



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF CARD. JEAN VILLOT,
ON BEHALF OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI,
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON POPULATION****

Friday, 28 March 1974

We would like, first of all, to thank you for coming to see us. You wished to have this meeting in order to speak to us about the high responsibilities that the United Nations Organization has given you in connection with the World Population Year and the World Population Conference. We avail ourselves of the occasion to assure you of the interest with which the Holy See follows the international community's efforts in favour of justice and peace.

The numerous activities being organized within the framework of the World Population Year and in connection with the World Population Conference, to be held in Bucharest next August, cannot leave the Holy See indifferent. Although the quest for solutions to the problems posed by population growth will, for many years ahead, call for the generous commitment of all men of good will, the World Population Year and Conference present particularly important occasions for alerting world opinion to the needs of individuals and peoples.

When the Church concerns herself with population problems, she does so by reason of fidelity to her mission. This concern stems from her commitment to work for the promotion of the integral good, both material and spiritual, of the whole man and of all men. The Church knows that population means people, human beings. Since she is the depositary of a revelation in which the Author of life speaks to us about man, his needs, his dignity and his human and spiritual destiny, the Church takes a profound interest in everything that can serve man. But at the same time, she concerns herself with everything that might compromise the innate dignity and freedom of the human person.

We are aware that the growing number of people, in the world taken as a whole and in certain countries in particular, presents a challenge to the human community and governments. The

problems of hunger, health, education, housing and employment become more difficult to solve when the population increases more rapidly than the available resources.

For some people, there is a great temptation to believe that there is no solution and to wish to put a brake on population growth by the use of radical measures, measures which are not seldom in contrast with the laws implanted by God in man's nature, and which fall short of due respect for the dignity of human life and man's just liberty. Such measures are, in some cases, based upon a materialistic view of man's destiny.

The true solutions to these problems – we would say the only solutions – will be those that take due account of all concrete factors taken together: the demands of social justice as well as respect for the divine laws governing life, the dignity of the human person as well as the freedom of peoples, the primary role of the family as well as the responsibility proper to married couples (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 37; *Humanae Vitae*, 23, 31).

We do not wish to repeat here in detail the principles that are at the basis of the Church's position in the matter of population. These principles have been clearly set forth in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council and in our encyclical letters *Populorum Progressio* and *Humanae Vitae*. These documents, the contents of which are well known to you, demonstrate that the Church's teaching on population matters is both firm and carefully enunciated, respectful of principles and, at the same time, deeply human in its pastoral approach.

No pressure must cause the Church to deviate towards doctrinal compromises or short-term solutions. It is not, of course, for the Church to propose solutions of the purely technical order. Her role is to bear witness to the dignity and destiny of man, and to enable man to rise to greater moral and spiritual heights. The Church's teaching, which we do not cease to reaffirm, assists the faithful to understand better their individual responsibility and the contribution that they are called upon to make to the solution of these problems. In this search they must not allow themselves to be influenced by the affirmation of individuals or groups who claim to present the Church's position while omitting certain essential aspects of the teaching of the genuine 'Magisterium'.

The Church has always emphasized, and she still does so today, the need to deal with the problems of population in the objective reality of their various aspects. These problems have of course economic and social aspects, but they are above all human problems.

In fact, discussion of the population problems involves the very finality of the human person. God's creative and redemptive will with regard to man can be recognized, confirmed or rejected in a debate that touches upon man's very existence. And this existence of man is only fully human to the extent that, "master of his own acts and judge of their worth, he is the author of his own advancement, in keeping with the nature which was given to him by this Creator and whose possibilities and exigencies he himself freely assumes" (*Populorum Progressio*, 34).

Any population programme must, therefore, be at the service of the human person. It must "reduce inequalities, fight discrimination, free man from various types of servitude and enable him to be the instrument of his own material betterment, of his moral progress and of his spiritual growth" (*Populorum Progressio*, 34). Hence it must remove everything that is opposed to life itself or which harms man's free and responsible personality.

Any population policy must, likewise, guarantee the dignity and stability of the institution of the family by ensuring that the family is provided with the means enabling it to play its true role. The family unit is at the service of a life that is fully human; it is the starting-point for a balanced social life, in which self-respect is inseparable from respect for others. Married couples must therefore exercise their responsibilities with a full awareness of their own duties towards God, themselves, the family and society, in a correct hierarchy of values. The decision regarding the number of children they will have depends upon their right judgment, and cannot be left to the discretion of the public authorities. But because this judgment presupposes a rightly-formed conscience, it is important that there should be realized all the conditions which will allow parents to attain a level of responsibility in conformity with morality - a responsibility which is really human and which, without neglecting the sum total of the circumstances, takes account of the law of God (cf. *Humanae Vitae*, 10; *Gaudium et Spes*, 50, 87).

One of the great themes that must be examined is, therefore, the theme of social justice. A fully human life, one endowed with freedom and dignity, will be assured to all men and all peoples when the earth's resources have been shared more equitably, when the needs of the less privileged have been given effective priority in the distribution of the riches of our planet, when the rich (individuals as well as groups) seriously undertake a fresh effort of aid and investment in favour of the most deprived.

The Population Year should proclaim a renewal of the commitment of all in favour of full justice in the world, in order to work together to build the common future of the human race (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 43).

One often hears it said that, in order to make possible the development of the less privileged countries and to guarantee to future generations a healthy environment and a life worthy of man, population growth must be radically slowed down, and that the public authorities must concern themselves with this matter.

The public authorities, within the limits of their competence, can certainly intervene by favouring the availability of appropriate information, and especially by adopting suitable measures for economic development and social progress, provided that these measures respect and promote true human values, both individual and social, and provided that due respect is paid to the moral laws (cf. *Mater et Magistra* in AAS, 53 (1961) p. 447; *Populorum Progressio*, 37; *Humanae Vitae*, 23).

Dear friends: the fundamental attitude of the Church in this Population Year is one of hope. The history of the world proves that man can succeed in finding correct answers to the questions which face him, when he applies to this task all his creativity and all his gifts of heart and mind in a sincere collaboration in favour of his brothers and sisters, in order to assure for all a truly human life in freedom and responsibility. The Church has been the witness to this truth down the centuries.

The Church's hope is, of course, based on realism, but also upon the certitude that the sphere of what is possible can always increase when one goes forward with God.

*ORa n.15 p.9, 10.

Paths to Peace p.403-405.