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Population Explosion? Don't Lose Your Calm

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Readers of *Linacre Quarterly* were exposed to Father Arthur McCormack's article about a "Population Explosion" recently.¹ But, whether by oversight or by intention, the writer omitted some very important facts which he should have included. May I present some of these facts, and give my own reflections on the subject.

'Needed Development . . . Is Hindered by the Population Situation'

Maybe Father McCormack is writing a bit "down" to the doctors here, thinking that they are laymen in the field of demography, and that it is better to make things simple for them. So he skips over the fact that demographers often have head-on collisions at conventions over the question of whether a rapid population growth hinders economic development. Father McCormack presents his own view as that of "ordinary common sense" and so solves this complicated problem very neatly for you.

Ordinary common sense would surely lead to the realization that needed development, even social justice itself, especially in the developing countries, is hindered by the population situation (*loc. cit.*, p. 268).

That was the insistent opinion of the strong Indian delegation at the Asian Population Conference in New Delhi in 1963. For two weeks we

argued back and forth, sometimes very heatedly. In the end, the Resolutions Committee went along with the Indian opinion, but the report in the newspapers came down on our side. The *Statesman*, Dec. 20, 1963, reported:

It was perhaps easy for the 200 experts who came from all parts of the world to repeat what has been said so many times before: that reduction of the birth rate was the only way out of the present difficulty. They, however, felt that such advice was neither practicable nor sufficient.

Most of them also felt that population was a burden because it was not being put to proper use. If everyone could be given the rudiments of education, some medical facilities, and vocational training, then they could produce more to add to the national wealth. Also this would eventually create among most people a desire to reduce the birth rate so that they could improve their standard of living.

Education of the young, vocational training, hygiene and nutrition are like the Midas touch, I think, which can supply a new nation with a dynamic pool of labor. Then, under a disciplined government and with the help of competent planners, managers, and entrepreneurs, a nation can modernize rather quickly and raise levels of living. As the monthly wage system begins to predominate among the laborers and mechanized agriculture revolutionizes subsistence farming, couples begin to calculate the cost of educating children in an entirely new situation. Whereas five babies out of 10 died before reaching adolescence in the subsistence agriculture situation, almost 10 babies out of 10 now survive and clamor for schooling and for all the conveniences of modern life. It is then that parents rather spontaneously, without need of government prodding, may look toward trimming the family size down to the size of their budget and capacities.

This is not only theory produced by experts at the Asian Population Conference. It is a fact which has occurred over and over again in many countries of the world. But not in all countries. What is possible under given circumstances does not happen necessarily under other circumstances. Some nations did not pull themselves up by the shoe strings, as others did.

Simon S. Kuznets, professor of economics, Harvard University, gave a report on his studies in this area to the members of the Second World Population Conference at Belgrade in 1965, two years after the Asian Conference. One cannot say absolutely, he reported, that population growth necessarily helped or necessarily hindered economic development in the countries which have been studied. We see a mixed picture: opposite results sometimes, mixed results, and positive results. Population growth has been a plus, a minus or a neutral in regard to economic development. In the words of Kuznets:

There was, and is, no invariant and significant direct effect of population increase on the rate of rise of per capita product, if the latter is accepted as the measure of economic growth. At least this is the conclusion for the

range of rates of population increase observed in the modern past. In some countries high rates of population increase were accompanied by high rates of growth in per capita product; in others, low rates of population growth were associated with low rates of growth of per capita product; and in still others, low rates of population increase were combined with high rates of growth of per capita product. This diversity of relations is found in countries within both the developed and the less developed groups, although the developed group, as a whole, showed a higher rate of population increase than the rest of the world in the nineteenth century ("Demographic Aspects of Economic Growth," statement by the moderator, Simon S. Kuznets, professor of economics, Harvard University, in *World Population Conference*, 1965, vol. 1, p. 307; United Nations 1966).

Why do some countries thrive economically while population grows rapidly — like Japan did since the 1870's — whereas others are mediocre in both — like France — and still others don't seem to be able to achieve economic take-off, as India? Is it not largely a matter of good government, of maximizing the economic contributions by a young and growing labor force through excellent schooling and health programs, so that the new generation can produce 10-20 times as much per capita as the older illiterates? Who would ever say that the USA was weakened by the massive population increases since 1620? And who will say that the USA will be a leading world power in 2075 if we drop out as front runners in population? Foreign armies will not take a long time to overrun an old folks' home.

I believe that such countries as South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines are already in a position to realize positive development strength from rapid population growth, because the young labor force is relatively well educated, in good health, and reasonably willing to do its share of work in an industrializing economy, just as Japan had been long ago. There is no real reason at all why any nation cannot turn a rapid population growth into an economic plus factor, if the new labor force is allowed to develop its capacity reasonably well to provide goods and services for the nation.

A group of 24 Philippine business personalities declared in no uncertain terms that they *want* a rapid population growth for a smooth and rapid development of the Philippine economy:

WHEREAS, it is our position being people directly involved in the country's economic production that the present rapid population growth rate is necessary given our stage of economic development in order to provide an expanding market, important enough to commensurate the risks that business and industry put into investments in production, and business opportunities which will then allow us to expand our services, then providing stable and even growing opportunities for employment for more people and finally resulting in an increase in consumer purchasing power;

WHEREAS, the rapid population growth presently existing in the Philippines is a positive factor in development as it provides facility for smoother changes in the direction of economic production by minimizing economic dislocations and unemployment, that it is this rapid population growth that has permitted many industries which have declined in relative

importance to the economy in the recent past to remain at the same or even greater level of production due to the fact that its diminishing share is part of an expanding — not fixed — whole; that this situation has in fact allowed business and industry to maintain constant and even growing employment despite problems of inflation;

WHEREAS, we do not agree that the cause of present economic problems is the rapid population growth per se, but rather the uneconomical manner of management of resources, including the human resource, and that if there shall be a decline in population growth at this time, or the near future, this could very well have negative repercussions as regards productivity as it is precisely this population pressure that has been pushing productivity upwards 2

The history of the world is a story of younger and vigorous populations elbowing aging nations — people tired of life — off the stage. But even in declining and dying nations, we see families and groups who survive and inherit the future. We see that North America and most of Europe are now experiencing a very low birth rate, below the replacement level; it means that the population structure is aging. Despite the national trends, however, there are vigorous families who enjoy life and believe in a future. And they are having children. They will inherit the land when the anti-population people are off the stage.

The above, I think, is a more complete picture of the population vs. development question than the one which Father McCormack gave.

Larger Populations Create Problems Which Are Harder to Manage

Father McCormack writes:

. . . the very least that can be said is that population increase is a crucial factor in making the problems of cities and of the developing countries as a whole much more difficult to manage. Anyone can see that to feed, house, educate, employ, give medical care to, for example, 2.9 million in Mexico City in 1950 is easier than to do the same for 31.5 million in the year 2000 or even for 10.9 million in 1975 (p. 269).

Again, there is no research to back up that statement. It seems that the oracle has spoken, and that is enough. But is it?

I moved recently from Nagoya, with a population of two million, to Tokyo, with an estimated 28 million in the Tokyo metropolitan area. I see no proof that it is more difficult to “feed, house, educate, employ” etc. the 28 million in Tokyo than the 2 million in Nagoya. The difference is that more people are doing it in Tokyo than in Nagoya.

Why would 28 million Japanese like to live in and around Tokyo if things are so bad there, as Father McCormack supposes? There are vast country spaces in Japan which are being depopulated because people move to the cities. In 1970, 53.5% of the people were living on 1.73% of the land area.

Tokyo proper has 104 colleges and universities, with 44% of the nation's student body. And it has baseball, kabuki, parks, the most TV channels, the best restaurants. When something exciting happens in Japan, it is likely to happen in Tokyo.

Because so many people have been moving to Tokyo and other large cities in Japan, rural areas are often in trouble. If too many of the younger folks go, the older people find it hard to manage — to keep weeds under control, maintain roads, provide services, man the public utilities, the schools, the hospitals. A conservative bent tends to dominate. Young people see the city as freer, full of opportunities, with more time for leisure. The day may come when some villages become completely depopulated with "for sale" signs on houses and fields which no one will bother to buy. Even some islands could lose all population. "Population implosions" will have cleared them of all humans.

Moving from the country to the city is not without cost in many ways, of course. As in many other affairs of life, we compromise, trading this for that, losing this to gain that. Man adapts himself, trying to make the most of life where he is. (Even birds in Japan adapt to city life. Nightingales sing from the garden of Ehocho parish in Nagoya and from our trees around the seminary and around the Catechist House. Crows have commandeered a large area around Roppongi in Tokyo, where there are many restaurants and good pickings from overflowing garbage containers.)

Sometimes grave, even inhuman and ghastly situations develop in cities before the government, with the backing of citizens, brings order out of the chaos. It is tragic that politicians often wait so long before moving. Shanty towns spawn, crime proliferates, traffic chokes itself, garbage piles up, sewers overflow, pornographers and pimps prey on the inexperienced. The human race must learn to cope better with many of these problems. Citizens must be willing to pay taxes, to make sacrifices, to curtail excesses, in order to achieve the good life.

An example of the interdependence of politics with the will of citizens comes to mind. Father Albert Bold, S.V.D., chairman of Nanzan School Corporation in Nagoya, and I were in Chicago, driving toward Techny on the Edens expressway during rush hour, over a decade ago. We moved—stopped—moved—stopped, and breathed fumes of the choked-up traffic. Just at the time, Prime Minister Sato of Japan was visiting the USA. I said to Father Bold: "I wish that Mr. Sato were sitting in the car with us to experience this; and that he would then see to it that the same situation does not develop in Japan."

Father Bold is a seasoned administrator. He thought for a while. "It wouldn't help," he said finally. "*Sato san* would not get support. Japan has to first experience this same problem before the people are willing to solve it. Politics can't move out in front too far."

But eventually, when pressures build up, politics and people usually tend to move to ease the pressure. Good leadership can even *prevent*

beforehand, instead of *curing* afterward. Japan, I would say, does comparatively well.

For example, Tokyo takes care of its garbage problem with some pride, even elegance. Before 8 a.m. the civic engineers drive their small blue trucks, waxed and spit-polished, to the local rendezvous. Inside there is coffee and calisthenics to the tune of a record. Then directions and a pep-talk. And at the sound of the bell the teams dash out to their trucks and swing the containers expertly, as compressors hum to devour the day's produce. If the crows haven't made a night visit, it will be too late for a meal. As Mr. Sato and I walked about New York recently and saw how the people walked at a swift pace, just as they do in Tokyo, we got a feeling that large cities are much alike, and that citizens have an almost perverted pride about their own city. But we thought, perhaps unkindly, that New York's system of collecting garbage is still in the "stone age" of human development.

Father McCormack fears that Mexico City will surely have a poorer standard of living in the year 2000 with its projected 31.5 million people than it enjoyed in 1950 with only 2.9 million people and in 1975 with only 10.9 million. Perhaps. But if Tokyo's 28 million can manage to live a fairly good life now, why should it not be possible that Mexico City's 31.5 million will do as well or even better in the year 2000? The fault would lie not so much with numbers as with people.

I am inclined to think that the projected 31.5 million Mexicans will provide a better living for themselves in the big city by the year 2000 than they enjoy at present. There is a very, very strong tendency among humans not to endure for long a deteriorating situation; regression to the past, to poor standards, goes completely against our grain. We long to improve. I predict, on the basis of this strong human tendency, that Mexicans will be more comfortable as population increases, and that Tokyo's standards will not be new to Mexicans in the year 2000.

The pull of the big cities is extremely hard to resist in Japan. Up to 85% of high school graduates in rural areas and towns move to the big cities for employment. Tokyo's 104 colleges and universities also enroll 700,000 students, 44% of the entire nation's total. When the time comes to make the "U turn" and return to the country for marriage and management of the inheritance, only about half do it.

The pull of the cities is felt by many members of the race, in all countries of the world. Humans are a gregarious species. Many of the people who moved out of New York during past decades, to get away from the noise, to enjoy more greenery, are now moving back to the heart of the city. Why? I asked a taxi driver. "There isn't enough excitement out in the suburbs; not enough activities, doings, restaurants," he ventured.

Let's face the fact squarely with Father McCormack, that by the year 2000, 50% of the world population will probably be urban, in cities and towns of 5,000 or more. And of this urban population, probably over 80% will be in cities of 100,000 or more (*People*, vol. 3, no. 2 [1976], p. 7). Even if these projections will not be fleshed out exactly as the computer now indicates, we do know that the process of urbanization is a major social factor of the human race during our century.

Pope John Paul spoke about the importance of facing facts squarely, of the liberating effects of knowing the truth:

Christ Himself links liberation particularly with knowledge of the truth: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32). . . .

As a Prophet, as a witness to truth, Christ repeatedly opposes non-truth; He does so with great forcefulness and decision and often He does not hesitate to condemn falsehood (General Audience, Feb. 21, 1979).

But turning population projections into an argument in favor of birth control is another matter. Why oppose population growth subtly by presenting projections about urban growth, as Father McCormack seems to do?

If a bishop would receive projections about the expected increase of churchgoers on Sundays, he would think about how to accommodate the increase, rather than about forbidding priests to baptize more than the churches can hold. If school administrators project future enrollment increases, they plan for increased classrooms and teachers, instead of excluding the surplus from the chance for an education. Are not the subtle anti-population, anti-baby suggestions of Father McCormack signs of the strange anti-life virus which is infecting so many writers and "experts" today? Far different is the challenge of Pope Paul VI:

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 (Pope Paul VI, to the United Nations General Assembly, Oct. 4, 1965. *The Pope Speaks*, vol. 11, p. 56).

We would be happier with Father McCormack, I think, if his writings would be along these lines, instead of echoing anti-population sentiments. Since he is a priest and a delegate to the United Nations Population Commission, it would be most fitting if he were to amplify the message of the Church's leader there, to oppose vigorously all artificial methods of birth control, and to urge measures designed to ensure that "there will be enough bread at the table of mankind." Even though he is not a delegate sent by the Vatican or any Church-related

institution, he nevertheless wears the collar; and by reason of the profession which the collar signifies, it would be perfectly normal that he speak in UN circles the way Pope Paul VI spoke there: in favor of life, against artificial methods of birth control, in favor of measures to enable more people to share in the banquet of life.

Can the World Feed Its Growing Population?

You see an image of a groaning, perspiring world in fierce labor pains, producing corn, wheat, rice, proteins, to satisfy the swarms of humans scampering on its surface. But such kindergarten jingoism does not deserve uncritical publication in *Linacre Quarterly*. It is glib propaganda, poetry, cartoonism, not science.

We know that the *WORLD* does not feed its population. *PEOPLE* do that. They are doing it better than ever in the perhaps four million year history of the human race. It is one reason why our numbers are expanding. Food production is meeting the demand, which makes an increase of humans possible as never before. The United States' 4.3 million farmers are feeding 220 million citizens far better now than two or three million American Indians fed themselves 350 years ago. Our farmers enjoy doing this if they get a good income. And the consumers enjoy excellent food. The Indians who hunted buffalo and rabbits, and gathered acorns, would never have believed that this high level of living is possible in our fair land, and for so many people.

At the Second World Population Conference in Belgrade, 1965, we spent a restless first three days of the session while professional anti-population propagandists dominated the discussions. After a particularly irritating barrage of such poetic creations as "the race between food production and population growth" and "the earth groaning to feed its burgeoning population," one delegate intervened to challenge all this:

I grew up on a large farm, and I believe that our ambition was less idealistic than engagement in a race to feed world population. We raised crops and livestock for profit, to make a living for ourselves. We were not particularly concerned about feeding a world population.

In fact, I should admit that I was more pleased than distressed if we read in the newspapers about crop shortages elsewhere; or hog cholera which decimated pork supplies. We relished the higher prices we could earn by selling our harvests and livestock.

And I think that farmers all over the world are not much concerned about feeding a world population. They are concerned about themselves and their families first; they want to make a living by earning a profit.

The "race between food production and population growth" is non-existent fiction, invented poetry, imagined by some theorists, but far from the minds of the farmers who are actually producing the world's food. If farmers could ever get together, they would probably even try to squeeze the market in order to raise prices.

World population growth and food production, I think, are more like a team of horses drawing a buggy: the two have to run together. When one

gets behind, the other pulls it along; when the other gets ahead, it pulls the first one again. When there is overproduction of food, prices sink, farmers cannot afford to invest so much in production; when food is more scarce again, prices rise, and farmers can afford to invest more to increase production.

Increase profit incentives, and you keep food production a step ahead of population growth.³

A delegate from the Soviet Union took issue with this, contending that farmers in Russia are the type who produce for the common good of the land, without selfish profit motives. This little exchange occurred 13 years ago. American farmers have sold much farm produce to these "idealistic" Russians in the meantime. Our selfish farmers have been keeping the idealistic Russian citizens alive and well-fed by selling surplus wheat and corn to them.

It is often said that the problem of hunger in the world is due to faulty distribution; the "WORLD" doesn't distribute its food produce on an equitable basis.

But why is food not distributed equitably, if that is the case? People on Manhattan Island produce no food, but farmers distribute plenty to them. Chicago collects farmers' grains for distribution to the world through its grain exchange services. Wherever in the world political powers permit AND profit motives justify sales, the distribution system of food functions quite well. The ones who are left out are the ones who do not offer a fair price for the food.

Government-Inflated Food Market Prices Cause Surpluses

Believe it or not, Japan has a chronic surplus of rice production, much as the USA has trouble keeping a lid on the pressure of farmers to over-produce. Here is an editorial from *The Japan Times*, July 13, 1978 which describes the situation:

The Government has had its way with the basic policy of freezing the producer price of rice for this year. . . . The price freeze comes at a time when this country is having a huge surplus of the grain. The stocks of unsold rice held by the Government are expected to exceed 5 million tons, or roughly half of the annual consumption, at the end of October. Since 2 million tons is considered enough to meet the normal stockpiling requirements, more than 3 million tons will be in surplus. This is clearly too much.

Japanese farmers, however, want more for the rice which they must deliver to the government. So they descend upon Tokyo with hoes and pitchforks to demonstrate. And politicians promise to raise the price again.

Thus the price of Japanese rice is so high above the world market price that Japan cannot export its surpluses. The high priced rice continues to pile up in bins, of no use to other peoples in the world who can buy cheaper rice elsewhere, or must do without because they cannot pay.

Similarly, in France, the government guarantees wheat farmers more than \$5 a bushel for their grain. And French farmers produce enough to feed their own people, other Europeans and some Africans and Latin Americans as well. The guarantee given by the US government is \$1.50 less. Despite this lower price, American farmers produce enough for the domestic market plus exports, reaching over 2 billion bushels in good years. Exports account for up to 40% of the world export market in wheat grain. But the European Common Market, at a cost of \$13.5 billion a year, subsidizes its own food prices, keeping them high, while levying tariffs on American grains to prevent imports which would undercut their own prices. Because of high support prices, Europe now has a wheat surplus. (See *The Washington Post*, March 4, 1979, p. A10.)

If we ask, then, whether the people of the world can feed themselves, I think that the answer will be "Yes, if they pay enough for the food."

Will the people be able to feed themselves in the future, even if their numbers increase 10-fold or 20-fold? Why not? If food becomes a precious commodity, and prices justify the investment, hydroponic farming in greenhouses and even on rooftops and terraces of high-rises can come into its own.

In this connection I would like to urge that something very special be done for the 300 million children throughout the world who are said to be getting a bad start in life because of poor nutrition after the time of weaning. Should the United Nations not do something dramatic for them? I imagine that if there were a fund of one dollar per day for each of these children to be spent on food for them, they could quickly become the best nourished children ever. For that many children, \$300 million per day equals \$110 billion per year, which is only \$20 billion more than the US government spent for the Defense Department in fiscal 1976. Let's think about it. Someone should take care that all the kids in the world get a good start in life. Catholic Relief Services is giving a tremendously good example to all of us in this area; its devoted people and imaginative innovations deserve our applause. But its operations of one-quarter billion dollars cannot cope with the needs of 300 million children.

How Many People Can Live Comfortably on the Earth?

Four billion people now inhabit the earth. Its land surface totals 135,897,000 square kilometers. Average population density is 30 people per square kilometer. Much of the land is quite uninhabitable, of course.

In Japan, 115.5 million people now live on 370,073 square kilometers, which equals 312 people per square kilometer. This is more than 10 times the world average. Seventy-five percent of Japan is

rugged hill and mountain land whose slopes average more than a 15% gradient, too steep for cultivation. More than half of the people are settled on 1.7% of the land, which equals 8,678 persons per square kilometer. If space alone is considered, Japan's area offers vast possibilities for additional population.

If Japan's existing population density is applied to world land area, the total comes to 42.4 billion people, 10 times more than now. People are quite comfortable in Japan, and there is not much emigration. In fact, quite a number of those who emigrated earlier decided to return to Japan. The yen is strong, the standard of living high. I think that the world can accommodate 40 billion people quite comfortably as far as space is concerned.

Within Japan, most people prefer to live close together, with its 8,678 persons per square kilometer. If that standard were applied to the world land area, it would equal 1,280 billion people, 300 times more than there are now. If we consider only one-fourth of the world land area habitable, this would accommodate 320 billion on the same basis, or 80 times as many as now inhabit the earth.

This is not some exotic figure, but represents the actual situation of more than half the people in Japan, who are living with reasonable comfort right here and now under those spatial circumstances. Manhattan Island has a higher density, 10,095 per square kilometer. And in 1910 Manhattan Island had 17,560 per square kilometer. If one-fourth of the global land surface were occupied at that density, it would equal 2,387 billion people, or 590 times as many people as now.

Space itself, then, is not an imminent problem. There is still ample space on this globe of ours to accommodate at least as many people as you want to think about. The limiting problem would rather be other resources, but most of all, the ability of humans to live together in peace, and to work out their problems together.

Realistically, people can live more economically if they move closer together, and that is one reason for Japan's high standard of living and the strength of the yen. There is a big saving in energy consumption, in time needed for travel and transport, in resources allocated to travel and transport, in shortening of cables, pipes, lines, roads, etc. when people live close to markets, factories, schools, hospitals, banks, stores, and amusement centers. This is one reason why the big cities of the world have so much extra wealth for culture, art, education, and amusement; and why levels of living in general tend to rise with the progress of urbanization.

Peaceful and prosperous living in an urban situation, however, is conditioned upon the amount of willingness of the citizens to socialize for the sake of the common good. And just in this area, I think, Japan excels. One reason for it is the intense education, training, regimentation, and conditioning which the children receive in the kinder-

gartens, in the grades, and in junior and senior high schools. Children at these age levels can tolerate and absorb such socialized training. They enter adult society with apparent ease, and the rest of society can usually depend upon them; almost all contribute toward the common good, and usually fall in line with the required patterns of socialized urban living. A Daniel Boone may find life in Tokyo intolerable, and Tokyo might find him unreliable and dangerous. Giving up the Daniel Boone style of living is one of the prices city people must pay for high levels of modern living. But Tokyoites who feel akin to Daniel Boone, can still climb mountains, ski, jog, play sports, even sail around the world during vacations and spare time.

The future world will have about as much living space as our social discipline creates; that is, we can have an immense world population if we learn to live together for mutual benefit, being mindful of the needs of others as well as ourselves. We should speak not so much of "population problems," as of "people problems." Immense populations are happy when the people are good.

Managing Births God's Way

We know that God is the essence of peace, joy, beauty, elegance, love, truth, and all that. If we are His children, all of our actions should be characterized by a like sophistication, proper to God's children. Birth regulation should be something which is done with dignity and love, in freedom and joy, in mutual admiration of husband and wife. Catholic doctors and Catholic priests can be God's partners in helping people to resemble God's beauty and love when living as husband and wife.

May the Lord give us the courage to do things more beautifully than the contraception-abortion-sterilization clique is advising. His ways are not always the easiest, but they are always the best for us here, as well as hereafter. Natural family planning is beautiful, and that is the type which God's family is going to be using.

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3. The writer made this intervention at the Second World Population Conference, Belgrade, Aug. 30—Sept. 10, 1965.