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**THE**

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**FAMILY**

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**AND**

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**POPULATION**

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The family is the first and most important unit of human society. It serves the needs of its members and also serves the larger society of which it is a part. The style of family living has changed in the past and is changing now, but the family itself is not the result of chance, a haphazard structure that will some day give way to other forms of community living. Rather, the family is, in the words of Pope Paul IV, "the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love."

The family cannot be treated in isolation from the world around it if it is to accomplish its basic purposes. Society must not neglect the family or deny it the economic, social, cultural and moral supports which are necessary for its stability and the fulfillment of its specific mission. For its part, the individual family, in the pursuit of its objectives, should recognize society's needs, and the role that families can play in meeting society's problems.

Since the family is not simply a private community, but is rather the primary unit in society, public policy should support the family by assuring sufficient housing, employment, educational and social opportunities. Policies benefiting the poor and disadvantaged are essential for long range social planning. Adequate maternal and child health care, including the provision of sufficient nutrition, should be readily available to everyone in the United States; and this nation should contribute generously in assisting other countries to achieve this same goal.

## **POPULATION POLICY AND THE FAMILY**

The interrelationship of the family and society is especially evident in regard to population growth and distribution. The United Nations has designated 1974 as U.N. Population Year and has called on member nations to stimulate population awareness and formulate population policies. It is the purpose of this statement to reflect on the implications of population policies for family life, with special concern for the responsibilities of families within the Roman Catholic tradition.

The Catholic tradition affirms the right of married couples to determine the size of the family and the frequency of births. The freedom necessary for such decision-making requires protection from the overbearing or coercive influence of government, of any particular public ideology, and of oppressive laws or social structures. It also requires an overall plan of human and social development that will liberate families from those circumstances — poverty, disease, ig-

marital chastity and self-mastery. In pursuing virtue they must be persevering and patient with themselves. Difficulties and failures should not separate them from the sources of grace, but should motivate them ever more strongly to draw strength from prayer and the sacraments. The Church should exercise a special pastoral concern for married couples and families.

Through childbearing, married couples insure the continuation of the human race and the society of which they are a part. In some instances this purpose requires large families, while in other cases it may dictate smaller family size. When limitation of population growth is truly necessary for the good of society, respect for personal freedom requires that it be brought about by self-restraint, not by external pressure or coercion. The role of government is to provide motivation to families; coercion and direct interference with family life are not permissible. We know very little about the factors which determine fertility patterns, and there has never been a demographic situation that could not be met without violating human freedom.

Many discussions of population tend to be somewhat technical and abstract, distracting us from the fact that we are really talking about individual people, their dreams and aspirations, their problems and their resources. Too often, the child becomes a target of population projections, and his dignity is violated as a result. All discussions concerning population should emphasize the value and dignity of children. Parents should think of children as a benefit rather than a burden, and should be willing to make sacrifices for them. American parents have always been generous in this regard, but the present propaganda for zero population growth seeks to undermine their generosity and raise selfishness to the level of virtue.

America is not experiencing a rapid or disorderly demographic increase, although patterns of consumption and waste certainly dictate a radical reappraisal of our affluent life-style. Americans can be well informed about the facts of population growth and its impact through the reports of the U.S. Census Bureau. The nation is fortunate in having such a highly competent source of information, one carefully developed over a number of decades.

As the activities of U.N. Population Year take place, Christian families should develop a keener awareness of population questions and of their own role in meeting population problems. They should be confident that mankind can find solutions to the most challenging problems without violating God's law or destroying human dignity. The basic responsibility of Christian

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norance — which limit their freedom. Finally, a full exercise of basic human rights in regard to procreation also requires freedom from psychological pressure — a pressure that is often the result of misinformation, and sometimes of dishonest presentations of population data for propaganda purposes.

## **POPULATION AND WOMAN**

Society should support the dignity and basic human freedoms of women, enabling them to pursue professional roles and employment opportunities without prejudice to the important responsibilities of marital partnership and motherhood. The maternal role is not narrowly limited to childbearing and nurture of the very young, but extends to the important educational and socializing functions that contemporary women are well equipped to fulfill. American women are among the best educated women in the history of the world, but they receive little attention or public support for their crucial work of transmitting knowledge, culture, and concern for human values to coming generations.

## **CATHOLIC TEACHING ON POPULATION**

In God's plan, the marital community results from the free and mutual love of a man and woman, whose commitment and intimacy lead to a strengthening of marital love and to the birth of children. For God has given men and women the responsibility of transmitting and safeguarding human life in a way consistent with His plan of creation and with human dignity.

In making decisions about family size and the frequency of births, each married couple must take into account the circumstances and goals of their own family. This necessarily involves a consideration of the needs of each spouse and of the children they already have. Consideration should also be given to aging parents, and the couple's responsibilities toward them. Choices about childbearing should not be left to chance, but should be the result of careful deliberation, mutual trust and confidence, and faith in God's providential care for His people. Pessimism and fear should not be the basis for such decisions, nor are such attitudes consistent with the Christian worldview.

It is true that real problems, often of an economic nature, affect families. But decisions concerning the number of children should not be based exclusively on worldly circumstances but also, and more fundamentally, should be reached in light of consideration of our eternal destiny. Moreover, Christian couples must

realize that population projections are calculated on demographic and economic factors. In the United States, a couple may responsibly choose to have a relatively large family, although for most this choice will undoubtedly require some sacrifices and a willingness to forego some material advantages and expectations that spring from affluence. Finally, couples must always remember their responsibilities to their own families and to others who are less fortunate, responsibilities that sometimes temper other laudable aspirations.

## **POPULATION AND HUMAN SEXUALITY**

Decisions regarding family size necessarily involve a Christian understanding of human sexuality and the means available to space births. The Catholic tradition has always acknowledged that marital intercourse intensifies the bond of love between husband and wife, and also leads to the initiation of new life. Human sexuality is basically good, and should always be regarded and used in ways that respect human dignity. In our times sex is often popularized, publicized and treated as if it were simply a means of personal pleasure. Various methods of contraception are promoted as means of achieving pleasure without responsibility. The delicate balance of intimacy, mutual love and responsibility for others is often lost, or never achieved. Unwillingness to have children is not surprising in these circumstances because the marital relationship itself fails to grow.

At the same time, there can be serious reasons why a couple may have to limit family size. If this is the case, couples should give primary consideration to the spacing of births as a most important aspect of responsible parenthood. In this way they are able to maintain the values of marital intimacy, love of children, and free and responsible decision making in a spirit of faith in God, self-confidence and security. They will in fact grow in personal wisdom and marital maturity because of their cooperation and mutual support.

## **POPULATION AND PROCREATION**

The Church, in emphasizing the link between marital intimacy and procreation, has rejected methods of family planning that directly frustrate procreation, and has endorsed only those methods of family planning that conform to the moral law authentically interpreted by her teaching authority. The decisions thus required of couples are not readily made or easily carried out. Christian couples must therefore develop the virtues of

couples at this moment may well be to witness to the advantages and rewards of marital unity, parenthood and family life, and thus restore a sense of well founded hope to society as it attempts to meet the needs of the entire human family in the years ahead.

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