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## Instrumentum Laboris

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# Vatican document takes on 'limits to growth' argument

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### Demographic realities today

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4. During this century the world population has grown steadily. It has been estimated for 1993 at 5,506,000,000.<sup>2</sup> Population increase must be interpreted in the light of well-identified and thoroughly understood factors. The most important of these factors is completely new in human history: the *increase of the average life-span*. In many countries the average life-span has more than doubled in a century. This increase results from improved health care conditions and standards of living, from better food production and more efficient policies. In less than two centuries, we have witnessed an almost general lowering of the infant mortality rate, by more than 90% in many countries. At the same time the maternal mortality rate has also fallen in unprecedented proportions.

### Population growth and population geography

5. The world population has doubled between 1950 and 1991. Nonetheless, the demographic growth rate decreased after reaching a maximum during the years 1965-1970.<sup>3</sup> This slowing down in the evolution of world population is in harmony with what population science calls the "demography transition." This term signifies the lowering of the mortality-rate and birth-rate while countries benefit from improved health care and/or economic conditions. However, *depending upon the country*, it must be kept in mind that population trends are *very different*. The so-called developed countries have experienced a very significant lowering of the synthetic fertility indices.<sup>4</sup> In almost all these countries, this index is at a lower level than is actually needed simply to ensure that generations be replaced. On the other hand, in

so-called developing countries, these same indices are at a level which allows for the replacement of generations, taking into account their health care conditions and mortality rate.

But even if there is a great contrast between the trends from the 1960s to the present, the *fall of fertility*, very significant in almost all parts of the world, is *irrefutable and evident* from the facts published by specialized organizations. It is, nonetheless, frequently *disregarded*.

6. Another important trend is *population geography*. There is a *growing urbanization*, above all in developing countries, as an effect of rural emigration and international migrations, almost always directed toward urban regions. It is true that certain policies, notably in the area of finance and/or agriculture, arising from national and/or international pressure, have the effect of discouraging rural development. Urbanization is further explained by the evolution of structures of production and by the desire to have access to the greatest possibilities for employment, to manufacturing markets, shopping, educational institutions, health facilities, recreational activities and the other advantages offered by the city.

7. Understanding population trends also requires the study of *migrations*. Various factors help understand their importance. Unfortunately each day brings the news that people are forced to move to escape wars or massacres. These sometimes cause massive exoduses.<sup>5</sup> Other persons, hoping to better their living conditions, leave their home for economic reasons: to avoid unemployment and find better paying work. Because of structural changes in methods of production, economic situations also bring about significant migrations: rural emigration, emigration from once-industrialized regions, emigration toward regions considered to have a future. Migrations have effects on the physiognomy of countries, their evolution, the geography of their population. This is true for both the countries of emigration and the countries of immigration.

### A 'second demographic revolution'

8. How are behavioral trends regarding the birth-rate in "developed" societies to be understood? The importance of the *fall in fertility* leads some to claim that there is a "second

demographic revolution.” Here one deals with as considerable a change as in the “first demographic revolution,” even if in a different sense. This first revolution in some way helped to “curb” the *mortality rate*, and especially the three rates which previously controlled demographic patterns: birth, infant and adolescent mortality.

9. This second demographic revolution has different causes which belong primarily to the moral and cultural order: materialism, individualism and secularization. Consequently, many women are forced to work more and more outside the home.<sup>6</sup> This results in unbalanced structures according to age. This imbalance brings about present political, economic and social problems. However, there is a risk that these problems are only perceived clearly when they have run their course because population trends are long-term. For example, a great number of aged persons will find themselves depending upon pensions which could only be assured by the work of an active population, which is certainly decreasing according to demographic projections. In various advanced countries there is a “demographic winter” which is becoming more and more severe. The authorities are beginning to be concerned: today there are more coffins than cradles, more elderly persons than children.

10. One of the more serious consequences of the aging of the population is the risk of *damage to solidarity* between generations. This could lead to real struggles between the generations for a share in economic resources. Perhaps discussions about *euthanasia* are not extraneous to these conflicting trends.

11. This “second demographic revolution” is often misunderstood for three reasons. The first reason is that these societies, living on advantages gained during periods of sufficient fertility, benefit from the *age-rated structures* which up to now favor their active population. This is one of the reasons which still makes high productivity possible. The negative effects which the falling birth-rate will produce in the economic and social domains are just beginning to be felt. Following upon this, the presence in these societies of the *immigrant* work force also helps delay the recognition of this falling fertility and its possible consequences. Finally, translated into less investments in human resources, hence in education, the fall in the birth-rate releases financial means in the short term. These are seen as advantageous but they benefit present generations *to the detriment of the future*.<sup>7</sup> . . .

16. Therefore, the evolution of world population cannot be examined without taking into account an almost general fact: *the relationship between fertility and mortality rates*,<sup>11</sup> and the *very strong demographic contrasts*, not only between continents, but even within continents and countries where very great regional differences are at times recorded. Thinking globally in terms of world population tends to gloss over the diversity of mortality rates, the different phenomena of migration, the difference in population growth rates, which are even negative in certain regions. Without a knowledge of

these differences, one can only misunderstand the reality of population trends. . . .

## Demographic growth and standards of living

18. Development problems in the relevant countries are not only to be sought in the increase of the number of their inhabitants. Many of these countries have considerable natural resources which would often be able to sustain populations larger than the ones they currently have. Unfortunately, too often this potential is presently either not sufficiently exploited or badly exploited. More often than not, the earth possesses materials which, thanks to man’s inventiveness, have been shown throughout history to be decisive resources for human progress. In the first place, the source of the difficulties of so-called Third World countries is to be sought in *international relations*. These difficulties have often been examined and even denounced by the Church.<sup>13</sup> With regard to these causes which have bearing on the problem of development, *solidarity is shown to be necessary*, but *this presupposes a change in the policies of developed nations*.

There are also other *internal causes* in developing countries. The low standards of living and the scarcity of food, even to the point of famine, can be the result of bad political and economic administration, often accompanied by corruption. To this must be added: exaggerated military budgets, in contrast to the small amount set aside for education; wars—sometimes instigated by other nations—or fratricidal conflicts; glaring injustices in the allocation of revenues; the concentration of the means of production for the profit of a privileged group; discrimination against minorities; the paralyzing burden of foreign debt accompanied by the flight of capital; . . .

## Food, resources and population

19. According to those who assert that world food and other resources are limited, would an increase in population inevitably result in poverty and want? It must be kept in mind that *the amount of resources at the planet’s disposal is neither pre-defined nor unchangeable*. The history of societies and civilizations shows that during certain periods some peoples were able to exploit hidden resources or resources neglected by previous generations. Thus, throughout the centuries, humanity’s resources have neither stagnated nor diminished. People have augmented resources; some examples of this would be: the cultivation of new crops such as the potato, which really revolutionized nutrition; the use of new techniques such as irrigating rice fields or greenhouse cultivation; the ability to utilize resources which before had been neglected, such as coal, petroleum, fertilizers, the atom, and sand. Such progress can also be seen in the fields of agriculture and breeding where modern methods increase possibilities. . . .

## Attitudes toward demographic realities

24. Citing the rates at which population trends occur often causes a strong reaction. Raw statistics are brought up

to explain the relationship between demographic growth and births. According to this kind of thinking, birth control is the indispensable precondition for the “sustainable development” of poor countries. By “sustainable development” is meant a development where the different factors involved (food health, education, technology, population, environment, etc.) are brought into harmony so as to avoid unbalanced growth and the waste of resources. The developed countries define for other countries what must be, from their point of view, “sustainable development.” This explains why certain rich countries and major international organizations are willing to help these countries, but on one condition—that they accept programs for the systematic control of their births. . . .

25. It would be difficult to find an example in history of a country which underwent a prolonged trend (more than twenty-five years) of falling population and enjoyed substantial economic development at the same time. It has even been shown that population growth has often *preceded* economic growth. Attentive to current facts and the lessons of history, the Church cannot accept that the poorest populations be treated as “scapegoats” for underdevelopment. The Church regards this attitude as particularly unjust considering that some countries are undergoing grave economic difficulties when, at the same time, they have a low population density and abundant exploitable resources. Furthermore, the Church can no longer ignore the *negative* demographic trends of industrial countries, all the more because the effects of these trends cannot be neutral. At the same time, the Church wishes to maintain a constructive dialogue with those who remain convinced of the necessity of setting up imperative population control, and with governments and institutions concerned with population policies. There are real demographic problems, even though they are often envisaged from an erroneous point of view and perverse solutions to them are often proposed. . . .

2. Population Reference Bureau, *World Population Data Sheet*, 1993.

3. Daniel Noin, *Atlas de la population mondiale*, Paris, Reclus, La Documentation française, 1991, p. 22.

4. The synthetic fertility index, calculated by adding up the fertility-rate according to age, allows a comparison in time and space of fertility behavior because it practically eliminates the effects linked to the differences of age groups in the population.

5. Cf. Pontifical Council “Cor Unum,” Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1992.

6. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens* (14 September 1981), 19: AAS 73 (1981), p. 624.

7. This phenomenon can be seen in the various European countries, in particular: Italy, France, Germany and Spain. . . .

11. In the “first demographic revolution” in developing countries, medical progress reduced general mortality and births increased (inverse relationship). In the “second demographic revolution,” for example in Europe today, medical science has reduced mortality even more, but births are decreasing.

13. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (30 December 1987); 11-26; AAS 80 (1988), pp. 525-547. . . .

## OAU has no answers for Africa’s crisis

by Lawrence Eyong-Echaw

The highlight of the recent summit of the Organization of African Unity on June 13-15 in Tunis, Tunisia, was the attendance by the new President of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. But even Mandela’s presence could not hide the fact that the OAU as a body is not prepared to meet the life-and-death challenges facing the continent’s 53 nations.

Although the heads of state at the conference were able to chronicle many of the problems afflicting Africa, they were assiduous in their effort not to name the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank as responsible for the crisis, but limited their attack to outside interference. The OAU did decide to press for an African version of the Marshall Plan, according to Tunisian Foreign Minister Habib Ben Yahia, whose country is the new OAU head. Ben Yahia said that Rwanda, Somalia, Liberia, and Burundi highlighted the need for a new phase in the history of Africa: “The new phase is one of development to complete political independence through economic progress.” The idea for a Marshall Plan was most recently put forward by Nigerian President Sani Abacha in December 1993, right before Nigeria decided to resist the conditionalities policies of the IMF which have collapsed the Nigerian economy over the last eight years. Ben Yahia said the idea for an African Marshall Plan would be put to a meeting of the Group of Seven industrialized countries in Naples on July 9. The message, he said, would be to ask them to examine their consciences: “It is in the interests of the industrialized countries,” he said, according to Reuters.

But the OAU has offered no route for organizing such a Marshall Plan other than simply begging from the industrialized countries—a plan that has not worked so far.

### No unity

The summit therefore appeared to heighten the sense that the OAU is such in name only, that in reality, the African states remain weak and isolated from each other, with no clear unified vision of how to guide the continent into the 21st century. This creates enormous problems for Africa to meet the accelerated pressures coming from the outside, which are fast reducing its countries to states of chaos and