

## SEVEN QUESTIONS ON ARTIFICIAL BIRTH CONTROL

*My query refers to the article published in the Manila Sunday Times, January 18, under the title: 7 QUESTIONS, POPULATION ISSUE AND THE CHURCH. With due respect to the "seventy-one" signatories, I think the title is misleading. Except the first one, the rest of the seven questions do not refer to the Church's stand on population but rather on artificial contraception. The whole tenor of the seven questions, as they have been formulated, seem to cast doubt on a doctrine which is most definite after *Humanae Vitae*. As College professors my colleagues and I, have adhered to the Pope's Encyclical to the Pastoral Letter of the Philippine bishops which we read in the 1969 January issue of your BOLETIN. But now the signatories of these seven questions have taken the matter to "theologians at the Loyola House of Studies, Sto. Tomas Seminary and other similar institutions". Is it possible that a solemn teaching of the Pope, so formally endorsed by the Philippine hierarchy may need support from theologians? To our discomfort, after the publication of these seven questions, our students have been demanding from us answers to these very points. Could we ask the BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO for brief, clear-cut answers to these seven queries, answers that may satisfy our students?*

### OBSERVATIONS

Before we attempt to answer the questions, some observations are in order.

#### 1. Publicity and signatories

It is perhaps difficult to question the sincerity of the seemingly candid presentation of these seven questions. Among the signatories we find men of such probity that no challenge can be raised about their

sincerity. Whatever means might have been used for the soliciting or obtaining of the signatures, since the matter in question has been under public discussion for years, and even under strong attacks from the press ever since the issuance of *Humanae Vitae*, July 25, 1968, one marvels at such questions at this late hour. Also, in order that everyone in the Philippines should accept the papal teaching as all Catholics are expected to, the Philippine bishops published a pastoral letter in which, while adhering to *Humanae Vitae*, they instruct the faithful on the duty of accepting the Holy Father's indubious doctrine. Is it possible that such prominent names, some of them identified as educators and priests, press editors or contributors, economists and professionals, have only now become aware of an obligation toward the Christian conscience? Equally puzzling is the manner in which these questions have been bluntly presented to the public. If the perplexed signatories have approached the theologians with the intention of publishing their findings, why did they not wait for the answers before going to the press?

## 2. Intrinsic incompetence of theologians on this matter

A recourse to theologians is essentially, from the start, a wrong way to answer the seven questions. The validity of the Church's magisterium does not rest on the wisdom of any theologian. Nor is it derived from the consensus of any body in the world. The teaching mission of the Church is based on Christ's command:

Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; ... and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of the world. Mt. 28:20.

Hence, the charism of truth of the magisterium rests on Jesus' presence and on His guiding Spirit. Both command and charism of truth in *teaching and commanding to observe* were promised and given alone and exclusively to Peter and to the apostles as well as to their successors, the Pope and the bishops. From Jesus' command emanates their obligation to teach and command and, consequently, the obligation too of their hearers to accept in faith and to observe their teaching, or else. "*qui vero non crediderit, condemnabitur*" (Mk. 16:16). All these

principles are at the root of the most elementary theology, yet, they are essential postulates for the right answer to our questions. A writer, M. Brugarola, S.J., puts it this way:

Not even the unanimous opinion of all the theologians can invalidate a doctrine which the Church's magisterium teaches as true, since they do not constitute said magisterium as the Pope does notwithstanding the significant role of the theologians in the Church.

And Cardinal Heenan:

Between sessions of this Council, the Church of God has suffered a great deal from the writings and speeches of some of the Specialists ... These few specialists care nothing for the ordinary teaching authority of the bishops nor, I regret to say, for that of the Pope ... Until now it has not been a doctrine of the Church that the theologians admitted to the council are infallible.

Note that the statement from this Archbishop did precipitate the exit of one so-called "theologian", Charles Davis.

On this field of teaching faith and conduct, even of him who was preeminent in theology, Augustine, Pius XI said: "non ita scilicet... ut Augustini loquentis auctoritas suprema ipsi Ecclesiae docentis auctoritati anreferatur" (AAS, (1930), p. 204).

And of one of Augustine's disciples, Aquinas, we read in the process of his canonization:

He suffered his this (last) illness with great patience, reverently and devotedly received the Sacraments of the Church... Before receiving the Body of Christ, he spoke many fitting words concerning the Body of Christ ... In the midst of this discourse, he uttered these words: "I have taught and written a great deal about this most holy Body and the other sacraments, in the faith of Christ and the holy Roman Church, to whose correction I submit and leave it all" (Aquinas' *Search for Wisdom* by V. J. Bourke, 1965. The Bruce Publ. Co., Milwaukee. p. 212).

Note Aquinas' words: "*to whose correction I submit and leave it all*". Fortunately, no one is more aware of the essential need of teaching with the Church than the true theologian. Thus, our inquirer may await their verdict with peace of mind. If it comes in accord with Paul VI and the Philippine bishops, it will be theology. If, God forbid, it goes at variance with Paul VI and our bishops, it shall be a mock theology.

### 3. **Intrinsic incompetence of any "national group of bishops" at variance with the Pope**

We are aware of the equivocal stance taken "by some national groups of bishops". But if the theologians need to teach with the Pope to produce a genuine theology, the bishops too, either individually or in groups, even all of them collegially, need to teach with the Pope if their teaching is to be genuine in matters of faith and morals. Unfortunately, heresy and schism of entire nations is a sad lesson of history on this matter.

In the words of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Vatican II, the episcopal college of bishops should teach "in conjunction with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head" (n. 22). And this same concept, in different terms, is repeated seven times in the same paragraph by the conciliar Fathers. Any group of bishops, therefore, who dare to act at variance with the papal teaching cannot be said to produce any genuine teaching in the Catholic Church.

But it is surprising that such a question is raised here in the Philippines. All know that, under the Pope, only the local bishop has the authority and the duty to teach, sanctify, and rule or govern in his diocese, with certain extension to national hierarchies in matters of common concern, according to the rules of the National Episcopal Conferences. For the Philippines, therefore, only the diocesan bishops and the Philippine hierarchy have a say in this matter, to the exclusion of any other "national group of bishops" of any other nation. As it is, the very inclusion of this catchy question cannot be honestly justified. Or is it that the composers of these questions wish us in the Philippines to be subject to any group of bishops except those of our own hierarchy?

#### 1. **Brief and clear-cut answers**

Our questioner asks for answers of this description. The students, indeed, are intelligent and when answers are not clear or are evasive we should not complain if they are demanding. Clear-cut answers are possible for such is the clarity of the Church's stand! But not brief answers. These seven questions cover the whole range of the Church's doctrines, ethical, social and economic, to individual rights, and also

to the family and marriage morality. Each one of the questions may well need volumes. For this reason we will attempt to answer the questions in short with a view of prompting our interrogator and his other companions, through personal research, to evolve more complete explanations for their pupils.

## ANSWERS

### 1. *How do you define the role of the Church in coping with the population problems of the Philippines?*

#### a) **In general**

The expression "population problems" is pregnant with meaning. The whole range of private and common property; of individuals' and community rights towards temporal administration, progress, and development; all means of capital, labor, industry and economy on the private, national and international level; and other essentials for the handling of *temporal* goods and resources are to be considered when the "population problems" of any country are at stake. The responsibility for all these matters rest not on the Church, but on human individuals and on human society. And that is so by virtue of God's original order:

God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and conquer it. Be Masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and of the living animals on the earth.' Gen. 1:28.

Competence here belongs to legitimate social authorities, from family to government. In classical theology, the only limits placed to legitimate authority are those marked by *natural law*, which is God's very law as known by *right reason* and which is the root of man's dignity: conscience and moral responsibility. The Gospel did not change an iota from this plan of God's creation. In fact the Gospel, God's revelation, the Church, — call it whatever you like — belongs to a different level, that of men's redemption, God's helping grace, and man's eternal destiny. From the start the Lord Jesus made it very clear:

A man in the crowd said to him, 'Master, tell my brother to give me a share in our inheritance.' 'My friend,' he replied, 'who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?' Luke, 12:13-14.

Jesus' mandate to the apostles, quoted above, is limited to the spiritual field. No interference, meddling or manipulation on matters of temporal government was therein included by Christ. *Salvific truth* alone, both *revealed* and *natural*, marks the limits of the Church's role in all temporal matters. The apostles did understand Jesus' compelling orders and soon they applied them to the very temporalities of their own early community. Read St. Luke's account:

When the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews. . . . So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food: you, brothers, must select from among yourselves. . . ; we will hand over this duty to them, and continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word. Acts, 6:1-3.

These biblical data possess eternal value. They map out the competence and legitimate action of the Church. Any attempt from the Church towards intrusion into the temporal business of society will be considered as usurpation and the public authority should resist it. On this point classical theology has rendered a splendid service to humanity through the admirable treaties of the great masters on all aspects of justice, beneficence, cooperation, contracts, rights and obligations of all persons — individuals, groups, nations. But the business of the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church aims only at doctrine and guidance from the field of both faith and reason.

So well marked is the essential division of competence here that, even at such humanitarian endeavours as those of the International Labor Organization (ILO), Paul VI, opened his Address to the Organization's representatives in Geneva with this basic statement:

We do not belong to this international organization; We are unacquainted with the specific questions which have their study offices and discussion rooms here, and Our spiritual mission is not intended to intervene in matters outside its proper domain. (The Pope Speaks, Vol. 14, 2., p. 137).

True, the Pope was emphatic in exhorting the ILO members towards all legitimate ways of promoting social justice for all men, on all aspects

of human life and dignity, specially toward the working and the poor classes. The Pope, in his exhortations and directives to the bishops of Latin America in Bagotá had likewise mapped out the norms for the bishops and for the Church's action in the field of social, economic and land reforms, with emphasis, however, on the avoidance of violence. Violence, in the Pope's view, is diametrically opposed to Christ's teaching and conduct in the Gospel, and it is contrary too to all men's fraternity and to the very meaning of the Church as spiritual *Mater et Magistra*.

Fidelity to the Church's very constitution is culled from the so-called social encyclicals *Rerum Novarum*, *Libertas*, *Quadragesimo Anno*, *Mater et Magistra*, *Populorum Progressio* and the truly inspired Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World of Vatican II. Read how the Council expressed the role of the Church:

Regarding institutions and programs directed to the secular order, the duty of the Church's hierarchy is to teach and provide an authentic explanation of the moral principle to be applied in the secular order. They also have the right, after enlisting the help of experts and weighing the matter carefully, to make judgment on whether such programs and institutions conform to moral principles, and to decide what is required to protect and promote supernatural values. (The Decree on Apostolate of the Laity, n. 19 & 24).

The reader may see that this *competence* belongs to the *hierarchy* and not to *theologians*.

#### b) Population in particular

What the social encyclicals did for social and economic matters was aimed at and obtained by *Humanae Vitae* for the all important field of birth regulation, or, as it is called, *responsible parenthood*. After an exhaustive study, the Holy Father, "by virtue of the mandate entrusted to Us by Christ" (n.6), issued *Humanae Vitae*. True to his spiritual duty as the Vicar of Christ, the Pope has declared *immoral the practice of all acts of artificial contraception* and also the licitness of rhythm under *due conditions*. This doctrine rests on faith and also on reason, or natural law. For this reason he addressed his encyclical to "all men of good will," and not only to his subjects.

2. *Given the emphasis in "Humanae Vitae" on responsible parenthood, what obligation does the Church have to disseminate information, especially among the poor, about the social and personal advantages of family planning?*

The Church has no business in disseminating such information, for two main reasons. First of all, the issue of overpopulation on a world level is too controversial. The diverse opinions were manifested very conspicuously at Belgrade, in the International Conference on Population, not so long ago. There the United States firmly sounded the alarm concerning overpopulation. But the delegates of Soviet Russia, no less firmly, and the delegates from Africa, at least for the African continent, contended that question was one of *under* population. As for the Philippines, opinions are far from being uniform.

On the other hand, the Church has clearly stated the intrinsic immorality of every act of *artificial* contraception, whether through abortion and direct sterilization, or through *any other action* which *artificially* renders procreation impossible. In addition, the Pope has stated the licitness of having recourse to the infecund periods when serious reasons warrant such practice. It only remains for public authorities and all members of the Church to comply with the doctrine that the Vicar of Christ proposes. Actually the encyclical points to the members of the Church from whom cooperation is expected: men of science, husbands and wives, priests and bishops, doctors and medical personnel, and all men of good will.

3. *How do you define the role of the State in coping with the population problems of the Philippines?*

We take no sides regarding the issue of *overpopulation* in the Philippines. But, *if and when* the problem comes to existence then the government should avoid a *defeatist stand*. A negative approach to the problem would even endanger the confidence and creative efforts of the people who must rely on their own capabilities in imaginative creativity. The words of Paul VI to the United Nations do apply here:



You must strive to multiply bread so that it suffices for the tables of mankind and not rather favor an artificial control of birth, which would be irrational, in order to diminish the number of guests at the banquet of life.

The positive approach has been favored by the bishops of the Philippines in their *Statement on Issue of Population control from Baguio*, in July, 1969. It reads in part:

It is the competence of the government to take necessary macro-measures of population control. To name a few: the concerted effort of state and society to raise the minimum age of marriage or to delay it through social, economic or juridical means; the integration of sex education on all levels of formal education; a system of pensions for old age to minimize the dependence of children for security; the expansion of recreational facilities; the control of internal migration. . . . When we deal with micro-measures of fertility control, however, the role of government is subsidiary. There are involved here those basic rights of spouses which both the United Nations and Vatican II insisted as setting limits to what the government can do. One such right is the right to determine the size of one's family.

*4. Is the State morally justified in initiating a population program that would make available a variety of family planning techniques, even though a number of these techniques are morally objectionable to some?*

No. The negative answer becomes evident from the very formulation of the question. When a "number of techniques are morally objectionable," those techniques cannot be morally justified. And, as we have said above, all artificial means or techniques, short of rhythm, are objectionable by Church's standards.

*5. If the State should initiate such a program, how should the individual react:*

- a) as a civic leader?*
- b) as an employee who is asked to become directly involved in it?*
- c) as a volunteer worker?*

If the state should initiate such a program, in which the "morally objectionable techniques" are included, the following considerations are valid:

All the persons therein involved, promoters, initiators and those who helped it established are actors and efficient cooperators to an *intrinsically immoral kind of activity*. Consequently, they are responsible for all immoral acts which are committed by those who accept the immoral practice. The amount of responsibility is in proportion to the influence of each person on the project and on its development and operation. In itself this project is highly more immoral than outright prostitution, in as-much-as the latter remains always considered sinful by all; while *artificial contraception* is here proposed as something morally licit in marriage. Thus, this project by itself does introduce *real* immorality into a sacrament of the Church. All collaborators should be affected as follows:

- a) The civic leader, should actively oppose such real, though camouflaged, immorality at the secret origin of human life.
- b) All employees become directly involved in the activities of the project. Thus, each of them shares in the very serious responsibilities of his co-workers according to the extent of his cooperation. All doctors, interns, nurses and clinical personnel would do well to consider the consequences of such an immoral conduct.
- c) The volunteer worker, if he is a true Catholic who accepts the Pope as the Vicar of Christ, will, of course, never volunteer for such a sinful project.

6. *How are married couples to react to the differences of opinion in the Church concerning "artificial" contraception, as manifested in the varied responses to "Humanae Vitae" given by some national groups of bishops?*

The answer to this question has already been given above. In all honesty, what business is it of any foreign "national group of bishops" to say anything for Catholics in the Philippines? Besides,

considering the unmistakable stand of the Philippine hierarchy, at unison with Paul VI and with *Humanae Vitae*, one cannot see how such a question could be asked without an effrontery to our bishops.

7. *How are married couples to resolve a conflict of conscience between their considered convictions and the teaching of "Humanae Vitae" on conception control?*

This last question is wholly artificial. It is possibly asked only by the dissenting position of false theologians who have dared to challenge the supreme authority of the Pope. The harm to Christian morality, however, has been great. This mock theology has also been detrimental, as the reader may see from the controversy among doctors on the seriously ill side effects of the pill.

If not for this opposition, no Catholic married couple would have been deceived in such serious matter of conscience. All Catholics accept the directives of Vatican II that in order to form a right conscience, the norms of the Pope's teaching should be accepted, even when the Pope does not speak *ex cathedra*.

In this matter the duty of the priests is rather to help the Christian couples. The encyclical asks for the cooperation of all members of the Church, most of all for the cooperation of the priests, who are the ministers of the word of faith, of prayer and of the sacraments. Therein lies the almighty grace that renders acceptable, even sweet, the greatest sacrifices taken all so silently in sacrificial love.

● Quintin M. Garcia, O.P.