

Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic  
Bishops.

Statement on population.

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Statement  
on  
**POPULATION**

National Conference  
of  
Catholic Bishops

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Church Statements  
On Population



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# STATEMENT ON POPULATION

## National Conference of Catholic Bishops

November 12, 1973

The United Nations has designated 1974 as U.N. Population Year, and has invited member nations to initiate programs of population education and to work toward the development of population policies throughout the year and beyond. At this point we take a positive attitude toward the U.N. Population Year. We hope that those conducting and participating in the public discussion will do so with objectivity, humility and honesty.

Population questions must be considered within the larger context of man's total relationship to the entire human family, that is, in terms of his relationship to the human and social environment of our world. The population discussion must include a recognition of moral and ethical principles, convictions about human rights and the good of society and a determination to preserve the true values of marriage and family life. The population discussion cannot be reduced to a simple discussion of demographic facts, economics or patterns of social organization. We must remember that our ability to make accurate predictions about the distant future is limited, and the picture can be seriously distorted unless equal attention is given to man's ability to solve social problems, to discover or invent new resources, and to change patterns of consumption.

We believe that the Church can make a valuable contribution to the discussion of population by calling attention to the Gospel message and to her social teaching which applies the Gospel to the changing situations of man's life on earth. Indeed, as Pope Paul has stated in the encyclical *On the Development of Peoples*, "A renewed consciousness of the demands of the Gospel makes it the Church's duty to put herself at the service of all men, to help them grasp their serious problem in all its dimensions, and to convince them that solidarity in action at this turning point in human history is a matter of urgency." (1)

The Church, in unfolding her social teaching, focuses on the dignity of man, the need for worldwide equality and social justice, and the pressing urgency for a new unity among nations. Existing in this world and taking her place in human history, the Church must "foster the human progress of the nations to which she brings faith in Christ." (2) Such progress demands that all men attain a decent standard of living, which includes the availability of employment and educational opportunities, adequate nutrition, health care and housing facilities. But the fulfillment of human desires also demands an "acknowledgement by men of supreme values, and of God—their source and their end." (3) Indeed, this acknowledgement is the most important aspect of human development. For "faith, a gift of God accepted by the good will of man" (4) creates an attitude toward the problems of daily living and relates this present life to the life of complete unity with God in heaven.

In proposing solutions to the various aspects of the population question, Christians must emphasize the need for human solidarity, for social justice, and for universal charity. (5) Men and women must come to realize that we are our brother's keepers, that we hold a common responsibility to increase the access to the banquet of life and to assure all persons an equitable share in the goods provided there. (6)

In light of these considerations and in anticipation of the activities of U.N. Population Year, we wish to make some basic observations and to restate some principles that contribute to understanding the population issue and the formulation of population policies.

## **Observations**

The following facts provide a context in which to approach population questions.

1. The population challenge does not affect all nations in the same way. Some nations have a high and uneven rate of growth that complicates or inhibits the development process. Other nations need an increase of popula-

tion to enhance development. In some nations, the relocation of population resulting from urbanization creates a special problem. Most of the developed nations, and particularly the United States, do not have the problem of *rapid population growth*. In fact, the United States birth rate has continually declined over the past 10 to 15 years, resulting in a low rate of population growth.

2. Population growth must be analyzed in the larger context of concern for the development of peoples. It must take into account the care and improvement of the human and physical environment.

3. Population projections must be based on an accurate presentation of demographic factors. They must include sound projections of resource development and of the discovery of new natural resources or synthetic materials.

4. Migration policies can help solve some of the problems resulting from a maldistribution of population. Thus, international and national migration policies should be examined and perhaps changed in light of population concerns.

5. In many nations, shortages of food, housing, schools and jobs generate extraordinary pressure on governments trying to develop dignified and equitable living standards for their people. *Rapid population growth* may gravely aggravate these pressures. However, population control alone is not the proper solution. Each situation should be met with specific policies and programs which favor human and social development.

6. Developing nations will hardly be able to reach their potential without the aid and cooperation of the already developed nations. This is not simply a matter of sending food, medicine, clothing and financial assistance, but also of granting access to world markets, enabling these nations to draw credit in the financial centers of the world, assisting them in the education and training of their people, entering into partnership in helping them tap their own resources and encouraging imports of necessary but absent raw materials.

7. Natural resources, especially the precious resources of air and water, and the delicate biosphere of life on earth are not infinite. They must be preserved, protected and used as a unique patrimony belonging to all mankind. (7)

## Principles

In order to provide a moral perspective, we affirm the following principles derived from the social teaching of the Church.

1. Within the limits of their own competence, government officials have rights and duties with regard to the population problems of their own nations—for instance, in the matter of social legislation as it affects families, of migration to cities, of information relative to the conditions and needs of the nation. Government's positive role is to help bring about those conditions in which married couples, without undue material, physical or psychological pressure, may exercise responsible freedom in determining family size. (8)

2. Decisions about family size and the frequency of births belong to the parents and cannot be left to public authorities. (9) Such decisions depend on a rightly formed conscience which respects the divine law and takes into consideration the circumstances of the places and the time. In forming their consciences, parents should take into account their responsibilities toward God, themselves, the children they have already brought into the world and the community to which they belong, "following the dictates of their conscience instructed about the divine law authentically interpreted and strengthened by confidence in God." (10)

3. Public authorities can provide information and recommend policies regarding population, provided these are in conformity with moral law and respect the rightful freedom of married couples. (11)

4. Men and women should be informed of scientific advances of methods of family planning whose safety has

been well proven and which are in accord with the moral law. (12)

5. Abortion, directly willed and procured, even if for therapeutic reasons, is to be absolutely excluded as a licit means of regulating births. (13)

## **Conclusion**

We strongly urge our Catholic people to take a positive approach to the question of population. We encourage research and education efforts in Catholic educational institutions, in order that discussions of population and social development may be carried on in light of a value system rooted in sound ethical and moral principles. To this purpose, intensive discussion of the central themes of the U.N. Population Year—family, development, environment and human rights—should be carried on with the dignity of the family and social justice as the focal points.

Finally, we urge the United States Government to increase foreign assistance programs to the developing nations, especially to those nations where population problems are complicating economic and social development. We must all realize that policy decisions governing the activity of the United States government agencies at home and abroad will be the focus of attention throughout 1974 and beyond. We have rights and responsibilities as citizens and as Christians to contribute to the creation of government policies which respect human dignity and the moral law.

## FOOTNOTES

1. *On the Development of Peoples*, Paul VI, March 27, 1967, #1.
2. *On the Development of Peoples*, #12.
3. *On the Development of Peoples*, #21.
4. *On the Development of Peoples*, #21.
5. cf. *On the Development of Peoples*, #44.
6. cf. *Address of Paul VI to UN General Assembly*, October 4, 1965.
7. cf. *Justice in the World*, Report of World Synod of Bishops, 1971.
8. cf. Statement of NCWC Administrative Board, November, 1966.
9. cf. *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, December 7, 1965, #50, 87; *On the Development of Peoples*, #37.
10. *On the Development of Peoples*, #37.
11. cf. *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, #87; *On the Development of Peoples*, #37; *On the Regulation of Birth (Humanae Vitae)*, #23.
12. cf. *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, #87.
13. *On the Regulation of Birth*, #14.



# CHURCH STATEMENTS ON POPULATION

## VATICAN II

### PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD, #87

Governments undoubtedly have rights and duties, within the limits of their proper competency, regarding the population problem in their respective countries, for instance, with regard to social and family life legislation, or with regard to the migration of country-dwellers to the cities, or with respect to information concerning the condition and needs of the country. Since men today are giving thought to this problem and are so greatly disturbed over it, it is desirable in addition that Catholic specialists, especially in the universities, skillfully pursue and develop studies and projects on all these matters.

But there are many today who maintain that the increase in world population, or at least the population increase in some countries, must be radically curbed by every means possible and by any kind of intervention on the part of public authority. In view of this contention, the Council urges everyone to guard against solutions, whether publicly or privately supported, or at times even imposed, which are contrary to the moral law. For in keeping with man's inalienable right to marry and generate children, the decision concerning the number of children they have depends on the correct judgment of the parents and it cannot in any way be left to the judgment of public authority. But since the judgment of the parents presupposes a rightly formed conscience, it is of the utmost importance that the way be open for everyone to develop a correct and genuinely human responsibility which respects the divine law and takes into consideration the circumstances of the place and the time. But sometimes this requires an improvement in educational and social conditions, and, above all, formation in religion or at least a complete moral training. Men should judiciously be in-

formed, furthermore, of scientific advances in exploring methods whereby spouses can be helped in regulating the number of their children and whose safeness has been well proven and whose harmony with the moral order has been ascertained.

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## PAUL VI

### ADDRESS OF POPE PAUL VI TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (OCTOBER 4, 1965)

#### RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF MAN

##### **Respect for human life**

What you are proclaiming here are the basic rights and duties of man, his dignity, his liberty and above all his religious liberty. We feel that you are spokesmen for what is loftiest in human wisdom—we might almost say its sacred character—for it is above all a question of human life, and human life is sacred; no one can dare attack it. It is in your Assembly, even where the matter of the great problem of birth rates is concerned, that respect for life ought to find its loftiest profession and its most reasonable defense. Your task is so to act that there will be enough bread at the table of mankind and not to support an artificial birth control that would be irrational with the aim of reducing the number of those sharing in the banquet of life.

##### ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES, #36 & 37 (*Populorum Progressio*)

36. Nevertheless man is not fully himself except in the society to which he belongs, and in which the family has greatest and primary importance. Perhaps this influence was excessive if we look at the times and places in which it flourished insofar as the basic rights of the human per-

son were impaired. Ancient social institutions, however, characteristic of developing regions, are still necessary for a time, but their excessive force must gradually be diminished. But the natural family distinguished by its monogamous character, stable, as it was conceived by the mind of God,<sup>37</sup> and sanctified by the Christian religion, "in which various generations come together and give mutual assistance to acquire fuller wisdom and to harmonize personal rights with other social requirements constitutes the foundation of society."<sup>38</sup>

37. It is not to be denied that accelerated demographic increases too frequently add difficulties to plans for development because the population is increased more rapidly than available resources so that all solutions seem to end in a blind alley. Then one easily yields to a plan to diminish the demographic increase by recourse to most drastic methods. *There is no doubt that the public authorities within the sphere of their competence can intervene in this matter giving their citizens information on the topic and adopting appropriate measures provided those are in accord with the precepts of the moral law and that the rightful freedom of married people is most completely protected.* But when the most inalienable right of matrimony and procreation is taken away human dignity is destroyed. It is finally the right of the parents having completely examined the case to make a decision about the number of their children; a responsibility they take upon themselves keeping in sight their duty to God, themselves, the children already born, and the community to which they belong, following the dictates of their conscience instructed about the divine law authentically interpreted and strengthened by confidence in God.<sup>39</sup>

## ON THE REGULATION OF BIRTH, #23 (*Humanae Vitae*)

### **Appeal to Public Authorities**

23. To Rulers, who are those principally responsible for the common good, and who can do so much to safe-

guard moral customs, 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 that 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 moral law and the liberty of citizens.

We are well aware of the serious difficulties experienced by public authorities in this regard, especially in the developing countries. To their legitimate preoccupations we devoted our encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio*. But with our predecessor Pope John XXIII, we repeat: no solution to these difficulties is acceptable "which does violence to man's essential dignity" and is based only on an utterly materialistic conception of man himself and of his life. The only possible solution to this question is one which envisages the social and economic progress both of individuals and of the whole of human society, and which respects and promotes true human values.<sup>26</sup> Neither can one, without grave injustice, consider divine providence to be responsible for what depends, instead, on a lack of wisdom in government, on an insufficient sense of social justice, on selfish monopolization, or again on blame-worthy indolence in confronting the efforts and the sacrifices necessary to ensure the raising of living standards of a people and of all its sons.<sup>27</sup>

## ADDRESS OF POPE PAUL VI TO UN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (NOVEMBER 16, 1970)

### **Technology and environment**

3. We heartily applaud these aims. Now by what methods do you propose to achieve them? We can indeed say that the absorbing study of the many reports sent to us about your varied activities has revealed to us the prodigious and growing complexity of your effort,

which is organized on a worldwide scale. More rational utilization of basic physical resources, better conceived exploitation of lands, waterways, forests and oceans, increased productivity for croplands, livestock and fisheries—these things are certainly providing a great quantity and better quality of foodstuffs. But food needs are increasing just as rapidly, due to pressure from two factors: population growth, which is sometimes extremely fast-paced; and increased consumption, which follows the rising curve of income.

Improvements in soil fertility, rational planning for irrigation, redistribution of land plots, reclamation of swamp land, greater efforts at plant selection, and the introduction of high-yield cereal varieties almost seem to have fulfilled the prediction of the ancient prophet who lived in an agrarian era: "The desert and the parched land will exult." <sup>8</sup>

### **For integral development**

6. Faced with the difficulties yet to be surmounted, people are certainly tempted to act in an authoritarian way to reduce the number of guests at table rather than to increase the food supply upon it. We are not unaware of the opinions held by some in various international organizations. They extol planned birth control of such a kind as to provide, so they think, a thoroughgoing solution to the problems of developing countries.

We repeat here today that the Church encourages scientific and technical progress in every domain of human activity. But she always defends and demands respect for the inviolable rights of the human person, for which public authorities are the first line of defense. The Church is firmly opposed to any birth control which, in the apt words of our predecessor John XXIII, would involve "methods and means unworthy of man." <sup>15</sup> She summons all those responsible to work courageously and generously for integral, joint development—the kind of development that will, among other results, foster rational mastery of procreation by couples who have become capable of freely assuming their destiny. <sup>16</sup>

For your part, it is man whom you are helping and supporting. How could you ever act against him, since you exist only for him and through him, and cannot succeed without him?

A CALL TO ACTION, #18  
(*Octogesima Adveniens*)

**Creating employment**

18. With demographic growth, which is particularly pronounced in the young nations, the number of those failing to find work and driven to misery or parasitism will grow in the coming years unless the conscience of man rouses itself and gives rise to a general movement of solidarity through an effective policy of investment and of organization of production and trade, as well as of education. We know the attention given to these problems within international organizations, and it is our lively wish that their members will not delay bringing their actions into line with their declarations.

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 sometimes 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. "It is certain," we said in our encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, "that public authorities can intervene, within the limit of their competence, by favoring the availability of appropriate information and by adopting suitable measures, provided that these be 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."<sup>14</sup>

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## SYNOD OF BISHOPS, 1971

### Justice in the World

By taking their future into their own hands through a determined will for progress, the developing peoples—even if they do not achieve the final goal—will authentically manifest their own personalization. And in order that they may cope with the unequal relationships within the present world complex, a certain responsible nationalism gives them the impetus needed to acquire an identity of their own. From this basic self-determination can come attempts at putting together new political groupings allowing full development to these peoples; there can also come measures necessary for overcoming the inertia which could render fruitless such an effort—as in some cases population pressure; there can also come new sacrifices which the growth of planning demands of a generation which wants to build its own future.

5. Although we recognize that international agencies can be perfected and strengthened, as can any human instrument, we stress also the importance of the specialized agencies of the United Nations, in particular those directly concerned with the immediate and more acute questions of world poverty in the field of agrarian reform and agricultural development, health, education, employment, housing, and rapidly increasing urbanization. We feel we must point out in a special way the need for some fund to provide sufficient food and protein for the real mental and physical development of children. In the face of the population explosion we repeat the words by which Pope Paul VI defined the functions of public authority in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*: "There is no doubt that public authorities can intervene, within the limit of their competence, by favouring the availability of appropriate information and by adopting suitable measures, provided that these be in conformity with the moral law and that they absolutely respect the rightful freedom of married couples" (37; A.A.S. 59, 1967, p. 276).

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## STATEMENTS OF NCCB

The following working principles are abstracted from statements of NCCB, and from the Statement of the Administrative Board, NCWC, November 14, 1966.

### 1. *On Parental Rights*

- a) "Therefore, a major pre-occupation in our present statement must be with the freedom of spouses to determine the size of their families." (NCWC Administrative Board, November 14, 1966)
- b) "Given educational opportunity and the economic means that go with it, we believe couples will make judgments about family size that will be in harmony with the common good. We affirm that parents themselves, and no government official, should make that judgment." (NCCB, November, 1969)

### 2. *On Separating Family Planning Service from Welfare Assistance* [This was the major thrust of the NCWC Administrative Board Statement, and a strong point in *Human Life in Our Day*.]

- a) "The freedom of spouses to determine the size of their families must not be inhibited by any conditions upon which relief or welfare assistance is provided." (NCWC Administrative Board, November 14, 1966)
- b) "We have consistently urged and we continue to urge, as a matter of sound public policy, a clear and unqualified separation of welfare assistance from birth control considerations. . . . whatever the legality or morality of contraception in general or in specific forms. . . ." (NCWC Administrative Board, November 14, 1966)
- c) "Let society always be on the side of life. Let it never dictate, directly or indirectly, recourse to the prevention of life or to its destruction in any of its phases; neither let it require as a condition of economic assistance that any family yield conscientious



determination of the number of its children to the decision of persons or agencies outside the family.” (*Human Life in Our Day*, November 15, 1968)

### 3. *Positive Role of Government Regarding Family Planning*

- a) “We insist that it is the positive role of government to help bring about those conditions of family freedom which will relieve spouses from such material and physical pressures to limit family size.” (NCWC Administrative Board, November 14, 1966)
- b) “Policies affecting population—as well as the administrative guidelines of government agencies—must always respect the well-being and stability of the family unit, the free and voluntary decision-making power of parents and the good of society. In point of fact, a population policy may only be a positive part of a broader policy that is calculated to support and strengthen family life.” (NCCB, April, 1972)

### 4. *On Research*

- a) “We support all needed research toward medically and morally acceptable methods which can assist spouses to make responsible and generous decisions in seeking to cooperate with the will of God in what pertains to family size and well-being.” (NCWC Administrative Board, November 14, 1966)
- b) “We affirm that there is a role for government sponsored scientific research for the preservation of life.” (NCCB, November, 1969)

### 5. *On Coercion*

“On previous occasions we have warned of dangers to the right of privacy posed by governmental birth control programs; we have urged upon government a role of neutrality whereby it neither penalizes nor promotes birth control. Recent developments, however, show government rapidly abandoning any such role. Far from merely seeking to provide information in response to requests from the needy, Government

activities increasingly seek aggressively to persuade and even coerce the underprivileged to practice birth control." (NCWC Administrative Board, November 14, 1966)

[More precise and detailed concerns about coercion have been enunciated in testimony before the U.S. Congress.]

6. *On International Affairs*

"In the international field, as in the domestic field, financial assistance must not be linked to policies which pressure for birth limitation. . . . Obviously, then, international programs of aid should not be conditioned upon acceptance of birth control programs by beneficiary nations." (NCWC Administrative Board, November 14, 1966)



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