

- The rate of population increase in the Philippine is 3.2% a year or about one million persons. The government does not seem to mind this grave problem, and so life in this country is becoming a very serious problem.

PHILIPPINE INDIFFERENCE TO POPULATION EXPLOSION

Dr. Gregorio G. Lim, the president of the Planned Parenthood Association of the Philippines, charged in a television interview that the secretary of health, Mr. Paulino Garcia, was "hostile" to the operations and objectives of his organization. Dr. Garcia not only has not done anything to be of assistance to the association but has forbidden officials and employees of the department from extending any kind of hospitality to it. Dr. Lim said Secretary Garcia's attitude was in contrast to that of his predecessor, Manuel Cuenco, who according to Dr. Lim, was help to the association. And this, Dr. Lim added, despite the fact that Secretary Cuenco comes from a prominent Catholic family that has included members of the hierarchy.

Undoubtedly what lies at the root of Secretary Garcia's negative attitude towards family planning in the Philippines is the total absence, which Dr. Lim himself noted, of any definite government policy regarding the problem of birth control. If there is a glimmer of a policy at all, it is one that leans towards hostility rather than approval. President Marcos, the last time he spoke on the subject before an audience of Catholic physicians, supported the shopworn and naive thesis that the only way to tackle the problem is to hope for the best. This is not, of course, a solution. It is sheer escapism and evasion of the issue.

The reason no President and no Philippine administration has dared touch the problem of population control with a 10-foot pole is,

of course, the strength and influence of the Catholic church in this country. And the Church, while it may be wrestling with the issue with an intensity never seen before, up to now has not budged from its doctrine that the only permissible method of birth control is the rhythm method. A Vatican Council-appointed commission delegated to make a comprehensive study of the problem has already submitted its findings to Pope Paul VI. The Pope has not yet announced, however, what decision he has reached on the matter, and no one really knows when he will get around to it.

Just the same, there seems to be no earthly reason why the Philippine government should not extend positive assistance to Filipino mothers who, through their own free choice, have decided to take advantage of the discoveries and aids of modern science in order to control and space their childbearing sensibly. The reservation could be made that this service would be extended only to those who ask for it, and that the government itself will not

undertake any proselytization in behalf of family planning. In more enlightened countries the government does enlist itself in this sensible cause, but in the Philippines some concession must be made to the Church. On the other hand, if a Catholic mother should, despite the injunctions of her religion, insist nevertheless on availing herself of assistance towards family planning, there is no call upon the government either to try to dissuade her from it because it goes contrary to the teachings and practices of her church.

For almost two years now, the city government of Manila (which has proved itself more enlightened than the national government on other fronts, such as free education and the medical care of schoolchildren) has been extending affirmative assistance to the family planning movement on this basis. And many Manila mothers, who might otherwise have gone on bearing children recklessly and irresponsibly far beyond their capability to bring them up decently, have thus been given the opportunity

to have only as many children as they should have.

The most inexpressible tragedy besetting the world today is that far too many children are being born who should have — and could have been avoided. Moralists are perpetually pretending to be repelled by the notion of family planning. The genuine immorality is to abet and encourage, especially in the face of safe and effective deterrents, the unlimited procreation of human beings who will never rise above the level of animal existence through their miserable, if mercifully brief, lives.

All the plans and dreams and hopes that the Filipinos may be nourishing about their future are meaningless unless and until the problem

of this country's fantastic population explosion is met squarely. To ignore it is to ignore the single most important factor in the situation. The Philippines' rate of population growth, 3.2 per cent, is the highest in Asia and one of the highest in the world. It is a voracious monster that will keep devouring the country's progress and advances as quickly as they realized, thus in effect keeping us in a state of perpetual stagnation. It is not, however, an invincible monster against whom all of us are powerless. On the contrary, it can be tamed and subdued if only the government would show some guts in facing the challenge. — *By J. V. Cruz in The Manila Times, January 11, 1967.*