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FOREWORD

Present and prospective rates of population growth pose one of the most critical problems of our times. At the outset of the Christian era, world population stood at 250,000,000. Not until 1650 did it reach the 500,000,000 mark, at which time it began to rise more rapidly. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it exceeded 1,000,000,000; by the middle of the twentieth century, 2,500,000,000. Since then, it has risen to 3,000,000,000, and by the year 2000, it is conservatively expected to exceed 6,000,000,000.

This phenomenal and unprecedented growth—awesomely and apprehensively termed a “population explosion” by some observers—prefigures crises of grave proportions ahead unless it is promptly and decisively checked. Scant comfort, indeed, can be drawn from sanguine assurances that advancing technology will keep food supply abreast of population increase and thus maintain current levels of living—for this is not enough. These levels must rather be raised substantially in distressed areas if existing material disparities among the world’s peoples are not to perdure and intensify as foci of domestic instability and international tension. Moreover, one crucial resource, space on this planet, is quite finite and absolutely limits the extent to which an expanding world population can be accommodated—especially since interplanetary and interstellar migration promise little relief in the foreseeable future. And finally, deep concern has been occasioned by the prospective deterioration in the quality of population that present fertility differentials among different societal segments seem to foreshadow.

Bleak as this picture may appear, its one redeeming grace lies in the fact that it is not inevitable—it can be averted. The present population surge reflects nothing more than the great excess of births over deaths that is primarily attributable to recently improved techniques of death control. Accordingly, unless the falling death rate is purposely to be reversed—an alternative that is probably universally unacceptable—it would seem obvious that the necessary balance can be restored only by instituting, *pari passu*, countervailing techniques of birth control—or, perhaps more accurately, fertility control.

Although further refinement and development may be desirable and even feasible, those methods of fertility control now available are reasonably adequate to the pur-

pose. The principal obstacles to their more widespread prescription, use, and effectiveness have been not scientific or technical, but rather ethical or religious, political, and cultural. Not surprisingly, therefore, the subject is customarily approached and treated with some diffidence and delicacy.

Most prominently associated in the popular mind with opposition to fertility control has been the Roman Catholic Church, whose attitude and influence in the matter have often been misunderstood and misrepresented. Responsible and enlightened spokesmen of the Church—no less than those of other religious denominational groups—have long recognized the need to restrict human numbers for not only biological, but also social and economic reasons; and they have, consequently, condoned and even advocated fertility control in principle. They have balked, however, at the use of procedures and devices that are inconsistent with the “natural law of God” as they conceive it. It is in this respect only—the means to the end—that the Roman Catholic Church has developed a distinctive position that diverges markedly from that of most other religions.

The communist value system has also been traditionally identified with antagonism to fertility control, since “overpopulation” has doctrinally been regarded as but a manifestation of the imperfections of the capitalist order. Nevertheless, this, too, is an oversimplification. Pronatalist policies and practices abound in the Sino-Soviet world, to be sure; but they vary widely and have been tempered increasingly in recent years by an apparent appreciation of the inverse relationship between overly rapid population increase on the one hand, and economic development and growth on the other.

These ideological controversies often erupt spectacularly, and they have, as a result, tended to obscure the basic fact that in the underdeveloped areas of the world, the scene of the most rampantly burgeoning population growth today, the real barriers to effective population control are rather lack of desire, know-how, or means to control fertility. Well-conceived and administered governmental programs have succeeded in countering much of this apathy and ignorance, however, and have, in some instances, achieved dramatic consequences. The Japanese experience is a salient case in point; and although the results in other milieus, such as Puerto Rico and India, are somewhat less impressive, the portents there, too, are, nonetheless, bright and encouraging.

In this country, although less immediately urgent an issue, population control has for some time been exciting lively legal and political interest. To date, only isolated and rather inconclusive skirmishes have been fought, and the situation is still quite fluid. Nevertheless, square confrontation of the problem cannot indefinitely be postponed, and we must—perhaps sooner than we anticipate—make far-reaching decisions touching on this area that will profoundly affect not only our own fate as a nation and as individuals, but that of the rest of the world. To the end that we may perceive the full dimensions of this momentous impending challenge and be prepared to respond appropriately to it, this symposium has hopefully been directed.

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