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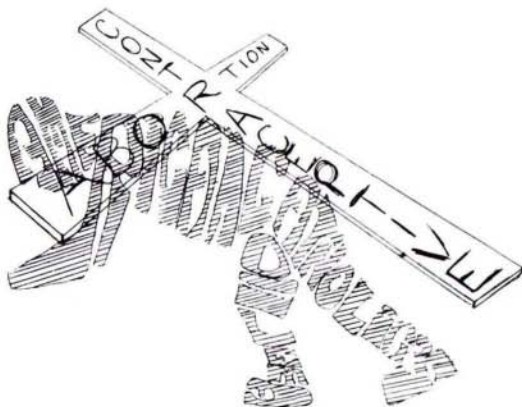
Dr. FitzGerald looks at the position in which social and environmental pressures, widespread contraception and the new therapeutic range of the prostaglandins have placed the American Catholic.

The American Catholic: Contraception and Abortion

James A. FitzGerald, M.D.

Catholic Christendom is almost 2,000 years old, and American Catholics number 47½ million. As world population figures approach an apogee or perigee, depending upon which

are sparsely settled and losing population. In ecology, however, it is the dictum that our projected population statistics exceed our capabilities and resources.



demographic groups are currently in acceptance, the Catholic lay individuals are subject to a consideration of numbers.

For all Americans the issue has many aspects other than moral ones. Any weight of numbers is burdensome and limiting in an indulgent and materialistic society. Our population density is not high compared, for example, to Holland or Japan. There are large areas in the United States that

An obstetrician turned "demographer" states, in the September/October, 1970, issues of the *Harvard Medical Alumni Bulletin*, that "at least

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a million to a million and a half abortions would have to be performed annually in the United States in order to reduce the birth rate from 18 to 12-13 per thousand, thus maintaining the population at the present level." The author of these portentous numbers is Dr. Duncan Reid, William Lambert Richardson Professor of Obstetrics, Kate Macy Ladd Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, at Harvard Medical School.

In England, Arthur Koestler speaks of the planetary problem.

The public is aware that there is a problem. It is not aware that we are moving toward a climax which is not centuries, but only a few decades, ahead — that it is well within the lifetime of the present generation of teen-agers. Asia, for instance, which merely doubled its population in the nineteenth century, has doubled it again since 1940. With the pace being set by the less industrially developed two-thirds of the world, we can count on doubling our numbers every three decades.

Until the dawn of the modern era this process took about one and a half thousand years, or, as Sir Gavin de Beer said in a commemorative address for the bicentenary of Thomas Malthus:

If we go back a million years to the hominids, or even 250,000 years to the Swanscombe Man and his Missus, the curve of the population is like an aircraft taking off: for most of the time it just skims along the time axis; then about A.D. 1600, the undercarriage is raised and it begins to soar; today it is rising almost vertically, more like a rocket off its pad. A million years to reach 3,250 million; thirty or so to double it.

In contrast to world population figures, American reproductivity is not

high. The overall population course for the planet that we inhabit has a different graph. World population ascends on the ordinate, while the U.S. population almost parallels the abscissa.

A world-wide impetus is thus given to the American Catholic to change his reproductive intentions. He is appealed to on an international level, and in terms of the survival of humanity he is addressed as an individual, as a human being, and not as a segment of a group or as a member of a religious establishment.

For some years, for practical, economic, and personal reasons the American Catholic has been practicing contraception. The population problem provides one more reason. Children are conceived at the best of times and experienced in the worst of times. Their care in infancy is arduous and time consuming, and as they advance in age they are expensive, and more often than not full of perturbations for their parents. The disturbances I speak of are the normal ones of growth, development, and personality. These are part of childhood, and admittedly difficult even for the child. Problems with children over and above these I will not discuss; a king named Lear found them horrendous. The couple practicing zero reproductivity will never experience either variety.

There is a fulfillment in child-bearing and an unconscious approach to unattainable immortality in fathering and mothering. Parenthood is an occupation, a definite sphere, a life pattern with constraints and goals. Like any elected path, it is restrictive and is followed only with some loss of personal liberties and choices. There are easier courses. Contributing to the

basic motivation of the married American Catholic who practices contraception is the rejection of the burdens and problems of child rearing. The rejection, however, is not total, except for some at the university levels who preach zero reproductivity. They will have a family; it will be limited; it may be postponed until certain personal ends are accomplished, i.e., job security, an education completed, finances established. This is planned parenthood made possible by contraception.

It is postulated that 70% of American married Catholics in their reproductive years use some form of birth control. A bare minimum exercise "rhythm," the method being not only psychologically poor, but impractical. The contraceptive creams and the condom have their adherents; there is increased applicability of the intrauterine device; the contraceptive steroid pill has the most widespread acceptance.

Contraceptive methods to date may be summed up as follows: if uncomplicated, then not entirely effective; if effective, then not without potential medical complications. The combined contraceptive-abortifacient properties of the prostaglandins is a new therapeutic range. The promise is safety, with contraceptive and abortifacient characteristics.

The morality of the pill and the intrauterine device is already blurred in the American Catholic's mind; if there is an immorality in their use, it is largely ignored. There will be increasing confusion with the prostaglandins. Is the "bleeding episode" that follows the injection of this material, particularly when a "period is late," a menstrual period or an abortion? Medical criteria can deter-

mine pregnancy or its absence with some accuracy, but a simple "shot" for a "late period" is a convenient item. Whether a pregnancy exists or not at the time of a delayed period may be irrelevant.

There is no paucity of abortions, or willing abortionists performing for a fee. Some techniques, such as D and C, or vacuum curettage, are technically operations, often requiring some form of anesthesia and, ideally, hospitalization. Those performing these procedures have fees they regard as commensurate with the technique. The intrauterine injection of saline and glucose is fatal to the child and may be formidable in its complications to the mother, but as a procedure it is regarded as less of an operation.

The urgency of the circumstances and the desperation of the patient may make any fee seem reasonable. Undoubtedly there are humanitarians who perform abortions, but a very substantial fee for a service desperately wanted cannot help but motivate some practitioners. The direction of the motivation is thus not necessarily charitable.

The prostaglandins will take the large element of profit out of abortions. It is not likely that any patient, even one urgently requiring the service, would pay \$200, \$500, or \$1,000 for one injection of medicine. If it is established that the intrauterine insertion of a catheter and the injection of prostaglandins is a more effective method, then the procedure has surgical connotations which will, of course, be reflected in the operator's fee.

The above remarks should not be taken as a diatribe against the avariciousness of abortionists. What I wish to report is that abortion is becoming technically easy and inexpensive.

The notion in Catholic thinking that to fault abortion we must accept contraception, perceptibly gives way to the reality that if we embrace contraception, we must necessarily include abortion. This arises from the circumstance that when contraception fails, or is not utilized, abortion is the solution. Contraceptive goals are restricted and not entirely reached without the fail-safe of abortion.

Lest American or worldwide Catholics bear an onus of genital guilt, they should be informed that no population expert considers the total Papal aggregate to be of consequence. They may reproduce at will; their moiety with regard to total world population is so small that in terms of present or future numbers, they are of no numerical consequence. Still, they are appealed to in tones Malthusian. No segment of humanity is to be neglected.

Contraception and abortion are at once an apparent necessity and, in some circles, an evil. The majority of American Catholics have passed through the contraceptive phase and stand on the threshold of abortion. At the moment the larger number rejects this. The rejection is easy inasmuch as the circumstances requiring it are not common. The rejection may be made more on an intellectual than a practical basis, and, given sufficient conditions, the practice of abortion may be accepted as an exception.

There have been few international priorities to date, the divisiveness of

the human race seeming to make these incapable of attainment. National priorities are more often misdirected than beneficent, and there may be an essential wisdom in disagreeing with what everybody says is right.

Plato, in his *Republic*, wrote of "keeping the number of the citizens as constant as possible, having regard to losses caused by war, epidemics and so on." This utopian state was to have 5,040 citizens, each holding "one inalienable lot of land." What is alienable or inalienable appears to change. Professor Gaston Bouthoul of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Sociales in Paris states that "the right to procreate arbitrarily is the only alienable right of man."

The apocalyptic in the population planners have told us of the magnitude of the problem; they have outlined their urgent goals, and sometimes desperate means of accomplishing them: but if there is national and international unreproductivity, at what time and at what optimal number is the Juggernaut to be reversed? The motivation of selected, advanced societies in either direction, productivity or unproductivity, I admit; but it is not easy to envision a totally enlightened human race.

If child rearing remains onerous as it has always been, if those conceiving and rearing children are at a lifelong economic disadvantage, if a society becomes egocentric enough not to want to make sacrifices for its children, and if contraceptive practices are widespread and easy abortion is possible, any population problem will diminish.

This is the position the American Catholic finds himself in at the moment.