITION

62. The anxiety of those who always speak about a "world population crisis" *does not seem justified by the diversified trends* actually found among populations in the different countries of the world. This anxiety really expresses a kind of *ideology of fear of the future and mistrust of man*. This security-minded attitude is found in different periods of history under different but basically converging forms. It undermines solidarity between generations and between nations. The Church must guide and help people to reflect upon this ideology which is so often presented by the mass media.

1. The Contribution of the Social Teaching of the Church

63. First of all, the Church forcefully calls attention to the covert appearance of a *new form of poverty*. It is expressed precisely in negative attitudes regarding life and family. These attitudes lead to forgetting solidarity; they drive man back into solitude, they are not sufficiently open to future generations nor are they sensitive enough to what the lack of people involves. These attitudes reveal the worst kind of poverty: *moral poverty*.

64. The positive experiences acquired from past generations risk being compromised, if not partly lost, because

of a lack of persons capable of passing them on. *The transmission of the common patrimony of humanity is in peril.* This patrimony is made up of moral and religious values, cultural assets, the arts, sciences and skills. It can only be transmitted and enriched with the cooperation of new generations. Because the rich but aging societies risk sinking into extreme selfishness, the first to suffer from this impoverishment and decline will be precisely the most defenseless people. Therefore the Church cannot cease to show her preferential, but not exclusive, option for the most vulnerable.⁵³

65. The Church is also aware of the reality of population changes in developing nations. She affirms the vocation of *every person and nation to development.* The inequalities in living conditions, in possessions, in knowledge and professional competence can be remedied. Underdevelopment is not inevitable. Forces can be put into motion which allow each person and country to develop their potentialities and thus overcome underdevelopment. Among others, universal access to knowledge is an absolute priority, so that all people and all nations themselves find a satisfactory solution to the basic problems of subsistence and development, within the framework of international solidarity.⁵⁴

66. With regard to demographic realities, the search for a truly human response is clarified by the Church's teaching

⁵³ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus annus*, 38-40, 49, 51; AAS 83 (1991), pp. 840-843, 854-857.

⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.* 32-34; AAS 83 (1991), pp. 832-836.

on the common good, on what is surplus and on the universal destination of goods.⁵⁵ Seeing the universal common good as requiring effective solidarity among peoples could guide the efforts of each to the benefit of all. No one — whether individual or nation — is justified in putting his particular good over the demands of the *common good* of the human family.

67. The Church also teaches that justice requires that the most favoured should share their *surplus goods* with those who lack the necessities of life.⁵⁶

68. In its teaching on the *universal destination of goods*, the Church recalls that, according to the Creator's plan, the whole of humanity's goods — spiritual and intellectual included — are at the disposal of the human community, both present and future, and each generation should act as its responsible stewards.⁵⁷

69. The *principle of subsidiarity* also applies to the demographic domain. As recent Popes have indicated, the Church recognizes a right of public authorities, within the limit of their competence, to intervene regarding population matters, but she also affirms that in this area the State is not to arro-

⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.* 30; AAS 83 (1991), pp. 830, 831.

⁵⁶ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, 69; Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 28, 31; AAS 80 (1988), pp. 548-550, 553-556; *Centesimus annus*, 58; AAS 83 (1991), pp. 863, 864.

⁵⁷ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus annus*, 31; AAS 83 (1991), pp. 831, 832.

gate to itself the responsibilities of which couples ought not to be deprived. All the more so, the State cannot use extortion, coercion or violence to make couples submit to its directives in this matter.⁵⁸ Whether it is concealed or obvious, any type of authoritarian demographic policy is unacceptable. On the contrary, the duty of the State is to protect the family and the freedom of couples, to guarantee the life of the innocent, and to see that the woman is respected, especially in her dignity as a mother.⁵⁹ To carry out these basic tasks, the State and public authorities in general must establish essential policies, notably in the areas of finance and education.

70. This same principle of subsidiarity applies equally to *public international institutions*. Nothing can justify their pressuring states or national communities to impose policies incompatible with respect for persons, families or national independence. These institutions were born out of a desire to bring together freely the efforts of all nations for a more just society. Therefore they must respect the legitimate sovereignty of nations as well as the just autonomy of couples. It follows that these institutions would go beyond their competence if they were to encourage states to adopt population

⁵⁸ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Address to Dr. Rafael M. Salas, Secretary General of the International Conference on Population 1984 and Executive Director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities*, 2; *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII. 1, 1984, pp. 1626-1628; and see above 45-49, 51, 54, 55, 57, 58.

⁵⁹ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus annus*, 39, 47, 49; AAS 83 (1991), pp. 841-843, 851, 852, 854-856.

policies which they themselves define and if they were to apply pressure so that these policies might be more easily carried out.

71. Care must also be taken lest these institutions serve powerful nations. There is the risk of arousing suspicion among poor nations that certain nations might be seeking to exercise power on a worldwide level, through the methods which these institutions use. Therefore the Church reaffirms that international solidarity is a duty and that aid for the world's poor is an obligation of justice for the rich. The Church also affirms that it would be scandalous to link the granting of this aid with immoral conditions involving the control of human life. She again affirms that it would be a *grave abuse of intellectual, moral and political power* to present anti-childbearing campaigns — sometimes associated with moral or physical violence — as the most appropriate expressions of aid by rich populations to disadvantaged ones.⁶⁰

72. Similar warnings apply to *private international institutions*. These should not make the particular interests of private groups prevail over the inalienable rights of every human being to life, physical integrity, education, personal

⁶⁰ One may also cite again the message sent to the United Nations Organization by the Bishops of Latin America (see above 59): "We are aware of the population problem existing in some of our countries, but it is not licit to deal with that problem by using methods which are unethical. No one can accept the systematic anti-childbearing campaigns organized by international institutions or by governments, many times accompanied by pressure, which are against the cultural and religious identity of our nations".

freedom, and the right of all peoples to autonomy and to human development in solidarity.

2. For Life and the Family

73. Two other ethical principles must be recalled, because the Church begins with these when she speaks out on population trends. The first is concerned with *the sacred nature of human life and the responsibility of couples for the transmission of life*. Created in the image and likeness of God, the origin of all life, men and women are called to be partners with the Creator in transmitting the sacred gift of human life. Within the communion of life and love which is marriage, they form the family which is the basic cell of society.⁶¹ It is not in conformity with God's design that couples should neutralize or destroy their fertility by artificial contraception or sterilization, and still less that they have recourse to abortion to kill their offspring before birth.⁶² A truly responsible fatherhood and motherhood begins with the couple's responsibility before the Author and Lord of Life. Such fatherhood and motherhood is based upon generosity within marriage and the respect of the unborn child's right to life.

74. The second principle regards the *inherent right of parenthood*. In the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, the Church

⁶¹Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, 11, 14, 28; AAS 74 (1982), pp. 91-93, 96, 97, 114.

⁶² Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, 51; Pope PAUL VI, *Humanae vitae*, 12-14; AAS 60 (1968), pp. 488-491; Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, 29-31; AAS 74 (1982), pp. 114-120.

affirms: "The spouses have the inalienable right to found a family and to decide on the spacing of births and the number of children to be born, taking into full consideration their duties towards themselves, their children already born, the family and society, in a just hierarchy of values and in accordance with the objective moral order which excludes recourse to contraception, sterilization and abortion".⁶³

75. For this reason, in the measure in which international agencies use coercion or deceit, they violate not only *the rights of men and women as individuals*, but also *the rights of the family*. Moreover, the *Charter of the Rights of the Family* affirms: "a) The activities of public authorities and private organizations which attempt in any way to limit the freedom of couples in deciding about their children constitute a grave offence against human dignity and justice; b) In international relations, economic aid for the advancement of peoples must not be conditioned on acceptance of programmes of contraception, sterilization and abortion; c) The family has a right to assistance by society in the bearing and rearing of children. Those married couples who have a large family have a right to adequate aid and should not be subjected to discrimination".⁶⁴

More precisely, however morally licit the population policies which they pursue may be, governments have no

⁶³ HOLY SEE, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, 22 October 1983, Article 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 3 a), b), c). A Charter of Family Rights published by the United Nations would be useful.

right to decide for couples the number of children they can or should have. Only the discovery of the inherent value of the human person, of marriage and of the family can encourage people to be receptive to children in view of the world of the future.

3. Responsible Choice

76. Free to choose the number of children they desire, the couple must be equally free to use natural methods for the responsible regulation of their fertility, for serious reasons and in conformity with the teaching of the Church. These various methods deserve to be known and spread widely.⁶⁵ Couples must be offered *the means* to freely exercise their responsible motherhood and fatherhood. The artificial methods of birth control as well as sterilization do not respect the human person of a woman and man because they eliminate or impede fertility which is an integral part of the person.

This is why in his *Letter to Families* for the International Year of the Family in 1994, the Holy Father John Paul II,

⁶⁵ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, 35; AAS 74 (1982), pp. 125, 126; and see the *Final Declaration of the Meeting on the Natural Methods of Regulating Fertility*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, N. 2, 12 January 1993, pp. 7, 8. The experts attending this meeting said: "The natural methods are easy to teach and understand. They can be used in any social context and do not require literacy. The health of mothers and infants is furthered through spacing childbirth in a natural way which harms neither the mother nor her baby. Natural methods do not harm the health of couples. The freedom and rights of the wife and husband are respected through these methods which center around the woman and are based on the integrity of her body".

explained the couple's responsible motherhood and fatherhood: "*They then experienced a moment of special responsibility, which is also the result of the procreative potential linked to the conjugal act. At that moment, the spouses can become father and mother, initiating the process of a new human life, which will then develop in the woman's womb. If the wife is the first to realize that she has become a mother, the husband, to whom she has been united in 'one flesh', then learns this when she tells him that he has become a father. Both are responsible for their potential and later actual fatherhood and motherhood*".⁶⁶

Chapter III

GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

77. Much of the information published about demographic facts is open to question and is erroneous at times. Confronted by the caution this information requires and the moral inadmissibility of population control programmes, the Church cannot remain silent or passive. She does not limit herself merely to stating principles about these abuses. Rather, she responds in a practical and positive way in accord with her mission of service to the family, the "sanctuary of life". *Christians must first of all promote the truth, especially*

⁶⁶ Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, 2 February 1994, 12, and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 2366-2379.

when it is *concealed* by widely disseminated, but groundless, clichés.

78. All are called to be vigilant about practices which do not respect *the human person*. In each concrete situation, how is the subject of the *environment* used to justify coercive population control? What about *family policy*? Does this policy assure true *freedom for couples*? Does anyone *denounce* cases where public or private international or national organizations violate the rights of individuals or the family under the pretext of fallacious “population imperatives”? To what extent do international organizations put *pressure* on nations to influence them to subscribe to demographic “containment” policies, incompatible with the just sovereignty of nations?

79. Without question, there are certain necessary *priorities*. The following require rapid action:

— many attempts on the part of the “population crisis ideology” to influence international agencies and governments;

— invoking so-called new “women’s rights” while underestimating the woman’s vocation to give life;

— invoking environmental questions in an excessive or improper way to justify coercive population control;

— attempts to spread abortifacient products such as RU486 in the developed countries and, above all, in poor countries;

— spreading sterilization everywhere;

— making devices against life such as the intra-uterine device (IUD) commonplace and distributing them;

— violations of the absolute and inalienable rights of individuals and families;

— and more generally: the abuse of moral, intellectual and political power.

Moreover, the Church recalls the necessity of priority action when confronted by disastrous practices — challenges to life such as drugs, pornography, violence, etc.

1. Correct Knowledge of Realities

80. Christians and all people of good will should *be informed* so as to understand how populations differ in conditions and evolution. They should develop a *critical spirit* regarding the “population crisis ideology”. In the face of constant hammering by the media, which is used by many movements in favor of coercive population control, Christians and all people of good will are urged to become aware of the fact that the tactics employed always make use of simplistic economic and demographic information and approximate, that is, inexact, projections.⁶⁷

81. The Church vigorously encourages *the relevant experts*, especially demographers, economists and political experts, to

⁶⁷ This information is often provisional. Therefore, it must be verified and kept up to date, taking into account the diversity of the current situations in different countries and regions. One must also be aware of the inaccuracy of demographic projections which tolerate, for example, an imprecision of 660 million inhabitants in the world population projections for the next twenty years.

carry out deeper scientific research on demographic realities. All associations and organizations committed to respect for the human person and the family must *make provision for a correct knowledge of facts and demographic diversity* in their reflection and activities. They should provide a reasoned rejection of the ideology which is expressed as a fear of life and the future. This task also involves organizations working for justice and peace in solidarity.

On their part, all educational institutions are asked to include systematic and critical reflection on demographic realities in their programme. All these efforts should be crowned with the resolve to provide objective information for opinion makers and the mass media, as well as public opinion.

2. Family Policy

82. Every governing authority, whether national, regional or local, owes it to itself to have a family policy which enables families freely to assume their responsibilities in contemporary society and in the chain which links the generations. These family policies must deploy various means for regulating work, adapting taxation, providing access to housing and education, etc.

Furthermore, *family politics* should include the struggle against “contraceptive imperialism” which the Delegation of the Holy See already denounced in 1974 during the International Conference on Population held in Bucharest. This “contraceptive imperialism”, which violates the religious and cultural traditions of family life, does violence to the freedom

of persons and couples and, through them, harms families and nations.

83. Associations and organizations — national or international, public or private — also have their responsibilities to promote a just family policy. In the interest of the expansion of interdependent human communities, family politics are indispensable to allow those basic cells, the families, to contribute to the development of the whole human community. The agents and protagonists of true family politics are not only the politicians and legislators, but in a special way, parents and families themselves.⁶⁸

3. Justice for Women

84. The Church also recommends the setting up of policies which assure respect of the *woman's specifically human character as a person, as a wife and as a mother*. Women are the first to suffer psychologically and physically from campaigns inspired by the ideology of population fear. In these campaigns a false concept of the woman's "reproductive health" is used to promote different methods of contraception or abortion. These methods not only can suppress the unborn child's life, but also have grave repercussions on women's health, even risking their lives.

This ideology of population fear puts the blame on the woman for being a mother, concealing the fact that *through*

⁶⁸ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, 47, 48; AAS 74 (1982), pp. 139, 140.

this maternal dimension she makes her essential and irreplaceable contribution to society. The quality of a society is expressed in the respect it shows with regard to the woman. A society which shows contempt for welcoming the child and human life, holds the woman in contempt. For this reason everything must be done to help women fulfill their responsibilities and reconcile their family, professional, associative and social duties as they see fit. This is possible only if in practice the equal dignity of man and woman is recognized. In particular, women must be able to express themselves and set up movements which help them take their place in society and make it better recognized.⁶⁹

4. No Possible Compromise

85. It so happens that organizations favourable to controlling population by illicit means deliberately *compromise* Christians in their activities. Thus, Christians may be invited to take part in projects or programmes of action with rather general objectives, such as development or environment, while, in fact, the real aim of these initiatives is to promote the ideology of the fear of life (anti-life mentality) and to involve Christians by leading them into "mismatched partnerships".⁷⁰ Christians must prove themselves to be watchful, prudent and courageous. They should be ready to bear wit-

⁶⁹ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem exercens*, 19; AAS 73 (1981), p. 625; *Familiaris consortio*, 22-24; AAS 74 (1982) pp. 106-110; Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 19, 30; AAS 80 (1988), pp. 1693-1697, 1724-1727.

⁷⁰ Cf. 2 *Corinthians* 6: 14.

ness, even if necessary by martyrdom, to the worth of each person in God's eyes.⁷¹

Pastoral letters could help the faithful discern the moral problems raised in this context by population trends as well as helping them organize appropriate action.

⁷¹ Cf. Pope JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor* (6 August 1993), 90-94; *AAS* 85 (1993), pp. 1205-1208.

CONCLUSION

1. Development, Resources and Populations

86. The diversity and complexity of the population trends of the different peoples of the earth cannot be summed up in catchy but superficial formulas, as is so often the case. Furthermore, the growth-rate of population (an *average* which by its very nature does not take into account the variety of situations) *is decreasing* after having reached a maximum between 1965-1970. On the other hand, taking into account all the populations of different countries, the average projections of specialist organizations for the twenty-first century refer to an increase three times inferior to that verified during the twentieth century. All this indicates that *the world's potentialities are largely sufficient* to satisfy humanity's needs. As Pope John Paul II forcefully emphasized: "Indeed, besides the earth, man's principal resource is *man himself*. His intelligence enables him to discover the earth's productive potential and the many different ways in which human needs can be satisfied".⁷² The Holy Father specifies and summarizes his thought: "Man... is God's gift to man".⁷³ Therefore, it is man's duty to be a responsible and inventive steward of the goods which the Creator has placed at his disposal.

87. In her teaching, the Church takes into consideration the fact of population trends. However, she is challenged by

⁷² Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus annus*, 32; AAS 83 (1991), p. 833.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 38; AAS 83 (1991), p. 841.

campaigns which create a fear for the future. Those promoting these campaigns have not understood the logic of long-term demographic mechanisms, and notably what population science calls the “demographic transition”.⁷⁴ Confronted by these campaigns, the Church is above all deeply concerned about promoting justice for the weakest. Certain groups encourage coercive population control by contraception, sterilization and even abortion. They believe that they see in these practices “the solution” to problems raised by the different forms of underdevelopment. When this recommendation comes from prosperous nations, it seems to express *a refusal on the part of the rich to face the true causes of underdevelopment*. Even more, the methods promoted to reduce births cause more damaging effects than the evils which they claim to remedy. This damage is seen particularly at the level of human rights and family rights.

2. Solidarity with the Family

88. Only when the rights of the family are recognized and promoted can there exist an authentic development which respects women and children and gives attention to the rich diversity of cultures. In the context of this authentic human development, there is a fundamental moral truth which cannot be changed either by laws or population policies, whether these be evident or hidden. This fundamental truth is that *human life must be respected from conception until*

⁷⁴ Cf. above 5.

natural death. The quality of a society is not only shown by the respect it has for the woman. Its quality is also shown by the respect or contempt a society has for life and human dignity.

In *Centesimus annus*, Pope John Paul II specifies that respect for life must be upheld in the *family*. It is necessary to see “the family as the *sanctuary of life*. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life”.⁷⁵

89. In discovering the family as the “*sanctuary of life*” and the “*heart of the culture of life*”, men and women can be freed from the “culture of death”. This latter culture begins with the “*anti-baby mentality*”, so widely developed in the ideology of coercive population control. In each child, couples and society must recognize a gift coming to them from the Creator, a precious gift which must be loved and welcomed with joy.⁷⁶

Together with efforts aimed at establishing family policies, the inherent value of each child as a human being must be proclaimed. In the face of population trends, everyone is invited to put to good use the talents given by the Creator to realize personal development and to contribute in an original

⁷⁵ Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus annus*, 39; AAS 83 (1991), p. 842.

⁷⁶ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, 50.

way to the development of the community. In the final analysis, God created man only to make him a partner in his plan of life and love.

The words of the Holy Father, Paul VI, cited above, must continue to challenge those responsible for the nations of the world: "... You must strive to multiply bread so that it suffices for the tables of mankind, and not rather favour an artificial control of birth, which would be irrational, in order to diminish the number of guests at the banquet of life".⁷⁷

Vatican City, March 25, 1994

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⁷⁷ Pope PAUL VI, *Address to the United Nations Assembly*, 6; AAS 57 (1965), p. 883.

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