

## ABOUT THE REPORT OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES ON POPULATION AND RESOURCES

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From 1990, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences started thinking of organizing a study week on Resources and Population. The task was, at first, undertaken by Monseigneur Rossano, Rector of the Lateran University, and by Doctor Max Perutz, member of the Academy and Nobel laureate for molecular biology. Initially I helped organize the demographic section of the study week and I can say that the demographers who took part in the study week were of the highest reputation. Thomas Wrigley was named in 1993 as “Laureate” of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population. Paul Demeny is the Director of the Population and Development Review. Massimo Livi Bacci is a Honorary President of the Union of which I spoke before, etc. Making them all first-class scholars in demography.

Unfortunately, the proceedings of the study week have not yet been issued. I will not dwell on the problems encountered over their publication, but upon what a group which took part in the work of the study week was asked to do. At the end of the week there were four reports: one on population problems by myself, one on economics by Prof. Quadrio Curzio of the Catholic University of Milan, one on resources by Sir Leslie Fowden and a fourth one by an Academician, Prof. Waterlow, on medical aspects. The aim of communicating the conclusions of the study week to the higher authorities as soon as possible so that the four reports could be used, was impeded by the fact that they were written in rather technical terms, they were undocumented and a little disjointed. That is why a group of persons who — as said — had taken part in the work of the study week was asked to prepare a sort of overview of the papers, discussions and conclusions,

rigorous and accurately documented, but at the same time user-friendly. What had to be done started immediately, early in 1992. We had several meetings, agreed on a division of work and had discussions here in the Academy. The President of the Academy, Prof. Marini Bettolo, attended all the meetings. When he unfortunately fell ill the work was suspended for a considerable time. We waited for the nomination of a new President. The work was resumed in the spring of 1993 and in June it was finished. It was then submitted to Dr. Max Perutz, who found that the medical aspects were not given sufficient attention. In fact in the group of five — whose names are recorded in the text record — there was no physician. So, during the summer of 1993 Dr. Perutz wrote an appendix on medical aspects. Early in October 1993 the text was ready and later the President of the Academy, with members of the Council and the Head of the Chancery, presented it to the Holy Father. The report was subsequently published in Italian at the beginning of the summer and in an English version last October.

When this paper came out, it raised some speculation in the media. Several people saw it as being in opposition to what the Holy Father had been saying and doing with regard to the draft programme prepared for the Cairo Conference which was distributed towards the end of last January. I personally was hurt by both some special points and the general philosophy of this text. In a heated debate, which took place among the delegations convened in New York in April, the first edition of the programme was modified only a little, while the main negotiations on controversial issues were deferred to the Cairo meeting. A simple comparison of dates and events can show how the report was not related to the Cairo Conference, its rationale having been rather to give an illustration of the scientific foundation of statements made by the Holy Father in the speech of November 22, 1991, to the participants in the said study week.

In the attempt to demonstrate that the alleged contrast is totally unwarranted, I am going to substantiate this with the help of transparencies, excerpts from the said Allocution and from the report, respectively. I wonder whether, without explanations, you can at once distinguish between what was said by the Holy Father and by the quoted group (see the Appendix).

The Holy Father makes a special mention of infant mortality. This is important because, if there is a drop in infant mortality, there are more people reaching the reproductive age. The growth of the population is only slightly dependent on the decline of mortality of people of old age, while it is heavily influenced by the amount of time spent in the reproductive span of life by those surviving until its onset. I underline the reference made by the Holy Father to the change in living conditions. In this same room two

weeks ago I happened to address members of the Academy of Sciences with the following statement, approximately: "You brilliant physicians and biologists have made miracles in helping us in many ways. But with your success you also changed our life. Humankind has erected a wall in front of it, a wall that it cannot overcome. You compelled us to low fertility and an aged population". I said this in relation to the main theme of the discussion of the General Assembly, which was the genoma project. And for the colleagues working on that project I added: "You are maybe changing our life again, the life of humankind. Please, be careful".

These new conditions must be met not only with scientific reasoning, warns the Holy Father. At the Cairo Conference I heard Prof. Kendall, a Nobel Prize winner for Physics, say: "Technology is not enough". Prof. Tandon, President of the Indian Academy of Sciences, said the same: "Technology is not enough". There is a great country to which we all owe much, which had developed the pill, the I.U.D. and several other contraceptives. In this country it has been estimated that in 1988 23% of married women of reproductive age were sterilized. That means that, since normally no recourse to sterilization is made until a certain age, about 40% of mature women still in reproductive age might have been sterilized. This country, in spite of that, had 1.4 million abortions registered per year. Technology is not enough. We need, more importantly, to have recourse to all forms of intellectual and spiritual energy. People need to rediscover the moral significance of respecting limits in drinking, in smoking, in everything. "They must — using the words of the Holy Father — grow and mature in this sense of responsibility with regard to every aspect of life. By not taking steps in this direction, the human family could well fall victim to a devastating tyranny which would infringe upon a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human, namely giving life to new human beings" (point 6 of the Allocution). Well, one fifth of humanity is under this kind of tyranny already. It is the responsibility of the public apparatus — and you have to help the public apparatus — within the limits of its legitimate competence, "... to issue directives which reconcile the containment of births and respect for the free and personal assumption of responsibility ..." (ibid.). This I see as a very difficult challenge and as the most important task. There is the freedom of couples and individuals and there are collective needs to reconcile. You may take point 87 of *Gaudium et spes*, or point 37 of *Populorum progressio*. Start from there, but try to fill the gap which is there. It is not enough — in fact — to say that it is *jura et officia* to do something, if you only say what cannot be done. Please, tell the public authorities what they ought to do.

If you consider the text of the concluding remark of the section on

demographic trends of the report (p. 25), you see how the alleged contrast is totally unwarranted. In it, in fact, are repeated almost literally concepts expressed by the Holy Father. This text speaks of a *globally inescapable* containment of births, but it specifies that this is due to the *long term* consequences of the new conditions mentioned. By that, it simply makes clear what had already implicitly been included.

Certainly, in the immediate future other problems have to be faced. Take, for instance, the contradictory situation concerning Africa South of the Sahara. In this region the population is growing rapidly and this creates difficulty in helping it efficiently. But the region is also largely underpopulated and this is also a cause of obstacles to fruitful help. You have to find the right balance. As you have to try to obtain a better balance between generations where — as in Italy — fertility is sometimes well below replacement level. To solve this kind of problem you have to tackle all aspects “... promptly, profoundly and on a scale without precedent” (p. 59): this is the conclusion of the report which warns that not doing anything creates instability for the future. Effective action requires, however — as is stated in final remarks of the report — “... an effort at spiritual renewal, at the formation of consciences to the sense of responsibility, at education in temperance in consumption and in behaviour, at the search for a balance between free choices and the common good, and a consensus between citizens and authority ...” (p. 59).

What do you find to be controversial with what the Holy Father said?

A deepening of reflection is your specific task, not so much of mathematicians or physicist and the like of the Academy of Sciences. In the words of the report “... a deepening of reflection concerning social morals and the instruments of governance can favor the search for political directions which are at the same time effective for humankind and respectful of human dignity ...” (p. 59). Governments need to act, need to know how to act in difficult situations. If, with your efforts, you can help them you would do wonderful work.

As to the Cairo Conference, especially the ideological debate, certainly Monseigneur Martin and His Excellency Monseigneur McHugh can speak much better than I. I attended only the plenary session and I saw as in a movie many problems of the world. But I do not think that I need to deal with the some two hundred speeches I heard in that session.

## APPENDIX

Thanks to advances in medicine which have reduced infant mortality and increased the average life expectancy, and thanks also to the development of technology, there has been a real change in living conditions. These new conditions must be met not only with scientific reasoning, but more importantly with recourse to all available intellectual and spiritual energies. People need to rediscover the moral significance of respecting limits; they must grow and mature in the sense of responsibility with regard to every aspects of life.

By not taking steps in this direction, the human family could well fall victim to a devastating tyranny which would infringe upon a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human, namely giving life to new human beings and leading them to maturity. It is the responsibility of the public authorities, within the limits of their legitimate competence, to issue directives which reconcile the containment of births and respect for the free and personal assumption of responsibility by individuals. (*Allocution of the Holy Father*, n. 6).

The long-term consequences of the *new conditions* created by the decline of mortality lead to the need of a globally inescapable *containment of births*, which must be faced both with scientific and economic progress and with all the intellectual and moral energies of humankind, at the same time assuring respect for social justice and equity between various areas of the planet and between present and future generations. (*Report*, p. 25).

To resolve these problems, it is necessary to act on all these aspects promptly, profoundly and on a scale without precedent. Efficacious action requires, however, an effort at spiritual renewal, at the formation of consciences to the sense of responsibility, at education in temperance in consumption and in behaviour, at the search for a balance between free choices and the common good, and a consensus between citizens and authority. A deepening of reflection concerning social morals and the instruments of governance can favour the research of political directions which are at the same time efficacious for humankind and respectful of human dignity. (*Report*, p. 59).