*Franz Böckle*
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# *Poverty and Demographic Trends in the Third World*

*Published by the*
*German Bishops' Conference*
*Research Group on the*
*Universal Tasks of the Church*

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# Notes on the publisher and the authors

## *The publisher*

The Research Group was appointed by the Commission for the Universal Tasks of the Church of the German Bishops' Conference. It consists of professors from various disciplines who carry out scientific studies of the global responsibilities of the church in Germany.

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# Introduction

In recent years population growth in the "Third World" has come to be recognized as one of the greatest challenges facing mankind in its attempt to enable the nations of the earth to continue to live together in conditions worthy of human dignity. Population growth confronts many "Third World" countries with humanitarian and socio-economic problems which they are hardly capable of solving. They relate especially to social security, the fight against hunger, and economic development. This trend affects us in the Western world, too. It is not only a problem of economic cooperation but also of our moral responsibility, for the ecological consequences of population growth are now of more direct concern to us than ever before.

The political assessment of these issues presupposes accurate information about the situation, the expected trends, as well as the causes and consequences of population growth. That is the purpose of this brochure. The first chapter will present in particular our statistical information. The second will examine the human right of procreation in terms of actual social conditions as they affect society as a whole and the individual. The incongruity of the right of procreation and its consequences is obvious. The main problem is the fact that children begotten in conditions of poverty are in many cases the sole safeguard against destitution. To reduce the number of children without removing the causes of people's desire to have a large family would be to deprive the poor of their only hope. At the same time, the "blessing of children" becomes a problem for society as a whole. Thus freedom to procreate is a large extent restricted by the prevailing conditions and falls within the realm of population policy. This central problem, which affects the people in all developing countries and the solution of which is vital to the poorest among them, must be given priority. The solution, in a nutshell, is: *fewer people through less poverty, not less poverty through fewer people.*

The third chapter deals with the question of responsibility and the political strategies and ethical individual decisions which this situation demands. Both developing and industrial countries are affected and are called upon to find remedies together, but the rich countries have a special role to play on account of their historical responsibility and their resources. As a solution to the menacing problem of poverty comes closer, the people in developing countries will have a responsibility to adapt their procreative behaviour to the new conditions. That is why family planning has been left until last. Its encouragement should be seen by the economically rich civilisations as a means not of containing the population explosion but of helping the nations concerned to enjoy a new freedom once the scourge of poverty has been removed.

# 1. The subject

## 1.1 Developing countries

We have grown accustomed to seeing the world through European eyes. Even the terms we use in discussing this subject reveal the problem. When we speak of "developing" countries do we not have in mind our own ideas of what development should lead to? Or when we speak of the "Third World" are we not presuming ourselves to be the "First World"?[1] The fundamental dilemma cannot be solved in this paper but it must be mentioned. We therefore beg the reader's indulgence for continuing to use the terms "developing country" and "Third World".[2]

They are not only Eurocentric but an inadmissible simplification. There is no such thing as *"the* Third World" or *"the* developing countries". We use these catchwords to describe very poor and relatively wealthy countries (judged by average per capita incomes)[3], agricultural countries and those in the process of industrialization ("threshold countries"), as well as heavily and moderately indebted countries. There are also very considerable differences between these countries as regards other factors, such as the development of productive forces, population growth, and political stability.

Since the following is not a survey of the "Third World" but rather an analysis of population growth, this enumeration of heterogeneous structural criteria can serve as a guide. However, it has to be clear that any global statement on "the" development policy or "the" population trend in the "Third World" is an abstraction which has to be adapted to the situation in the country concerned. On the other hand, some developments are common to most "Third World" countries, though in differing degrees. One such common development is rapid population growth.

Development means not only industrial growth but essentially improvements in living standards in the sense of providing more humane conditions, i. e. meeting basic needs regarding private consumption (sufficient food, housing and clothing) as well providing vital community services (hospitals and schools, drinking water and sanitary facilities) and other requirements, especially freedom, participation, the right to work, social security, information, rest and recreation. This definition of living standards shows that the concept of development has interacting social, political and economic dimensions.

## 1.2 Population trend: statistics[4]

In the early millennia the human race needed over 1,000 years to double its size. Developments in modern Europe have reduced that time factor drastically. Between 1650 and 1750 it fell to about 170 years. During this century the population "explosion" has become a global problem. In 1970 the time it took for the world's population to double was down to only 35 years.

The absolute figures are as follows:

| Year | Population |
|---|---|
| At about Christ's birth | approx. 0.3 bill. |
| 1650 | approx. 0.5 bill. |
| 1750 | approx. 0.8 bill. |
| 1850 | approx. 1.3 bill. |
| 1900 | approx. 1.65 bill. |
| 1950 | 2.5 bill. |
| 1960 | 3.0 bill. |
| 1970 | 3.7 bill. |
| 1980 | 4.4 bill. |
| 1988 | 5.2 bill. |
| 2000 | 6.25 bill. (?) |
| 2025 | 8.5–10 bill. (?) |
| 2125 | 10–14 bill. (?) |

Global population growth since the 50s is largely due to changes in the developing countries. It is gauged by the rate of increase[5], which in Europe between 1650 and 1950 averaged 0.5 %, in the developing countries in 1950 around 2 %, rising to its highest level of 2.4 % in 1965. Today it is back to 2 % or so in the developing countries, 0.3 % in Europe. We get a vivid picture if we consider the following: An annual growth of 3 % means that in the space of 70 years the population increases eight times over, whereas with an annual rate of 1 % during the same period it "merely" doubles. Expressed in absolute figures, this trend translates into an increase in the world's population of 90 million in 1988, with over 90 % of that growth being accounted for by the developing countries. And to illustrate this figure as well: A growth of 90 million people a year means about 250,000 births a day, over 10 000 an hour, or an increase equivalent to the population of the Federal Republic of Germany in a good seven months. And yet another comparison: At the moment mankind is increasing at the rate of a million in about twelve years. This trend will continue since those who will

reach procreative age in the years ahead are already born, so that the proportion of people living in the "Third World" will probably grow from about 75 % today to over 80 % in the year 2000.
A forecast of the future birth rate presupposes information about the development of the two major determinants of population growth, fertility and mortality. The conclusions from a global point of view are:[6]

1. Fertility is declining in spite of the fact that it is on average still very high in the developing countries. It has decreased significantly in some Asian and Latin American countries in particular, but not in the sub-Saharan countries of Africa. The average rate of over four children per woman in Latin America and Asia and over six in Africa is still well above the European average of about two.

2. The mortality rate has slowed down everywhere, but as it gradually levels off it will have less influence on population growth than in the 50s and 60s.[7] Infant mortality in the "Third World", however, is still much greater than hitherto assumed.

These trends form the basis of the forecast of a world population of over 6 billion at the turn of the millennium, the global growth rate being 1.8 %. Depending on developments, the 10-billion mark will be reached between 2025 and 2125, with the population of the present developed countries increasing only from 1.2 to 1.4 billion, while that of today's developing countries will swell from 3.6 to 8.4 billion. According to the most recent United Nations projections, the trend will not become stable until the world's population numbers at least 14 billion, if all birth control measures prove ineffective.
Here are some examples to illustrate population growth: In the year 2050 India, the most populous nation on earth, will probably have a population of 1.7 billion, thus larger than that of all the industrial countries together. Bangladesh (an area about the combined size of the south German states of Bavaria, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and the Saarland) will probably have a population of 450 million in 2150 – 15 times greater than that of these German regions together. Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zaïre and Kenya, some of the most densely populated countries of Africa, can expect to have populations of 620, 230, 170 and 150 million respectively in that year. And finally, 50 % of the world's population will be in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia (today the poorest countries with the highest rate of population growth), compared with the present figure of already 30 %.
There are also many uncertain factors. Two of them, the consequences of which could spell bad news and would adjust birth rates downwards, are the ecological situation and Aids. If the process of steppe formation and desertification continues at the present rate it could reduce the food base to such an

extent that famine would decimate the population. In the case of Africa, for instance, it is feared that in coming years many millions might die of famine (today already about 40,000 children a day in developing countries are dying of hunger or malnutrition). Aids is even more difficult to estimate. If it is true that one third of Tanzania's population, as its President maintained in June 1989, are suffering from Aids and this could be taken as a yardstick, population growth will slump drastically if this illness remains incurable. After all, we know far too little about the possible self-regulatory mechanismus, so that the projections which extend beyond 2000, even into the 22nd century, are extremely speculative.

## 1.3 Population structure: qualitative change

Rapid population growth also alters the age structure. In the developing countries it is relatively "young".[9] About 40 % of the population are 15 or younger as a consequence of high fertility and retrogressive infant mortality in the "Third World". In countries like Kenya, where the birth rate has decreased only slightly or not at all, over half of the population are under 15, compared with 20–25 % in "developed" countries. This age structure implies a continuing high birth rate for developing countries since a large proportion of the population are of procreative age.[10]

Another consequence of this age structure is that in the next two decades ever more young people will reach working age. In countries where the birth rate began to decline in the mid-60s, growth of manpower reserves has started to level out for the first time, but the absolute number of new additions to the workforce will keep on increasing into the next century. The other age groups, too, will increase faster in the developing than in the developed countries. The over 65s, for instance, will almost double by the year 2000. This shows the urgent need for a system of old-age security that is not contingent upon family size.

A further characteristic of population growth in the "Third World" is urbanization. It is interpreted differently from country to country and therefore lends itself to only very limited comparison. Subject to this reservation, it can be said that in 1980 about two thirds of the population of Latin America lived in the towns and cities (a proportion which in the present "developed" countries was not reached until 1950). This will increase to three quarters in the year 2000.[11] By comparison, the poor countries of Asia and Africa, with an urban population of 25 %, are still mainly rural.

Another point is that more and more of the world's largest cities are to be found in developing countries. Between 1950 and 1980 the porportion of their population living in cities with more than 5 million inhabitants increased from

2 % to 14 %. The World Bank sees the average urban population of all developing countries rising from 22.2 % in 1950 to 35.4 % in 1980 and 43.3 % in 2000, based on an average annual population growth of 3.5 % in urban and 1.1 % in rural areas. Urban populations are increasing at twice the rate of the total population.[12] In towns and cities the proportion of the population of procreative age is very high, due the large number of migrants from rural areas (the majority of the estimated 330 million migrants from the land are between 15 and 29[13]). A regional comparison shows that Latin America has the greatest urban concentration. The concept of "urbanization" requires a differentiated assessment since the problems stem partly from the process of "metropolization". It would therefore seem necessary to ease the burden on the regional metropolises through a systematic process of urbanization. One of the key problems in this respect is that of dismantling the centuries-old clan structures which have served as a means of providing social security. Poverty's self-eruption is raised to a higher power. This is further evidence of the great responsibility which falls to "Third World" governments.

# 2. Freedom

## 2.1 Ethical considerations: the human right of procreation

The statistical data form the basis for all other considerations. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from them is that population growth should be curbed. However, there has to be an ethical discussion of policy measures in view of the fundamental human right of procreation. This right was solemnly proclaimed at the international conference on human rights held in Tehran in 1968. It was defined as the right to decide freely and responsibly on the basis of reliable information the number of children and the intervals between their births.[14] That right has meanwhile been confirmed on several occasions.[15] On the other hand, policy criteria and measures are indispensable means of safeguarding that freedom in the light of the constraints imposed by society. This became widely accepted during the 1974 world population conference in Bucharest at the latest. The freedom of decision is tied to social and economic behavioural patterns and thus clearly restricted. Claiming that freedom without taking this into account is meaningless. These conditions are the subject of the following deliberations.

## 2.2 The social conditions of freedom

### *2.2.1 Theory of "demographic change"*

A glance at our own history shows that the individual's right of procreation cannot be exercised regardless of social conditions. They include the constraints of marriage or "control of generative behaviour, which is almost a public affair in rural communities and these days hardly conceivable".[16]

Moreover, procreation is closely connected with population trends in the community as a whole, which is described by the theory of "demographic change". It starts from the assumption that in a demographically balanced society births only slightly exceed deaths, so that the population increases or decreases only slightly or remains constant. In traditional societies the birth rate and the mortality rate are high: if many children die very many must be begotten so that at least some survive. This balance was upset in early modern Europe, as it has been in today's developing countries, chiefly as a result of a declining mortality rate. This happened in Europe as a result of the medical and hygienic revolution. Falling mortality rates and the consistently high birth rates translated into rapid population growth in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the developing countries, too, medical progress (vaccination, medical care for babies and pregnant women) has drastically reduced infant and maternal mortality.

Europe has been spared famine on a large scale, though it has suffered considerable loss of life as a result of wars and epidemics. Bairoch pointed out that as early as the turn of the 17th century, that is to say before the steam age and before the use of chemicals in farming, a major agricultural transformation had taken place in Western Europe which boosted production considerably. He said it was largely due to the elimination of fallow land, the introduction of new field crops, improvements in traditional implements and the advent of new equipment, as well as the wider use of draught animals.[17] This simple technical advancement would not have been possible without political and institutional change, without adjustments to farming law and agricultural organization (e. g. the abolition of the compulsory system of communal farming).[18] Thus one can speak of a socio-technical transformation in agriculture which created a food, labour and capital basis for the subsequent industrial revolution, which in turn modernized farming further still. This process was also greatly facilitated by the fact that Europe's industrial nations were able to exploit the resources of their colonies in developing the continent's industries.

Increased farm production quickly expanded national food capacities, while industrial progress created jobs and purchasing power for agricultural products. Even in Europe this development did not progress evenly – think of the unequal distribution of income, the pauperization which evoked Karl Marx's

criticism of capitalism, and the problems of rural exodus and sometimes large-scale emigration – but in the long term it brought prosperity for large sections of the population and a change in generative behaviour in line with the theory of "demographic change", that is to say, birth and mortality rates evened out at a relatively low level. The development of forms of non-family-based social security had a similar effect.

The corresponding processes in the "Third World" took a different course. There, no farming-led development took place and adaption to new circumstances is a slow process. There is no global economic system working predominantly in favour of the developing countries. Nor has there been an industrial revolution in the "Third World". "The population explosion took place without being preceded by an agricultural revolution which provided the food and capital (income) base, without a European-style labour-intensive industrial revolution having created jobs for millions and millions of people".[19] The developing countries have been thrown off balance demographically, not so much by internal social change as by the export and expansion of Western culture.

However, the "faults" in this demographic change are also largely due to a domestic problem. In the developing countries the people are often slow to realize that the general conditions for procreative behaviour have changed. In particular, a decline in the infant mortality rate in many cases does not cause a rapid reduction in the birth rate. There is either no adaptation at all to the changed conditions or it is very slow.

### *2.2.2 Children: insurance against poverty*

If we examine the specific reasons for the current high surplus of births we find a complex network of causes, but there is one which in the opinion of most experts is the key problem: poverty. It is quite simple. In a society that has hardly any social welfare, that is to say, no health, old-age, invalidity or unemployment insurance, children are the only safeguard, the only "insurance" against life's hardships. Empirical studies show that if poverty is related to per-capita incomes and the phenomenon of poverty is viewed in terms of society as a whole there is a connection between low per-capita income and high fertility.[20] Of statistical significance is the fact that there is a negative correlation between the per-capita income of the poorest 40 % of the population and the birth rate. This quickly escalates the problem. The increasing poverty of the masses also leads to an increase in the population, who are constantly guarding against ever more poverty by begetting ever more children. The outcome is not more security but more poverty, which the people try to offset by having yet more children, and so the vicious circle continues. In many developing countries there is no or extremely little transition to a new demographic balance. In

the conditions described above the people are, from a subjective point of view, acting rationally in accordance with their circumstances. But decisions which are subjectively correct can, as the interaction of poverty and number of children shows, be fatal for the overall system and, from an objective point of view, futile.
In addition, children contribute to the family income from a young age, either directly (wages, help on the family farm, through informal work) or indirectly (by helping parents run the household). True, parents have to meet the cost of raising their children and also have to take into account the mother's loss of earning power, but such losses are partly offset by the children later on. Since poverty not only has a material dimension but also manifests itself in a person's feeling of worthlessness and helplessness, this too can be a powerful incentive to have many offspring. Children are all poor people possess and give them a feeling of self-esteem.
Thus a new demographic balance presupposes the removal of mass poverty. Steps to control poverty have a strong political component. It is also necessary to remember that poverty consists of many interdependent factors, the composition of which differs from system to system. Hence it has to be considered in all its "varieties", for instance lack of food, the non-availability of health services, inadequate education, an existence on the fringe of society. Combating poverty is not merely an instrument of population policy but an objective of development policy in itself, for it is now realized that straight-forward family planning is not sufficient, that the individual has to be helped to develop his entire personality, and that this places special emphasis on the "basic needs" strategy (cf. paragraph 8 of the declaration adopted at the world population conference in Mexico).
Taking account of the theory of demographic change, it can be said with regard to strategies for modifying generative behaviour that real change only occurs if the whole system changes. In particular, population and economy must be regarded as two sides of the one integral social process.[21] A population policy that does not make allowance for these interrelationships and is based solely on family planning in the narrower sense is bound to fail.

### *2.2.3 Children: more than a means of survival*

The complex structure of population growth supplies many more reasons other than poverty for the continuously high birth rate. One in particular is the situation of women. Their generally low level of education leaves them few alternatives outside marriage and children. According to empirical surveys, fertility is highest among those women who have had less than four years' schooling.[22] This brief education leaves most young females with little opportunity to develop any interests outside the family, with the result that their life

centres on child-bearing and rearing. But many women also see themselves compelled on account of their economic dependence (which is again the outcome of poor opportunities for work and low social standing) to have a lot of (preferably male) children in case they lose the family's traditional breadwinner.[24] Also, in the developing countries the desire to have children is largely influenced by metaeconomic factors which are governed by cultural as well as traditional values and norms. Thus part of the reason for wanting many children is that large families have considerable social and political influence, or that the husband's and/or wife's standing is judged by the number of children they have produced, often with sons being preferred. In many cases a woman is only considered fit for marriage after her fertility has been proved. In some countries (such as Malaysia) population growth is part of government policy.
Religious beliefs, too, play a role. In many religions children are regarded as proof of God's favour. In the biblical faith childlessness was considered a punishment. The Islamic belief that God will provide for children encourages procreation. This explains why population control policies meet with particular difficulty in Islamic countries. Indigenous African religions teach that children are a divine blessing, a "vital force" which is passed on. A reduction in the number of children is considered a reduction in life itself and is therefore rejected, as is, to a large extent, celibacy.

### *2.2.4 Where's the limit?*

Experts have long been wondering when demographic growth will have reached the point where the earth is no longer able to feed its population. There has been much speculation. Estimates put the population limit between 7.5 and 11.4 billion, depending on the per-capita calorie consumption rate selected as the basis of calculation. These figures relate to 3.75 billion acres of farmland. This is slightly more than the amount of land actually being used for agricultural purposes (3.5 billion acres) but much less than the 8.5 billion acres considered to be the maximum possible.[25] So to this extent there is still a certain amount of scope. Experts say food production can also be boosted by raising productivity per unit of area.
Although these estimates sound optimistic, there are two points to remember. One is that supply and demand can be balanced on a global but not on a country basis. Since it is possible to raise production above all in industrial countries, this would make the developing countries increasingly dependent upon the "First" World for their food, with all the consequences this would entail.[26] The other is that exhausting the world's food capacities would place such a huge ecological burden on the earth that it would not seem possible to maintaine those capacities in the long term.[27] There would also be other burdens

resulting from products which mankind requires in addition to food: energy, water, clothing and living space, to name only a few of the basic needs. There is also the threat of ecological problems of hitherto unknown dimensions outside the agricultural sector which can place an even graeter strain on the earth's ability to accommodate its population than has been supposed to date. They can only be solved through the joint efforts of the industrial and developing countries.

# 3. Responsibility

## 3.1 Responsibility on moral grounds

The main criterion for all decisions to influence the population trend both quantitatively and qualitatively must be to enable man to fulfil his individual and social needs in dignity and freedom to the fullest possible extent. Optimum population movement is a process which always relates to the individual and mankind in a holistic sense. It is not merely an economic factor but has a personal quality as well. It does not derive from itself, either from the mere balancing out of actual behaviour or as a fate imposed on the individual from outside or from "above" without any demand on his freedom. It is rather the fulfilment of the individual finding his personality in freedom by dint of reason.

Deliberations so far have revealed how population growth and generative behaviour are bound up in a social and cultural framework and personal motivation structures. Accordingly, responsibility presupposes cooperation between different partners: those responsible for establishing the general conditions, and parents with their personal responsibility. It is a question of changing the external as well as the internal conditions. The external aspects are principally the responsibility of the developed countries, not only because they should share their wealth with the poorer countries on moral grounds but because they have a debt to these nations deriving from the history of their economic expansion. The internal aspects concern the power structure within the country concerned. Often there is an exceedingly wealthy elite whose debt is no less great. After all, measures designed to control population growth will only succed if the developing countries themselves join in the effort so that it becomes a common responsibility. If the individual is to

assume responsibility he must have access to adequate information. This requirement was already postulated at the 1968 conference on world population in Tehran. Such information must present the individual with the facts of his situation, show him what he can do to change it, and make him aware of the social and ethical motives and thus of his responsibility.

## 3.2 Political strategies

### *3.2.1 Changes in economic relations*

One serious problem concerns the unequal system of trade between industrial and developing countries. The system is distorted in many respects and this led to a debate on a new, more equitable international economic order. The "preference for the poor" accepted by the Catholic Church applies not only in the individual but in the international context. We cannot here embark on an intensive discussion of economic problems, although they are of primary importance where it is a question of combating poverty, nor of political power or our fear of losing what we possess, but we can touch on a few aspects of our responsibility. We must use our technological achievements for the benefit ot the whole world. However, an indiscriminate transfer of technology could prove extremely problematical in terms of reducing poverty. Hence our research efforts should concentrate more on meeting the needs of societies at different levels of socio-economic development.
Basically, we have to achieve a number of interrelated aims, that is to say, to boost production whilst keeping employment and incomes at the highest possible level and at the same time nursing natural resources. In this context research into traditional methods with a view to their further development could prove quite effective. But if such technology is to be of any use at all as an instrument in the fight against poverty the poor must have better access to productive resources, such as land and water, but also education and markets. In this respect, as with distribution problems, political and institutional change is normally required, such as agricultural reform or the modification of deficitary market systems; support for the development of a relatively simple infrastructure and employment-oriented industries in the underdeveloped countries; the economic use of natural resources and new materials in the industrial countries; the opening of international markets for products from developing countries through renunciation of protectionism by the highly developed nations; the provision of personnel on a large scale to help build up educational and training systems in the "Third World"; and finally a tangible increase in development assistance, as time and again advocated by various economic conferences.[28]

### *3.2.2 Government measures*

It is debatable whether a government is at all entitled to pursue a population control policy.[29] Opposition to such measures comes from various quarters. For a long time the nation's population was considered part of a divine order which put population planning beyond the realm of human responsibility. Some people contend that such policies have proved unsuccessful, whereas others consider them a threat to parents' freedom. There is also the argument that they divert attention from the main problem – the world economic crisis.

The advocates of government planning, however, say the individual's desire to have children does not necessarily have results that are satisfactory from the point of view of overall population development. Indeed, situations may develop in which the equal or higher ranking rights of others – which include tolerable living conditions for the next generation – demand such measures. Another reason is that since population movements are long term the effects of any measures taken now are only felt decades hence. For instance, as indicated earlier, old-age security through children can be jeopardized by those very children.

In such situations the theorist tends to make sharp distinctions, which can be dangerous. One such distinction is that between direct and indirect influence. A direct measure, for instance, would be a loan to a married couple subject to their limiting the number of children they have, or the procurement of contraceptives. Indirect measures include, for example, housing policy decisions which affect the population's generative behaviour. But direct or indirect population control measures are likely to disguise the problem because in many cases they too quickly feign a consensus (as with direct measures, most of which are rejected) without really clarifying the actual issues. Considering the individual's freedom of decision, the only question of any importance is whether and to what extent a certain measure poses a threat to that freedom.

It transpires from these ethical principles that any constraint like the sterilization laws enacted during the Third Reich, for instance, is absolutely ruled out as a means of population control. The crucial question is: Where do economic measures become constraints? It goes without saying that no sharp distinction can be made. Social disparities or the degree to which the individual can be influenced play a considerable role. And there is obviously also a major difference depending on whether the measure in question is intended to encourage or deter procreation.

No one has yet suggested that child benefit can influence a couple's free decision. Nor would this argument be put forward even if the benefit were greatly increased. The reaction is different, however, if, for instance, the government imposes a levy from the second or third child onwards. Depending on the size

of the levy, it may seem very much a compulsory measure. No less problematical are attempts to press women or men into sterilization by paying them bonuses, as shown by the widespread opposition to Indira Gandhi's drastic measures.

### *3.2.3 Overcoming poverty*

In the light of the above, strategies for changing the population situation should concentrate on combating mass poverty. Thus the fundamental objective of development policy cannot be to reduce poverty by curbing population growth but to reduce population growth by eliminating mass poverty. This may sound like a play on words, but if taken seriously the consequence is a major change of strategy. Of course, getting the great majority to accept family planning remains a major target, but experience has shown that the propagation of birth control comes to nothing unless the basic conditions for a decent human existence are created. Reference has already been made to the responsibility of the industrial countries in all these areas (3.2.1). The following relates to the measures required of individual countries.

One of the keys to breaking the vicious circle of poverty and underdevelopment is agriculture. There is no denying that farm output has increased considerably in some developing countries, but with some exceptions only the "modern" agricultural sector has benefited. Traditional farming has by and large remained untouched, indeed sometimes been negatively affected, by modern methods. There has been no real socio-technical transformation in the agricultural sector. Selective industrialization has swollen migration from the land and an if anything negative selection process has caused a brain drain in rural areas. In the urban centres migrants have too few opportunities to earn a living. The result is increasing urban poverty and the spread of slums (1.3). As recent events have shown, the mass of the urban poor successfully resist the attempts by some governments to pursue a more producer-oriented agricultural market and price policy.

From our analysis so far we can deduce the following spiral effect. Forgotten or uncompleted agricultural revolutions are one ot the chief reasons for the increase in rural, but also urban, poverty. The swelling masses of destitute people in the towns and elsewhere react to their situation not by having fewer children, rather the opposite. Thus neglect of agriculture and of rural areas is one of the chief reasons for the population explosion in the "Third World". Anti-poverty strategies will always affect the system as a whole since without exception they amount to a redistribution of power and resources. Consequently, any change for the benefit of the poor will decidedly change the social system also. However, there is considerable potential conflict among the target groups as well, no matter how they are defined. All such strategies, like all

population control measures, are bound to fail in the long run unless they give high priority to self-help projects. Precisely birth control and responsibly planned parenthood can, by definition, only be a question of self-help in terms of individual freedom and human rights. It should not be overlooked, however, that self-help programmes will only last if at least minimum conditions are maintained.

## 3.3 Responsibility of the individual

### *3.3.1 Precondition: information*

The awareness of individual responsibility in generative behaviour presupposes that women and men are informed about their social conditions (cf. Böckle, 1984). For this reason the 1968 population conference in Tehran cited not only freedom and responsibility but also information as a necessary element of the parental decision-making process. In turn, the right to be informed also embraces social and individual aspects. In order to be able to make a responsible decision parents need reliable knowledge about the social conditions awaiting them and their children. What are children's life expectation? To what extent can the social net replace the function of children? In other words, how many children are necessary to ensure a decent life? In view of what has been discussed earlier, the national calculation with regard to the number of children obviously coincides in this question with other determinant factors.

But the right to information also relates to the narrower sphere of family planning. It is certainly not sufficient for people to know about the different methods of contraception and about free access to contraceptive means. That is now taken for granted. There were times when the state, aiming to increase population growth, actually blocked access to contraceptives and even tried to stop the dissemination of information about them. Such policies were tantamount to a compulsion to bear children, especially among the lower strata of society. Today we should not pursue policies which give rise to constraints having the opposite effect. Hence it is not simply a question of providing the means but first and foremost of explaining the whys and wherefores.

Corresponding to the ability of target groups to understand the reasons, the ethical motives must be aroused in their generative behaviour. Obviously, this will be difficult to achieve if the personal interests of parents run contrary to the need for birth control, if, for instance, the indispensable prerequisites of work and old-age security are missing. Help will only be effective if taboos are broken and if people's awareness of their responsibility for the survival of society as a whole is reflected in their generative behaviour.

The Catholic Church can point to its pioneering missionary and development work (eg. through "Misereor"), but where the problem of world population is concerned the "official church" has considerable leeway to make up at the intermediate and higher levels, as shown by the lack of or only hesitant official comment on the subject.

### *3.3.2 Women*

Among the many other aspects of individual responsibility, that of women is of special significance. Already the 1974 Bucharest conference on world population agreed that development should be based on the principles of human rights. Its resolutions uphold national sovereignty in respect of population policy, irrespective of the dictate of international solidarity and assistance, but they also state that the right of individuals to decide freely and responsibly on the basis of proper information should not be restricted by direct government intervention. They also stress that the equal rights of men and women should be especially respected where family planning is concerned.

The conference resolutions underscore the importance of the family as the basic unit of society which requires special protection. And there are repeated references to the link between social and economic development on the one hand and population development on the other. They state that any alternative strategy, whether its sole aim is to promote economic development or to increase the number of family planning programmes, is from the outset incapable of solving the global problem of population growth.

But judging by the actual situation of women, this goal is still very remote. Many of them begin life at a disadvantage in relation to their male siblings. Marriage comes early, usually when they are still minors, and they carry the multiple burdens of child-bearing and work. Very often the relationship between man and woman is unequal. A lot of women are not consulted on fundamental family matters, not even with regard to children. Moreover, there are many hazards, such as physical exhaustion, undetected risks of pregnancy, lack of assistance during complicated childbirth, which translate into a high maternal mortality rate.[30]

All of these aspects affect population growth in differing degrees. Early marriage, for instance, is followed by many years of child-bearing. As a result of their many burdens and inadequate medical care, women give birth to weak children, which increases the child mortality rate – yet another reason to have many children. And finally, the fact that women have no say in family planning means they have little influence on the number of children. Their situation is therefore a microcosm of the wider issue of population growth. This also means, of course, that measures related specifically to women will have little impact without the fundamental changes outlined in chapter 3.2.

Among the many necessary changes, modifying women's social and family status and providing them with better health care are particularly important. Specific measures could range from legal adjustments, such as improving women's contractual capacity, via better family social benefits (which, when cut, often affect women in particular) and changes in the marital relationship so that it becomes more of a partnership, to maternity counselling and medical assistance for pregnant women and mothers. Raising the level of education, too, is extremely important (cf. 2.2.2). Education and training are not only the prerequisites for social and family emancipation. They also help defer marriage and facilitate family planning. Education enhances women's appreciation of demographic change and enables them to adjust their generative behaviour accordingly. And finally, it gives them a better chance to become the subjects rather than the objects of decisions taken, thus placing them in a position to determine their own lives in dignity and freedom.

### *3.3.3 Family planning*

Contrary to a widely held opinion, the moral and social doctrine of the Catholic Church demands a high sense of responsibility in generative behaviour. "Responsible parenthood" is a fundamental principle. The Second Vatican Council protected parents' family planning freedom against any form of tutelage. It said that marriage and having children are inalienable human rights, that it is for parents to decide themselves on the number of children and that this question should "on no account be left to the judgement of the state", provided parents follow "divine law" und take account of "the prevailing situation". The Council ruled that they should bear in mind the well-being of themselves and their children (those already born or expected to be born) and that they should be conscious of the material and spiritual circumstances in which they live and also make allowance for the welfare of the whole family, the secular community and the Church.[31]

The encyclica *populorum progressio* on questions of development aid, too, refers to the great distress caused by population growth. The problem is also highlighted in the Pope's circular *familiaris consortio*.

Representatives of the churches in the "Third World", however, are extremely critical of the contraceptive programmes initiated by international organizations. They not only strongly object to artificial means but are afraid the "assistance" offered is not merely intended as a rational solution to the population problem. In the view of African bishops as expressed in the words of Cardinal Ratzinger, ". . . the main reason why the industrial countries are urging contraception is that they wish to defend their possessions against the unwanted hordes of heirs from the Third World who are seen as a threat to their undiminished, customary use of the world's commodities. Behind the

seemingly benevolent motives of the West the nations of the Third World perceive the much more likely motive of greed".[32]

But the Church's attitude is not confined to mere criticism. At the WHO conference on the ethics and human values of family planning held in Bangkok from 19 to 24 June 1988, the Vatican submitted its own proposal to the effect that while there are no "value free" methods of familiy planning medical personnel and the staff of governments and social insurance institutions should consider seriously the possible consequences of their activities, the obligations they take upon themselves, and the aims they pursue with family planning. The document weighs up the pros and cons of different methods and compares them with "natural" family planning, which is cheap, available to everyone, and has no harmful side effects. Recently, Church organizations too have been making great efforts to test the feasibility and safety of this method in developing countries. Pilot projects are already being conducted in New Zealand, India, the Philippines and El Salvador with the support of the World Health Organization. Mother Teresa's staff are also using the method extensively in the slums of Indian cities.

The reports received so far are positive beyond all expectations, both as regards the willingness of couples to use the method and the success rate. By its very nature it rules out any manipulation and must be completely voluntary. While this positive aspect should not be underestimated, natural family planning should not become an ideological issue. It is crucial that personal freedom is respected, that abortion is ruled out, and that the method used should make the greatest possible allowance for the spiritual and physical well-being of man and woman. We can meet our responsibility not by engaging in a fruitless dispute over method but solely by making a final attempt to ensure mankind's survival in freedom and human dignity.

## *Footnotes*

[1] This fact does not change even considering that the term "Third World" was used in the 50s in the sense of a third route. Cf. Dieter Nohlen: Dritte Welt, in Lexikon Dritte Welt, publ. idem, Reinbek 1984, p. 152.

[2] We trust the reader will not mind our having spoken so much about these countries' problems and so little about their merits. This is due to the subject of our brochure.

[3] Per-capita income is defined as the quotient of a country's GNP and population, though it is not always an indicator of actual income distribution.

[4] Cf. Birdsall (1984), p. 11; Hauser (1983), p. 82 seq.; World Bank (1984), p. 72 seq.; UN (1989) p. 2 seq.

[5] The rate of population growth is the difference between the birth rate and the mortality rate, adjusted by the balance between immigrants and emigrants.

[6] Cf. Hauser (1983), p. 79 seq.

[7] Cf. World Bank (1984), p. 82 seq.

[8] UN (1989), p. 2 seq.

[9] Cf. World Bank (1984), p. 76 seq.; UN (1988), p. 8

[10] Cf. Birdsall (1984), p. 12

[11] UN (1988), p. 8

[12] Cf. World Bank (1984), p. 78

[13] Cf. Mahar (1984), p. 16

[14] UN Doc St/Hr/1, 1973, p. 18

[15] Cf. General Assembly resolution on social progress and development, Art. 4.22, World Population Conference, Bucharest 1974, Mexico 1984

[16] Wingen (1982), p. 11

[17] Bairoch (1976), p. 304 seq.

[18] Every peasant was entitled to a plot in one of the village's communal fields. All peasants in one field were obliged to cultivate the same crop, so that their economic freedom was considerably restricted.

[19] Hauser (1983), p. 75

[20] Cf. World Bank (1984), p. 79 seq.

[21] Cf. Mackenroth (1953)

[22] Cf. Ainsworth (1984), p. 19

[23] The low rate of employment is in many instances partly due to poor education, with the result that these determinants of female fertility are in some instances interdependent.

[24] Cf. World Bank (1984), p. 129

[25] Cf. World Bank (1984), p. 106 seq.

[26] Cf. Ehlers (1983), p. 28

[27] Cf. Kötter (1983), p. 127

[28] Nevertheless, it has not been forgotten that southern countries, too, have political obligations in this respect, as for instance in the elimination of corruption and nepotism or in facilitating the participation of poor people.

[29] Cf. Kerber (1986), col. 764 seq.

[30] This is not only a population problem but a human tragedy. Nearly 5 % of pregnant women in Africa die in childbirth. In South Asia the rate is nearly 3 %. In Iceland, to draw a sharp contrast, the last death resulting from pregnancy was reported in 1976. Figures from UN (1989), p. 11. This report on world population is concerned chiefly with matters relating specifically to women. It is also the source of other aspects covered by this chapter.

[31] *Gaudium et spes,* No. 87 and No. 50

[32] Ratzinger (1989), p. 17

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