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OVERPOPULATION

Is Birth Control the Answer?



Rev. Arthur McCormack, M.A. (Mill Hill)



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by

REV. ARTHUR McCORMACK, M.A.

(Mill Hill)



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REV. ARTHUR MCCORMACK, M.A.
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OVERPOPULATION - IS BIRTH CONTROL THE ANSWER?

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OVERPOPULATION

IS BIRTH CONTROL THE ANSWER?

The Problem

IN the present century, there has been an astonishing increase in the population of the world. Experts expect this increase to continue for some time.

In 1900 it was 1,600 millions. In 1950 it was 2,500 millions. The latest United Nations Report says that in A.D. 2000 it will be over 5,000 millions. There are 120,000 more mouths to feed every day.

Can they be fed? The pessimists say they cannot. Their argument is that, even at the present time, over half the inhabitants of the world do not get enough to eat. Very many people live in conditions bordering on starvation; some actually die from it. The resources of the earth are not sufficient to support the millions yet to be born.

They point out that these resources are not inexhaustible. They are being rapidly exhausted; already over half the good soil of the earth has been lost, due to erosion, bad farming methods and other causes. The process is continuing.

An ever-increasing population seems to be depending on ever-dwindling resources. Some alarmists foresee disaster within several generations. One of the most sensational of these was an American, William Vogt. His book, *The Road to Survival*, had this publisher's note on the cover:

"This book is a revelation of the fact that the earth, as abused by man, is unable to support the human race in terms of its most basic need—food, and is rapidly becoming uninhabitable."

The pessimists say that the only way, or at least the main

way, to cope with this problem is to keep the growing population within bounds by birth control.¹ A panel of experts on B.B.C. Television declared recently that this was the only remedy for the "absolutely new and menacing situation which has arisen in this century." The Lambeth Conference has blessed this solution, especially for the under-developed countries of the world.

Sir Julian Huxley and Bertrand Russell are the chief supporters in this country of the view that economic and agricultural progress is a mere palliative and that a world campaign for birth control must be set going. In a recent article Sir Julian suggested that even the Vatican was thinking in terms of reducing the excess numbers in backward countries.² This deduction from the exhortation to Catholics, in 1954, to do their best to solve population problems must be read in conjunction with what Pope Pius XII said in other places, e.g. :

"Certainly we would not deny that this or that region is at present burdened by a relatively excess population. But the desire to solve the difficulty with a formula that the number of inhabitants should be regulated according to the public economy is equivalent to subverting the order of nature."

In another place the Pope said : "Overpopulation is not a valid reason to spread the illicit practice of birth control."

The Under-developed Countries

It is the under-developed countries of the world which present the greatest difficulty. The more prosperous countries can absorb any foreseeable increase in population. But the poorer countries of the East will, according to the latest estimates, have as many people by A.D. 2000 as there are in the whole world today.

This is a particularly worrying problem for some Christians, and especially Catholics. Their religion says : "Do works of mercy." Yet if they do, there will be still more mouths to feed, for more babies will be born and people will live

¹ "Birth control" is used throughout in its commonly accepted meaning of artificial birth prevention.

² *Reader's Digest*, February, 1959.

longer. But are we to stop curing disease, decreasing infant mortality, lowering the death rate, caring for the aged, fighting against the exposure of infants and the evils of sterilisation and abortion for fear that our efforts may be TOO successful, and that we may only save life in order to expose hundreds of thousands of people to starvation or intolerable living conditions for lack of food and space to support them ? Such a thing is impossible for a Christian to think of.

What the Church teaches

The dilemma "birth control or starvation" seems to face much of the world in all its grim reality. It appears to many that the teaching of the Catholic Church against birth control is condemning large numbers of mankind to misery and want. Fortunately this is not so, for the picture is not so grim as has been painted.

God has provided

Let us put it this way. Either you believe in God or you do not. If you do, then you believe in His Providence. You know that He will provide for any natural increase in the human race and that He has already done so. It is up to men to use the resources of the world as God intended. They are abundant and sufficient for all, if men's skill and ingenuity are allowed full play to develop and distribute them properly.

The fact that people are dying from hunger in the cities of the East is not due to any failure of God's Providence, but to the fact that the bounty of the earth, which was meant for all, is not available for all. Lack of human solidarity, greed, selfishness and ignorance, past and present, are the reasons why large parts of the world are in poverty. The Church also believes that God would not permit a situation to arise the only remedy for which would be to break His law. Birth control, being immoral, cannot be God's answer to this problem.

A Negative Solution

But even those who do not believe in God or His Providence have ample reason to judge that a negative solution such as

birth control is not the best or even a sufficient answer. I myself worked for nearly ten years in one of the countries, normally classed as under-developed, in a very primitive part of Africa. I knew the people and their conditions intimately; I have read most of what has been written on both sides of this controversy both here and in America, and I unhesitatingly say that, even if I were a convinced supporter of birth control in general, I still would not recommend it as a way of coping with the population situation. My reasons for this will be clear later on. The Church forbids birth control on higher grounds than mere practical politics, but from my own experience I am utterly convinced that she is right from the point of view of economics also.

Large Families

Note that the Church does not insist that everyone should have as large a family as possible. Rather, she says that individual couples must use their judgment in this matter to decide what is right and prudent. She certainly does not demand “an ungoverned spate of unwanted births.” But she does teach that whatever the size of the family, it must be the result of keeping the law of God. If the family is to be small, this must not be brought about by immoral devices. If it is to be large, this must not be due to an uncontrolled and imprudent use of marriage, nor to a lack of consideration on the part of one of the spouses, but to a loving desire to fulfil marital duties and bring forth children to the glory of God.

God helps those who help Themselves

The Church relies on Providence, but not in a blind or fatalistic way. Men must use their brains and their efforts to plan the solution of the population problems. Pope Pius XII made this very clear. He did not want people to be so heavenly-minded that they were no earthly good; and he showed how the whole history of the Church has been full of deeds of Christian charity at a very practical level. He said :

“Do not let yourselves be misled by the manufacturers of errors

and unhealthy theories . . . currents of thought which hold that since redemption belongs to the sphere of supernatural grace, and is therefore exclusively the work of God, there is no need for us to co-operate on earth. . . . As if the first efficacy of grace were not to co-operate with our sincere efforts to fulfil every day the commandments of God, as individuals and as members of society; as if, for the last two thousand years, there has not lived and persevered in the Church the sense of the collective responsibility of all for all; so that souls were moved and are moved to heroic charity, the souls of the monks who cultivated the land, those who freed the slaves, those who healed the sick, those who spread the faith, civilisation, and sciences to all ages and all peoples, TO CREATE SOCIAL CONDITIONS WHICH ARE ALONE CAPABLE OF MAKING POSSIBLE AND FEASIBLE FOR ALL A LIFE WORTHY OF MAN AND OF A CHRISTIAN.”

Although Christianity has shown always a great esteem for the practice of religious poverty, it is no part of the Church's message that abject poverty and destitution are desirable for all, simply because Our Lord said that “man doth not live by bread alone.” On the contrary, as the Popes have always insisted, a certain modicum of freedom from want is necessary for most people to be able to practise religion properly. Even religious vows bind to poverty, not destitution. It was in this light that the late Pope viewed the problem of overpopulation as can be seen from the following passage from a speech in 1951 :

“ . . . the normal growth and increase of religious life presupposes a certain measure of healthy economic conditions. Who can resist a pang of emotion upon seeing how economic misery and social evils render Christian life according to the commands of God more difficult and too often demand heroic sacrifices ? ”

It is obvious, then, that the Church does not regard the poverty of millions in the under-developed countries of the world as some God-sent condition to be accepted with fatalism and with some pious reference to the will of God. It is not God's will that these people should be so poor and should suffer so much. It is God's will that their want should be relieved by those in a position to do so—the more favoured countries of the world.

Why the Church forbids Birth Control³

But the Church does not and cannot recommend birth control as a means of assisting the needy. Birth control is morally wrong, against the law of God, and therefore it cannot be used as a solution for population problems. It is a sexual perversion, unnatural and sterile, which goes against the right relationship between men and women in their sacred contact with the origin of life. It is a deliberate interference with the plan of God, clearly shown in the very structure of the human body and in the processes of nature for the continuance of the human race. It is, as even George Bernard Shaw called it, "mutual masturbation".

Birth Control is wrong for All Men

Because birth control is against the nature which God has given man, it is wrong for all men, even for those not directly subject to the laws of the Church. The natural law binds all mankind, and the Church's teaching on this subject is no man-made law, but the law of God. The Church could not change it, even if she wanted to.

Birth Control not the Answer

Birth control is not the answer to population difficulties. It is not even a good partial or temporary answer. The forebodings of the prophets of woe go against the facts. The scientists who are concerned with the actual work of producing food and finding new ways of increasing food supplies tell us that the earth can supply plenty of food for all. Birth control, in addition to being wrong, is therefore unnecessary, and it can be very harmful. It makes people reluctant to tackle the problems, which are very real and pressing, in the positive way that they should be tackled.

Previous Population Scares

Let us put the present population scare in its proper place. It is the third such scare in 150 years. It came from the

³ For a simple, full account of the Church's teaching on birth control, see *Birth Control* by G. P. Dwyer (C.T.S., 3d.)

threat of famine after World War II and has been fostered by several books written by the extreme pessimist school of economists and social scientists, who are called Malthusians or neo-Malthusians (after the Rev. T. R. Malthus who started the first of these scares at the end of the 18th century).

Malthus believed that there was some kind of natural law that made population increase more quickly than food supplies. He prophesied famine unless the numbers of the population could be severely reduced and kept at a certain level.

False Prophecies

His prophecies were falsified by the discoveries of new lands, the use of fertilisers and changes in the system of agriculture. As the 1800's were years of plenty, no more was heard of the Malthusians until the end of the century.

Then, in 1898, the President of the British Association, disturbed by the rapid growth of population, especially of the wheat-eating peoples, forecast that there would be famine in the 1930's, as the supply of wheat could not possibly keep pace with the increasing numbers.

He, too, was wrong. In the thirties, there was a glut instead of a famine. The wheat farmers of the Argentine were burning grain instead of lamenting shortage, for new methods of plant breeding had led to unforeseen increases in harvests. This population scare gave great impetus to propaganda for artificial birth control, which up to then had been regarded as being far from respectable.

If the present population scare is not defeated in its turn, it will be the first time that science has been unable to produce the answer to such a challenge. Actually, the answer is already here. Professor Colin Clark, Director of the Oxford Agricultural Economics Research Institute, for example, has told us that the available land of the earth, *if cultivated only according to present knowledge*, could support a population TEN TIMES larger than at present.⁴ Further, taking into

⁴ *Nature*, May, 1958, p.1236 (bottom of first column). *Nature* is one of the most reputable and widely read periodicals among scientists. Professor Clark informs us that his article aroused considerable interest and no attempt was made to question or deny anything stated in it.

account the possibilities of winning new land for cultivation and the recent discoveries of science, American agricultural scientists confidently predict that the world could support a population of 50,000 million, i.e., TWENTY TIMES its present size.

The Evidence of the United Nations

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (usually referred to as F.A.O.) is the most authoritative body in the world on agricultural questions and food supply problems. Its interests are world-wide and it has in its service some of the foremost authorities and technical experts of the day.

Beginning its work shortly after the end of the war, when famine was freely prophesied and the views of the pessimists seemed very weighty, the Organisation declared in its first World Food Survey, published in 1946 :

“Many people who have given serious study to the population problem, prophesy doom for much of mankind, unless the population growth can be drastically checked. It is worth reiterating that the fundamental solution of the problem lies in increasing the productivity of the individual by putting at his disposal modern scientific knowledge and the tools of modern technology. To the extent that this is done, every individual can become a source of new wealth to his country and to the world.”

The United Nations Population experts also contradicted the pessimists in their official reports. The U.N. Population Committee summed up as follows in 1953 :

“The danger of the world population reaching the maximum that could be supported by the earth's resources seems remote in view of the findings of this chapter . . . it would be technically possible to feed a very much larger population than the world now holds.”

In 1958, the same Committee reported that, in view of current scientific progress, conditional estimates of the world population carrying capacity (5,000 millions to 16,000 millions) “would now have to be *revised upwards*.”

Poverty can be wiped out

The most striking refutation of those who foretell coming disaster unless the population is reduced by birth control, was contained in a passage in the Report on the first decade of the activities of F.A.O. (1945-1955) published under the title of “So Bold an Aim.” This exposed the dismal forecasts of the faint-hearted for what they were and showed how baseless and harmful were the grounds on which they tried to justify birth control. The passage below is a long one but it is so important that it deserves quoting in full :

“Many are pessimistic as to the capacity of the under-developed countries to climb out of primary poverty and, capacity apart, as to their possibility to do so. They point to the apparently meagre mineral resources of many of these countries, the eroded lands and unfriendly climates, the rapidly expanding population on territories in many cases already overcrowded, the absence of capital and impossibility of saving on a scale to provide the capital required, the hopelessness of finding enough exports to pay for needed imports of equipment for industry, and many more equally convincing arguments.

It may, however, be pertinent to enquire what the outlook was in Europe 200 years ago when she started pulling herself up by her boot straps. Could it not be said that then her peoples were too poor to save on any massive scale, that her agriculture could not be made more fruitful and her people would not adapt to factory tasks and urban ways of life ? And yet the revolution took place.

Is the plight of the under-developed countries today any worse than that of Europe in 1750 ?

True, there are no vast prairie lands in temperate zones waiting to be ploughed nor are there empty spaces into which to move surplus population on a massive scale. But Europe had gone far down the road to industrialisation before she had recourse to importing food and exporting people.

Today agriculture has other tools for increasing production without having to rely on new acres by the million. Also the newer forms of power for industry—oil and, still more, atomic energy—mean that industry can be located where the people are, not vice versa.

Moreover, there are nations standing by who have already modernised themselves and who can lend their skills and experience for the job.

All these things give solid ground for believing that, during the next 100 years, there could happen in the remaining two thirds of the

world what hitherto has happened in only one third—a revolution in modes of living, in standards of living, social patterns, arts and skills, culture and thought. If this be a fair assessment, it is just about the most exciting prospect for a century-to-be that mankind has ever faced. By comparison, most of our pre-occupations appear puny indeed; cold war, class war, colour prejudice and so on. *What is almost within human grasp is nothing less than the abolition of primary poverty in the last strongholds of poverty, the bringing of low-income peoples, not to equality of income with the wealthiest peoples, but to hailing distance, so there is no longer a wide social and material gap between them.*"

Existing Land can produce Abundant Food

The population pessimists and champions of birth control make many mistakes. One is that they look on the earth as if it were like a coal mine, which is useless once it has been worked out and its seams exhausted.

The earth is not like that. Land can be renewed. Erosion and its bad effects can be checked and reversed by irrigation and scientific methods. Future erosion can be guarded against so that the errors and damage of the past need not be repeated.

Existing land can be made much more fruitful, in many cases without very great expense and in a short space of time. Barren land can be reclaimed. Even the deserts can be made to bloom. There is, for example, a vast underground lake under the Sahara, which could be tapped to make this desert fertile again, as it was in 4000 B.C.

New methods of tillage can multiply agricultural yields. In many of the under-developed countries, agriculture is hundreds of years behind the times. The use of fertilisers and the adoption of modern techniques of plant-breeding can revolutionize farming yields in the backward countries. These methods defeated the population scares of the early 19th and 20th centuries. They can do so again. The introduction of new crops, for which the soil of these countries is suitable, could supply more food, and, for the same cost, increase the nutritional value of the people's diet. Relatively easy schemes such as keeping more pigs, ducks, goats, chickens and rabbits could mean more food for the hungry millions.

Too much — not too little

It was estimated by no less an authority than the F.A.O. North American representative in 1953, that, if the same intensive agriculture were practised throughout East and South East Asia as is done in Japan, there would be an immediate SURPLUS production of food on such a colossal scale as has never yet been witnessed on earth. Such countries as India and China would have more than twice as much food for the population as now. This would occur without reclaiming unused land.

Millions need not go hungry

Much of the hungry half of our race lives in lands such as Africa and North America which have an abundance of natural resources. These could be developed to give the comparatively sparse populations plenty of food. Not only could present wants be supplied but an increasing population could be sustained. Overpopulation is a relative term. In the desert, one person per square mile would be overpopulation, if there were not food available. In densely populated Holland, which is highly developed agriculturally, an average of 900 per square mile is not too much.⁵ It should be remembered that not all the under-developed countries of the world have populations that can be regarded as large on any reasonable basis.

The World Population Conference stated on this point :

"The technical possibilities for increasing agricultural production by raising crop yields, expanding livestock numbers and yields per animal are perhaps even greater and in many respects less difficult and costly. . . . The resources and technical basis appear to exist for an output of cereals and crops at perhaps twice, and, in the case of livestock products, perhaps four or five times the present levels. AND THIS APPLIES ESPECIALLY TO THE LESS DEVELOPED REGIONS OF THE WORLD."

In addition, mechanical farming can not only increase production on existing acres but can bring into cultivation

⁵ i.e. 333.7 per sq. kilometre in 1956, according to the *Statesman's Yearbook*, 385 per sq. kilometre according to Colin Clark, in 1958.

marginal land which otherwise could not be used. From this point of view, many countries are not developed. Less than ten per cent of the land area of China is under cultivation and even this is subject to damage and neglect. Vast tracts of land in South America and Africa are still completely unused. The Population Conference of 1954 reckoned that unused tropical soils could be cultivated to such an extent that an area nearly half again the size of the arable land of the earth could be added to the world's resources.

The above are only some of the possibilities of greater use of available food supplies. There are others which may be briefly mentioned. Reduction of wastage, for example, could help very much: "for the world as a whole, the quantity of rice and grain destroyed by rats and insects probably equals the total quantities moving into international trade," according to the F.A.O. New types of food, like algae, are being used; crops are being grown by new methods, even without soil.

Food Surpluses

Facts like these justify the optimism of agricultural scientists who say that the physical potential of the world food producing capacity can be developed without limit. This is proved by what has happened in those countries which have developed their agriculture on the lines indicated above. In these highly developed countries, where even less radical methods have been used than some I have mentioned, the food problem has changed from one of scarcity to one of unmarketable surpluses.

In the U.S.A., for example, it is costing millions of dollars in the current year (1958-9) to store 8,000 million dollars worth of surplus grain. The 1958 harvest of grain was 11% greater than ever before although deliberately the acreage planted was the smallest for 40 years. In order to maintain price stability, 1,000 million dollars were spent in 1955-56 in order to prevent American farmers from cultivating an area of altogether 10 million acres. In 1956, the Commodity Credit Corporation of the U.S.A. invested 9,000 million dollars in buying up the peas which had not been sold on the market, in order to prevent prices from going down.

Incidentally this shows how the problem of distribution is the real problem we are facing in the world today, not overpopulation. A campaign (with all the money that birth control advocates desire for their purposes) to solve this problem would be a far greater and more constructive contribution towards coping with world food difficulties than birth control. After all, to use a homely example, if ten people need hats and there are only eight hats available, the common-sense solution is to get two more hats from somewhere, not to cut off two people's heads!

Atomic Power

The uses of atomic power are still in their infancy and atoms for industry have not made so much progress as atoms for war. Yet the potential uses in this field are very great, indeed, revolutionary. Atomic power can be used to relieve the food situation either, directly, by providing the power for huge irrigation schemes, or, indirectly, by helping to produce food chemically. It would not, however, be fair at this stage to include its benefits in a short-term assessment of the possibilities of coping with overpopulation problems.

The Pessimists are wrong

The Malthusian pessimists are, therefore, in conflict with the real experts. The food resources of the world CAN support any foreseeable increase in the world's population for several centuries to come. The same is true of fuel and raw materials. As regards space, the whole population of the world at present could fit on the Isle of Wight.

Incidentally, it is strange that supporters of birth control should be so strong in England. England's birth rate is the lowest in Europe, although in the past couple of years there has been a slight increase. In 1949, the Royal Commission on Population warned that it was not high enough for replacement needs. It was calculated in 1937, that, if the birth rate did not change, there would be by 1990 eight old people for every child. The dangers of *depopulation* in the more advanced countries of Western Europe and the

evils of an ageing population dependent on a small younger generation are not sufficiently stressed by the advocates of birth control.

A "Population Explosion"

It is important to remember—and this would spare us some of the fantastic calculations we are sometimes subjected to—that this is a "population explosion." It will not go on indefinitely. The most recent United Nations Population Report says :

"Never in the history of mankind have numbers of the human species multiplied as in the present century, nor can it be easily conceived that the peoples of the earth will continue at a similar pace in the century that follows. . . . *It would be absurd to carry detailed speculations forward into a more remote future.*"

Birth Control—A Short-term Answer ?

It should be obvious from what has been said that the long-term answer to population problems is increase in food production and fairer distribution of the world's resources. Would birth control be a better and more immediate answer to the pressing short-term problems ?

It is very significant that Professor Oser of New York has altogether only ONE PAGE on birth control out of the 300 pages of his recent book *Must Men Starve ?* and Professor Oser has no moral objections to birth control.

Actually, recourse to birth control is based on a double fallacy : first, that economic and agricultural progress must be slow and remote ; and second, that birth control is an easy, speedy, cheap and universally suitable panacea.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The speed and extent of progress depends, as Lord Boyd-Orr, a former Director-General of F.A.O., has declared, "on the amount of labour and capital that society is prepared to devote to it."

Birth Control neither practical nor immediately effective

Birth control is very far from being an immediate, easy and effective remedy. In countries where the most elementary

medical services are lacking, contraception is not likely to be practical or successful. A pioneer of birth control in backward countries, Dr. Chandrasekhar, makes this frank admission :

"But taking the message of birth control to the rural millions is more easily said than done. As it is, the villages of India are starved for medical and health facilities. In millions of homes there is no running water, bathrooms or privacy ; they are far removed from dispensaries and clinics. . . . A clinical examination, a contraceptive and the willingness and ability to resort to it may be centuries away from a hovel in India, a sampan in China, a rural hut in Japan."

He goes on to say that research and money must be used to find an easy and cheap means of contraception. By that he means, no doubt, the so-called contraceptive pill. No satisfactory pill of this kind has yet been discovered, although experiments have given rise to optimism in certain quarters. Experts think that it will be five to ten years, at the least, before such a pill—if it can be found—can be put safely into general use.⁶

The teeming, poverty-stricken millions which so distressed Sir Julian Huxley on a recent tour of the East, are, therefore, the worst possible material for large-scale immediately effective birth control. Yet they are the ones who are supposed to need it, not the well-off and intelligent who, as in other countries, will take to it long before the masses. Mr Aldous Huxley, although he was a member of the Brains Trust panel which in October 1958 unanimously agreed that birth control was the only remedy for overpopulation, seems to have changed his mind on this point and to have seen the force of the arguments against it. In *Brave New World Revisited*, he says :

"Birth control is a very different matter. . . . Birth control depends on the co-operation of an entire people. It must be

⁶ Incidentally, this pill will be social and moral dynamite. There is no guarantee that it will be used in the way that the population planners wish. In fact, there is every likelihood that, like present contraceptives, it will be used largely by those for whom it is NOT intended, with deplorable effects on morals.

practised by countless individuals, from whom it demands more intelligence and will power than most of the teeming millions of the world's illiterates possess, and (where chemical or mechanical methods are used) an expenditure of more money than most of these millions can afford. . . . For all these reasons death control is achieved very easily, birth control is achieved with great difficulty. . . .”

A substantial proportion of the world's population is at subsistence level. Many millions of women, therefore, must fall into the class of those “needing” a contraceptive of some kind.

Keeping these women supplied regularly with contraceptives, even in the form of a cheap pill, and getting them to use such means would be financially and administratively impossible. Even if it were possible, it could only be achieved at the cost of essential medical and other services.

Millions cannot be helped by Birth Control

Moreover, it is estimated that, in spite of birth control campaigns, another 1,000 million people will be added to the population of the world in the next ten years and more than half of this number will go to swell the numbers of those in poor living conditions. These people will ask for bread and they will be offered birth control.

An American writer suggested a few years ago that they should be allowed to die off until they reached a number which their country could support. Then they should be kept at that level by a vigorous policy of birth control. Are we really supposed to write off a whole generation and let millions of human beings eke out a pitiful existence until a miserable but merciful death? That is the *IMMEDIATE* hope that a policy of birth control offers to the hungry millions. For it is too late to prevent *them* from existing. If such a course were adopted, we would have no right to complain if they go over to Communism, as Lord Boyd-Orr has warned.

Western and Christian ideals backed by such a policy would be sheer hypocrisy. They would have little appeal in the

⁷ *Brave New World Revisited*, p.16.

East; and the ordinary, hungry Asian would be strongly tempted to prefer four sandwiches to the Four Freedoms.

Perhaps the last word on the possibility of using birth control as an immediate answer to population problems was said by Richard Meier, an American social scientist, who himself believes in contraception in a mild sort of way. He frankly says:

“These are circumstances (i.e. favouring birth control) that can exist only if economic development has already proceeded a long way in that society. The world does not have yet an instance of a rural people with low levels of literacy and with consumption at subsistence levels, which has voluntarily taken up birth control and made a success of it.”

The example of Puerto Rico shows that this is true. For twenty years, the Government has fostered a birth control campaign in this small compact country which is easily accessible to more civilised nations. No woman was farther than walking distance from the clinics sponsored by the Government where contraceptives and advice could be had free. Yet the birth rate in Puerto Rico is still one of the highest in the world, in spite of the fact that many women there have expressed a desire for two- or three-child families.

In Japan, where, since 1948, there has been a similar policy, there is very great concern in medical quarters over the great increase in the number of abortions—legal and illegal—which are attributed to the contraceptive policy. Even in the U.S.A., contraceptives do not decrease the birth rate. Though 300 million dollars a year are spent on them, the birth rate in America is one of the highest in the world.

Economic Progress can solve Population Problems

At the World Population Conference of 1954, only a small minority of delegates thought that overpopulation should be dealt with by birth control. The delegates put their faith in agricultural and economic effort.

An Example from Mexico.

Such progress is perfectly realisable, much of it in the immediate future. There is, for example, a valley in Southern

Mexico, called the Papaloapan River Valley, potentially one of the richest agricultural areas in that country. Until 1947, it was mostly wild jungle, subject to frequent flooding. Its one million inhabitants were impoverished. With a population of only 50 people to the square mile, *it was overpopulated.*

In that year, a multi-purpose development scheme was begun. A dam was built and a great artificial lake created. *In five years from the beginning of that project* the production of wheat had increased from 1,000 tons annually to 9,000 tons, and there were corresponding increases in other crops. Hydroelectric plant is now supplying 650-million kilowatt hours of power per year.

More than 300 miles of roads have been built ; malaria has been wiped out ; new towns and villages are appearing in the jungle. Apparently the Papaloapan Valley, *with an increasing population, is no longer overpopulated.* The cost of this was about £25,000,000 altogether (about one third of what the U.S.A. spends every year on contraceptives). Compare this achievement with what birth control would have accomplished, even if it could have been applied successfully.

The First Five-Year Plan in India

The First Five-Year Plan for India has shown what can be done for under-developed countries. During its first three years nutrition production increased by 21%. Large scale projects, some financed by the Colombo Plan of 1951, similar to the one in Mexico, and others involving extensive recovery of land by mechanical means, were successful.

A dramatic small-scale effort was perhaps even more encouraging. A well-known mining engineer, Mr Harold Smith, who has specialised in finding water and digging wells, came to India in 1952. His modern machines and techniques and 'know-how' produced 755 wells irrigating some 302,000 acres in 26 months. As a result more food was assured to 350,000 people and also the prosperity which goes with increased crops and water supplies in barren areas. An enthusiastic supporter of his ideals has said :

"The water they (his wells) bring up will narrow the gap in the present inequality of food, work and wealth in the world. It can free people in backward areas from under-nourishment, ill-health and poverty—and it could do it *in this generation.*"

Individual countries and international agencies like F.A.O. are undertaking many projects such as these in many parts of the world at this very moment. Lord Boyd-Orr has said of them :

"Schemes are in progress or planned, in Africa, the Near East and the Indian sub-continent. International co-operation through the United Nations, in completing all these projects would do for the present world situation what the agricultural development of the new continents did for the food shortage of Western Europe in the 19th century, and the spectre of Malthus would be laid for another one hundred years."

Massive Aid needed

Much has been and is being done. But assistance *on a massive scale* by the richer countries is necessary to make all the possibilities become realities. Not enough is being done. The United States which has indeed been the most generous, as she is the most favoured of the more fortunate countries, has done a great deal since the War to help the needy nations. Yet even the U.S.A. devotes, in its 1959 budget, only 2% of expenditure to aid for the under-developed countries, or one seventh of what the U.S.A. spends on alcohol in a year. It is obvious that even she is not grappling with the immense problems on the scale they need and deserve.

Pope John XXIII, on the day after his election, October 29th, 1958, appealed for more help for poorer people, saying :

"Why must the resources of human ingenuity be turned more and more to the preparation of arms instead of improving the welfare of all classes, particularly the poorer classes ? We know, it is true, that to bring about so laudable, so praiseworthy a proposition, there are grave and intricate difficulties in the way but they must be victoriously overcome, even by force : this is, in fact, the most important undertaking connected with the prosperity of mankind."

By the year A.D. 2000, when the population of the world will have increased so greatly, it is nevertheless possible that very

much of the world's poverty and want could have been wiped out without recourse to birth control. If this is not achieved, the blame will rest, not on Providence, not on science or scientists, not on religious and other bodies opposing birth control, but squarely on mankind itself. For as the World Conference on Population stated: "We cannot justifiably plead poverty of our natural or scientific resources." Or, as Chesterton put it, if you have only eight hats for ten boys, you do not send for the headsman but for the hatter.

NOTE

It has been possible to treat only of some aspects of the overpopulation problem in this small pamphlet. For fuller treatment, interested readers may like to read *Overpopulation and Birth Control: Papal Teaching*, by the present author (Catholic Social Guild, Liverpool) and his book to be published shortly by Sheed & Ward, dealing with every aspect of the problem and giving full references and proofs of all that has been stated in this pamphlet.

SUGGESTED READING

- ***Must Men Starve ?** By Jacob Oser, 1956.
 - ***World Population and Food Supplies.** By Sir E. J. Russell, 1954.
 - ***So Bold an Aim.**—Review of the first decade of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 1956.
 - ***Our Undeveloped World.** By Dudley Stamp, 1953.
 - ***The White Man's Dilemma.** By Lord Boyd-Orr, 1953.
 - ***Men against the Jungle.** By Ritchie Calder, 1954.
 - ***Men against the Desert.** By Ritchie Calder, 1951 (re-published 1958).
 - ***Men against the Frozen North.** By Ritchie Calder, 1957.
 - Control of Life.** By Halliday Sutherland, 1951.—Contains much useful information about the evils of birth control. However, his theory that fertility rises due to under-nourishment is not widely held.
 - Marriage and the Family.** By Dr Jacques Leclerq, 1948.
 - ***Birth Control.** By G. P. Dwyer (C.T.S., 3d.).
 - ***The Family Handbook.** By William Lawson, S.J.
 - The War on World Poverty.** By Harold Wilson, 1953.
- * These books are the most useful and easily obtainable by the general reader.

The following books contain the best statements of the Malthusian Case :

- Hungry People and Empty Lands.** By Sripati Chandrasekhar, 1954. Very well written ; shows genuine concern for the poor.

OVERPOPULATION - IS BIRTH CONTROL THE ANSWER?

The Limits of the Earth. By Fairfield Osborn, 1954. Very moderate, with the best understanding of the Church's attitude to birth control.

In addition :

The Road to Survival. By William Vogt, 1948 (and 1955). Very extreme, outdated.

The Human Sum. 1957. A symposium by the Planned Parenthood Association containing essays on the subject by Bertrand Russell and Sir Julian Huxley ; not very good, but should be read by students as the authors are the foremost English advocates of Malthusianism.

For more advanced readers :

Determinants and Consequences of Population Trends (1953)—
United Nations Population Report.

The Future of World Population. 1958, United Nations.

Proceedings of the World Population Conference of 1954.

The State of Food and Agriculture (F.A.O.) each year.

Activities of the F.A.O. under the Expanded Technical Assistance Programme.

U.N. Demographic Year Book, 1958.

Various United Nations publications on specific schemes fostered by them in under-developed countries (United Nations Headquarters, 14-15 Stratford Place, London, W.1.).

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