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A Statement on Proposals for Family Limitations*

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Cardinal Manning once remarked that all human controversy, ultimately, is theological. His meaning was that every intellectual or moral position taken or rejected by man is dictated finally by his belief or disbelief in God, his understanding of the person, nature, and will of God, his acceptance and comprehension of God's revealed word, and his balancing of God's mercy against his justice. It is an aphorism which was substantially repeated, it may be recalled, by Gen. Douglas MacArthur on the occasion of the signing of the armistice with the Japanese emperor at the end of World War II. Whether the soldier was conscious of the prelate's earlier insight, we do not know. But solemn occasions not infrequently provoke powerful formulation of the great basic truths by which we live.

*Archbishop Dwyer of Portland, Oregon issued this statement on proposals for Family Limitation, March 12, 1970.

There is no question but that the current debate on ecology and the population crisis is theological at bottom. It has recently been sharpened by recommendations of a highly indigent nature, made conspicuously by Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Robert Finch, and by the junior Senator from Oregon, Robert Packwood. If you believe that God exists, and that He has laid down certain laws of life by which humanity is to be governed, laws implicit in the very nature with which man is endowed, laws explicit in God's revealed word as taught by His accredited spiritual authority here below, then any proposal which would put the state in the place of God, as possessing final power over human life, human freedom and human dignity, must be rejected absolutely.

Let certain points of this debate be clarified. We share, as Christians and Catholics, as concerned Americans, the general anxiety of the civilized world over the problem of population. We are fully aware that at least in certain

areas of the world population growth threatens to outstrip the present and foreseeable possibilities of accommodation and vital sustenance. At the same time we entertain some grave reservations as to whether the threat is as general, as acute, or as portentous for the future of the race as some of the more highly colored propaganda now in circulation would persuade us to believe. But insofar as population growth poses a genuine problem for human life and happiness, we too would seek means of limiting or controlling that growth. Such means, it goes without saying, must be sanctioned by the Christian moral code and applied by force of conscience, not by the exercise of the police power of the state.

In like manner, we share the general concern over the ecological deterioration with which the world is confronted. Dissipation and pollution of our nation's resources, the resources of our rapidly contracting world, through the enormous expansion and concentration of industry and technology, are real enough and terrifying in their ugly implications. We too, most assuredly, would keep God's footstool sweet and green. It must be pointed out, however, that we are here dealing with two problems, not unrelated, it is true, but clearly distinct. The ecological salvation of the sphere is a matter, primarily, of reversing the trend toward careless waste, of stemming economic irresponsibility, and of educating humanity in the proper care of itself and of its physical surroundings. As such it has very little to do with the population crisis, unless one is to subscribe to the ultimate counsel of despair, that man is himself the worst of pollutants, and ought therefore to be exterminated. It might be remembered that if the projections of the Rev. Thomas Mal-

thus, the 18th-century divine who started the debate, had been even partly realized, the SRO sign would have been put out over the face of the entire globe several generations ago.

It is unexceptionable to encourage family limitation by the use of those means which have always been available to man and which are in full conformity with the Christian ethical code. It is simply false to say that such means are ineffective or abortive. Democracy itself rests on the proposition that man is a responsible agent and can exercise self-control. Moreover, as a matter of observable fact, the trend toward large families, which, if multiplied, might endanger the health and welfare of the race, has already reversed itself almost everywhere throughout Western Europe and America, to the point, actually, where there may well be some justification for the fear that the opposite peril, that of geno-suicide, might threaten even more balefully. For anyone who has been a conscious observer of the patterns of population theory over the past 50 years, the danger of adopting drastic measures, even as a purely political or economic solvent of the population problem, must be manifest. In post-World War I France, for example, the panacea proposed was economic assistance precisely to large families. Nor is the instance isolated.

Any state which would enact legislation to enforce family limitation by some form of tax discrimination, or by wholesale sponsorship of abortion or artificial birth-prevention, would be grievously interfering with the rights of its citizens to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It has been well noted that happiness for the Christian, or for the believer in God, is not summed up in physical comfort alone, nor in freedom from pain, nor in the

Gross National Product, nor in permissive sexual indulgence. Conformity of human life and thought to the will of God, expressed in his divine law, is far more germane to its true understanding and possession.

We can appreciate the sincerity of those who are advocating the substitution of the law of God by the law of Man, insofar as they are motivated by an honest, if mistaken, anxiety over the shape of things to come and the

means to be adopted in order to avoid a possible catastrophe. But at the same time we must give notice that if these political leaders persist in their efforts to propagandize compulsory family limitation and planned parenthood as a national policy, and abortion and the pill as weapons in the hands of the state to impose conformity in defiance of conscience and the rights of God, the Catholic community will fight back. Please God, it will not fight back alone.