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**ADDRESS to the  
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME**

BY

**ROBERT S. McNAMARA  
PRESIDENT, WORLD BANK GROUP**

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Notre Dame, Indiana  
May 1, 1969

I am grateful for this award, and pleased to become an honorary alumnus of Notre Dame.

This university, over the years, has become a catalytic center of creative thought. It does what universities do best: it probes. It probes the past for what is most relevant to the present. It probes the present for what is most formative of the future. And it probes the future for what will most enlarge man's freedom and fulfillment.

I want to discuss with you this afternoon a problem that arose out of that recent past; that already plagues man in the present; and that will diminish, if not destroy, much of his future—should he fail to face up to it, and solve it.

It is, by half a dozen criteria, the most delicate and difficult issue of our era—perhaps of any era in history. It is overlaid with emotion. It is controversial. It is subtle. Above all, it is immeasurably complex.

It is the tangled problem of excessive population growth.

It is not merely a problem, it is a paradox.

It is at one and the same time an issue that is intimately private—and yet inescapably public.

It is an issue characterized by reticence and circumspection—and yet in desperate need of realism and candor.

It is an issue intolerant of government pressure—and yet endangered by government procrastination.

It is an issue, finally, that is so hypersensitive—giving rise to such diverse opinion—that there is an understandable tendency simply to avoid argument, turn one's attention to less complicated matters, and hope that the problem will somehow disappear.

But the problem will not disappear.

What may disappear is the opportunity to find a solution that is rational and humane.

If we wait too long, that option will be overtaken by events.

We cannot afford that. For if there is anything certain about the population explosion, it is that if it is not dealt with reasonably, it will in fact explode: explode in suffering, explode in violence, explode in inhumanity.

All of us are, of course, concerned about this.

You, here at Notre Dame, have been giving constructive attention to this concern for several years. And yet it may seem strange that I should speak at a center of Catholic thought on this awkward issue which might so conveniently be ignored, or left to demographers to argue.

I have chosen to discuss the problem because my responsibilities as President of the World Bank compel me to be candid about the blunt facts affecting the prospects for global development.

The bluntest fact of all is that the need for development is desperate.

One-third of mankind today lives in an environment of relative abundance.

But two-thirds of mankind—more than two billion individuals—remain entrapped in a cruel web of circumstances that severely limits their right to the necessities of life. They have not yet been able to achieve the transition to self-sustaining eco-

conomic growth. They are caught in the grip of hunger and malnutrition; high illiteracy; inadequate education; shrinking opportunity; and corrosive poverty.

The gap between the rich and poor nations is no longer merely a gap. It is a chasm. On one side are nations of the West that enjoy per capita incomes in the \$3,000 range. On the other are nations in Asia and Africa that struggle to survive on per capita incomes of less than \$100.

What is important to understand is that this is not a static situation. The misery of the underdeveloped world is today a dynamic misery, continuously broadened and deepened by a population growth that is totally unprecedented in history.

This is why the problem of population is an inseparable part of the larger, overall problem of development.

There are some who speak as if simply having fewer people in the world is some sort of intrinsic value in and of itself. Clearly, it is not.

But when human life is degraded by the plague of poverty, and that poverty is transmitted to future generations by too rapid a growth in population, then one with responsibilities in the field of development has no alternative but to deal with that issue.

To put it simply: the greatest single obstacle to the economic and social advancement of the majority of the peoples in the underdeveloped world is rampant population growth.

Having said that, let me make one point unmistakably clear: the solution of the population problem is in no way a substitute for the more traditional forms of developmental assistance: aid for economic infrastructure; aid for agriculture; aid for industrialization; aid for education; aid for technological advance.

The underdeveloped world needs investment capital for a whole gamut of productive projects. But nothing would be more unwise than to allow these projects to fail because they are finally overwhelmed by a tidal wave of population.

Surely, then, it is appropriate that we should attempt to unravel the complexities that so confuse this critical issue.

## II

One can begin with the stark demographic dimensions. The dynamics are deceptively simple. Population increase is simply the excess of births over deaths. For most of man's history the two have been in relative equilibrium. Only in the last century have they become seriously unbalanced.

Though the figures are well known, they are worth repeating—if for no other reason than to forestall the familiarity with unpleasant facts from cloaking itself with complacency. It required sixteen hundred years to double the world population of 250 million, as it stood in the first century A.D. Today, the more than three billion on earth will double in 35 years time, and the world's population will then be increasing at the rate of an additional billion every eight years.

To project the totals beyond the year 2000 becomes so demanding on the imagination as to make the statistics almost incomprehensible.

A child born today, living on into his seventies, would know a world of 15 billion. His grandson would share the planet with 60 billion.

In six and a half centuries from now—the same insignificant period of time separating us from the poet Dante—there would be one human being standing on every square foot of land on earth: a fantasy of horror that even the *Inferno* could not match.

Such projections are, of course, unreal. They will not come to pass because events will not permit them to come to pass.

Of that we can be certain.

What is not so certain is precisely what those events will be. They can only be: mass starvation; political chaos; or population planning.

Whatever may happen after the year 2000, what is occurring right now is enough to jolt one into action.

India, for example, is adding a million people a month to its population—and this in spite of the oldest family-planning program in Southeast Asia.

The Philippines currently has a population of 37 million. There is no authorized government family-planning program. At the present rate of growth, these limited islands—in a brief 35 years—would have to support over one hundred million human beings.

The average population growth of the world at large is 2%. Many underdeveloped countries are burdened with a rate of 3½% or more. A population growing at 1% doubles itself in 70 years; at 2% it doubles in 35 years; at 3½% it doubles in only 20 years.

Now, if we are to reject mass starvation and political chaos as solutions to this explosive situation, then there are clearly only three conceivable ways in which a nation can deliberately *plan* to diminish its rate of population growth: to increase the death rate; to step up the migration rate; or to reduce the birth rate.

No one is in favor of the first choice. On the contrary, under the impact of public health programs, death rates are falling throughout the underdeveloped areas. Even simple medical improvements—better sanitation, malaria suppression, widespread vaccination—bring on a rapid and welcome decline in mortality. The low-level death rates which Europe required a century and a half to achieve are now being accomplished in the emerging areas in a fifth of that time.

The second choice is wholly inadequate. Increased migration, on any scale significant enough to be decisive, is simply not practical. Countries concerned about their own future crowding are understandably disinclined to add to it by accepting more than a limited number of foreigners. But the more important point is that the continually expanding increment, on a global basis, is already so massive that migration as a solution to population pressure is manifestly unrealistic. We can put a man on the moon. But we cannot migrate by the millions off our own planet.

That leaves the third choice: a humane and rational reduction of the birth rate.

Is it feasible? It is.

Is it simple? It is not.

Is it necessary? Without question.

It is necessary because the consequences of continuing the present population growth rates are unacceptable.

### III

Let us examine those consequences.

One cannot sense the inner significance of the cold, remote, impersonal demographic data by merely tracing a line upward on a graph, or by scanning the print-out from a computer.

The consequences of rapid population growth—piled on top of an already oppressive poverty—must be grasped in all their concrete, painful reality.

The first consequence can be seen in the gaunt faces of hungry men.

One half of humanity is hungering at this very moment. There is less food per person on the planet today than there was 30 years ago in the midst of a worldwide depression.

Thousands of human beings will die today—as they die every day—of that hunger. They will either simply starve to death, or they will die because their diet is so inadequate that it cannot protect them from some easily preventable disease.

Most of those thousands of individuals—individuals whose intrinsic right to a decent life is as great as yours or mine—are children. They are not mere statistics. They are human beings. And they are dying; now; at this very moment; while we are speaking.

They are not your children. Or my children. But they are someone's children. And they are dying needlessly.

And yet the thousands who die are perhaps the more fortunate ones. For millions of other children, suffering the same malnutrition, do not die. They live languidly on—stunted in their bodies, and crippled in their minds.

The human brain reaches 90% of its normal structural development in the first four years of life. We now know that during that critical period of growth, the brain is highly vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies: deficiencies that can cause as much as 25% impairment of normal mental ability. Even a deterioration of 10% is sufficient to cause a serious handicap to productive life.

This is irreversible brain damage.

What is particularly tragic in all of this is that when such mentally deprived children reach adulthood, they are likely to repeat the whole depressing sequence in their own families. They perpetuate mental deficiency, not through genetic inheritance; but simply because as parents they are ill-equipped mentally to understand, and hence to avoid the very nutritional deprivations in their own children that they themselves suffered.

Thus hunger and malnutrition forge a chain of conditions that only spiral the total human performance dismally downward. Alertness, vitality, energy, the ability to learn, the desire to succeed, the will to exert an effort—all these inestimable human qualities drain away.

How many children today are caught up in this crisis? How many of them subsist at levels of hunger and malnutrition that risk their being irreversibly mentally retarded for the rest of their lives? Some three hundred million.

But the population explosion's corrosive effects on the quality of life do not end with hunger. They range through the whole spectrum of human deprivation. With entire national populations, already caught up in the dilemmas of development, now doubling in as short a time as 20 years, there is a chronic insufficiency of virtually every necessity.

Current birth rates throughout the emerging world are seriously crippling developmental efforts. It is imperative to understand why. The intractable reason is that these governments must divert an inordinately high proportion of their limited national savings away from productive investment simply in order to maintain the current low level of existence.

Each additional child brought into the world must not only be fed, but clothed, housed, medically cared for, and supported



by at least minimal educational services. All of this requires new capital—new capital that cannot be invested in other desperately needed sectors of the economy. For approximately the first 15 years of their lives, children cannot contribute economically to the nation: simply because they are young they are consumers rather than producers.

If the number of children in the total population—as a result of high birth rates—is very large, a nation is under the compelling necessity to expend ever greater resources simply to keep its people from slipping beneath minimum subsistence levels. A treadmill economy tends to emerge in which the total national effort will exhaust itself in running faster and faster merely to stand still.

More and more classrooms must be built; more and more teachers must be provided; more and more vocational training facilities must be established. But despite all this effort both the quantity and quality of education will inevitably decline. It simply cannot keep pace with the mounting waves of children. Thus, one of the prime movers of all human development—education—is sacrificed.

Further, as ill-educated, perhaps wholly illiterate, children reach the age when they ought to become producers in the economy, they are engulfed by the hopelessness of underemployment. In many of the world's shanty towns 50 to 60% of the adolescents are out of work.

Not only are these youngsters unequipped for the jobs that might have been available, but the total number of meaningful jobs itself tends to decline in proportion to the population simply because the government has been unable to invest adequately in job-producing enterprises. The capital that ought to have been invested was simply not available. It was dissipated by the ever rising tide of additional children.

This, then, is the cruel and self-perpetuating dilemma that governments face in underdeveloped countries overburdened for long periods with high birth rates.

Their plans for progress evaporate into massive efforts merely to maintain the status quo.

But what is true at the national level is repeated with even greater poignancy on the personal family level. Millions of individual families wish to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

And when these families cannot find legal and compassionate assistance in this matter, they often turn to desperate and illegal measures.

Statistics suggest that abortion is one of the world's most commonly chosen methods to limit fertility—despite the fact that in most societies it is ethically offensive, illegal, expensive, and medically hazardous.

In five countries of western Europe, it is estimated that there are as many illegal abortions as live births.

In India, the estimate is that each month a quarter of a million women undergo illegal abortion.

In Latin America, illegal abortion rates are among the highest in the world. In one country, they are said to total three times the live birth rate; in another, to be the cause of two out of every five deaths of pregnant women. Further, there are indications that the illegal abortion rate in Latin America is increasing, and that multiple illegal abortions among mothers are becoming common.

The tragic truth is that illegal abortion is endemic in many parts of the world. And it is particularly prevalent in those areas where there is no adequate, organized family-planning assistance.

The conclusion is clear: where the public authorities will not assist parents to avoid unwanted births, the parents will often take matters into their own hands—at whatever cost to conscience or health.

#### IV

Now I have noted that this entire question of population planning is incredibly complex. There are, of course, certain precise and painful moral dilemmas. But quite apart from these, there is a vague and murky mythology that befores the issue. Not only does this collection of myths obscure the essentials of the problem, but worse still, it builds barriers to constructive action.

I should like to turn now to that mythology, and examine some of its more irrational premises.

There is, to begin with, the generalized assumption that somehow "more people means more wealth." As with all fallacies, there is a deceptive substratum of plausibility to the thesis. With the earlier rise of nationalism in the West—and the more recent emergence of newly independent countries in Asia and Africa—rapid population growth has often been regarded as a symbol of national vigor. It provided, so it was believed, the foundations of a more powerful military establishment; an economically advantageous internal market; a pool of cheap labor; and, in general, a prestigious political place in the sun.

But in the underdeveloped world, nearly every one of these assumptions is false. Because rapid population growth tends seriously to retard growth in per capita income, the developing nation soon discovers that its economic vigor is diminished rather than enhanced by the phenomenon of high fertility. The hoped-for internal market becomes a mere mass of discontented indigents, without purchasing power but with all the frustrations of potential consumers whose expectations cannot be met.

"Cheap labor" in such countries turns out not to be cheap at all. For sound economic growth requires technological improvements, and these in turn demand higher levels of training than the strained government resources can supply. Though individual workers may be paid lower salaries than their counterparts abroad, their efficiency and productiveness are so low that the nation's goods are often priced out of the competitive export market. The "cheap" labor turns out to be excessively expensive labor.

Even the argument of expanding the population in order to provide a powerful military force is suspect—not merely because the expansion of one nation's forces will, in time, lead to a reactive expansion of its neighbors' forces, but also because modern defense forces require an increasing ratio of educated recruits rather than mere masses of illiterate troops.

As for political prestige, nations caught in the catastrophe of an uncontrolled population growth do not enhance their posi-

tion in the family of nations. On the contrary, they find it slipping away as their once optimistic plans for progress turn inevitably to the politics of confrontation and extremism.

Akin to the myth that "more people means more wealth" is the notion that countries with large tracts of uninhabited open land have no need to worry about birth rates, since there is ample room for expansion.

The argument is as shallow as it is misleading. For the patent fact is that mere open land does not, in and of itself, support a high rate of population growth. Such open land—if it is to become the home of large numbers of people—must be provided with a whole panoply of heavy government investments: investments in roads, housing, sanitation, agricultural and industrial development.

The sound economic argument is quite the other way round. What such raw space requires first is not surplus people, but surplus funds for investment. And it is precisely surplus people in a developing economy that make the accumulation of surplus funds so incredibly difficult.

What is equally overlooked is that a rational restraint on fertility rates in an emerging country never implies an absolute reduction of the total population. It simply hopes for a more reasonable balance between birth and death rates. And since death rates in the future are certain to drop with continued advances in medicine—and in highly underdeveloped countries the drop in the death rate is characteristically precipitous—there are no grounds whatever for fearing that a nation's population, under the influence of family planning, will dangerously ebb away. The danger is quite the opposite: that even with family planning—should it be inadequately utilized—the population will proliferate in the future to self-defeating levels.

A still more prevalent myth is the misapprehension that official programs of family planning in a developing country are wholly unnecessary since the very process of development itself automatically leads to lowered birth rates. The experience of Europe is cited as persuasive proof of this theory.

But the proof is no proof at all, for the theory is hopelessly irrelevant to today's conditions in the underdeveloped world. There are no comparable circumstances between what happened in Europe's early period of modernization, and what is happening in the emerging world today.

Aside from a lapse of logic which fails to grasp that the current population growth in these areas inhibits the very economic development which is supposed to curb that growth, the historical fact is that conditions in Europe during its initial developmental period were far more favorable to lower rates of population growth. The birth rates were much lower than they are in the underdeveloped world today, the death rates had not yet drastically fallen, and by the time public health measures had accomplished that, the infrastructure of industrialization was already in place.

Further, in nineteenth century Europe, unlike in the developing countries today, marriages were entered into later, and the level of literacy—always an important factor affecting population growth—was considerably higher.

Even in spite of all these advantages, it required some 70 years for Europe to reduce its birth rates to present levels. Today the average birth rate for developing countries is 40 to 45 per 1000 of population. To get this rate down to the 17 to 20 per 1000 that is common in contemporary Europe would require a reduction in the developing world of some 50 million births a year. To suppose that economic advancement by itself—without the assistance of well organized family planning—could accomplish this in any feasible time-frame of the future is wholly naive.

Indeed, even with family planning, no such promising results are feasible in less than two or three decades. What is feasible—indeed what is imperative—is the establishment of family planning on a scale that will stave off total economic and political disintegration in those countries where social progress is being seriously limited by the glut of unwanted births.

No government can, of course, ultimately succeed in convincing its own population to undertake family planning, if parents themselves do not really want it.

But the almost universal fact is that parents do want it. They often want it far more than their own political leaders comprehend.

People—particularly poor, ill-educated people—may not understand the techniques of family planning. Most of them have only the most tenuous understanding of human biology. Often their limited comprehension is tragically confused by gross misinformation.

But the notion that family-planning programs are sinister, coercive plots to force poor people into something they really do not want, is absurd.

The pervasive prevalence of voluntary illegal abortion should be enough to dispel that fiction.

The poor do not always know how to limit their families in less drastic and dangerous ways, but there is overwhelming evidence that they would like to know how.

Another serious misunderstanding is the fear that family planning in the developing world would inevitably lead to a breakdown of familial moral fiber—and that it would encourage parents to limit the number of their children for essentially frivolous and selfish reasons: that it would trade the responsibility of having a large number of children for the opportunity of acquiring the needless gadgetry of an advancing consumer economy.

But one stroll through the slums of any major city in the developing world is enough to dispel that concept. If anything is threatening the fiber of family life it is the degrading conditions of subsistence survival that one finds in these sprawling camps of packing crates and scrap metal. Children on the streets instead of in non-existent classrooms. Broken men—their pride shattered—without work. Despondent mothers—often unmarried—unable to cope with exhaustion because of annual pregnancies. And all of this in a frustrating environment of misery and hunger and hopelessness. These are not the conditions that promote an ethically fibered family life.

Family planning is not designed to destroy families. On the contrary, it is designed to save them.

All of us accept the principle that in a free society, the parents themselves must ultimately decide the size of their own family. We would regard it as an intolerable invasion of the family's rights for the State to use coercive measures to implement population policy. We can preserve that right best by assisting families to understand how they can make that decision for themselves.

The fact is that millions of children are born without their parents desiring that it happen. Hence, a free, rational choice for an additional child is not made in these cases. If we are to keep the right of decision in the hands of the family—where it clearly belongs—then we must give the family the knowledge and assistance it requires to exercise that right.

Nor need anyone be deterred from appropriate action by the pernicious, if pervasive, myth that the white western world's assistance in family planning efforts among the non-white nations of the developing areas is a surreptitious plot to keep the whites in a racial ascendancy. The myth is absurd on purely demographic grounds, as well as on many others. Non-white peoples on the planet massively outnumber whites. They always have and always will. No conceivable degree of family planning could possibly alter that mathematical fact.

But a more relevant answer is that if the white world actually did desire to plot against the non-white nations, one of the most effective ways possible to do so would be for the whites to deny these nations any assistance whatever in family planning. For the progressive future of the non-white world is directly related to their indigenous economic development—and that, in turn, as we have seen, is dependent upon their being able to bring birth rates down to a level that will allow a significant increase in per capita income.

## V

There is one more myth that obstructs the road to action. It is the belief that the time for decisive action is past, and that sweeping famine is inevitable.

The distinguished British scientist and novelist, C. P. Snow, has recently noted that it is the view of men of sober judgment

that "many millions of people in the poor countries are going to starve to death before our eyes."

"We shall see them doing so," he adds, "upon our television sets."

He stresses that when the collision between food and population takes place, "at best, this will mean local famines to begin with. At worst, the local famines will spread into a sea of hunger. The usual date predicted for the beginning of the local famines is 1975-80."

In summing up his own view, he suggests that "The major catastrophe will happen before the end of the century. We shall, in the rich countries, be surrounded by a sea of famine, involving hundreds of millions of human beings."

"The increase of population," he predicts, "all over the rich world may get a little less. In the poor world it won't, except in one or two pockets. Despite local successes, as in India, the food-population collision will duly occur. The attempts to prevent it, or meliorate it, will be too feeble. Famine will take charge in many countries. It may become, by the end of the period, endemic famine. There will be suffering and desperation on a scale as yet unknown."

Now, though Lord Snow is a brilliant and perceptive man of good will, I simply do not believe that one need feel quite so near despair—even in the face of a situation as ominous as this one.

Wholesale famine is not inevitable. I am convinced that there is time to reverse the situation, if we will but use it. Only barely sufficient time. But time nevertheless.

It is the time which has been given us by those who have created the revolution in agricultural technology: a revolution based on new seeds, hybrid strains, fertilizers, and the intensified use of natural resources.

It is a revolution which already has increased the yields of food grains by more than 100% in parts of Southeast Asia, and which promises to boost yields by one-half ton per acre throughout Asia. It is a revolution which has expanded the number of



acres sown with the new seeds from 200 in 1965 to 20,000,000 in 1968—and an estimated 34,000,000 in 1969—but which has yet to touch more than a small percentage of the rice and wheat-producing acreage of the world.

If we will but speed the spread of this agricultural revolution—by adequate and properly administered technical and financial assistance to the developing countries—we can expect that for the next two decades the world's food supply will grow at a faster rate than its population.

The predicted spectre of famine can be averted.

It will take immense energy and organizing skill, and significant infusions of new capital investment—but it is possible to stave off disaster.

What is required to accomplish this is not so much a psychologically comforting optimism, as an energetic, creative realism.

I believe enough of that realism exists among men of good will—both in the developed and in the emerging world—to do the job.

This is the fundamental reason I do not share Lord Snow's degree of discouragement.

There is no point whatever in being naively over-optimistic about a situation as full of peril as the population problem.

But I am confident that application of the new technology will dramatically expand the rate of agricultural growth and will buy two decades of time—admittedly the barest minimum of time—required to cope with the population explosion, and reduce it to manageable proportions.

## VI

How can this best be done?

To begin with, the developed nations must give every measure of support they possibly can to those countries which have already established family-planning programs. Many have. The governments of India, Pakistan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore have established both policies and specific targets for

reducing population growth rates and have shown some measurable progress.

Ceylon, Malaysia, Turkey, Tunisia, the United Arab Republic, Morocco, Kenya, Mauritius, Chile, Honduras, Barbados, and Jamaica are giving government support to family-planning programs, but need substantial technical or financial assistance before any significant reduction in birth rates can occur.

Some 20 other governments are considering family-planning programs.

In other countries, where governments are only dimly aware of the dangers of the population problem—but would like, nevertheless, to ponder the matter—the developed nations can quietly assist by helping with the demographic and social studies that will reveal the facts and thus point up the urgency of the issue, and the disadvantages of delay.

It is essential, of course, to recognize the right of a given country to handle its population problem in its own way. But handle it, it must.

The developed nations can point out the demographic facts; can explain the economic realities; can warn of the consequences of procrastination. They can—and should—inform. They should not—and cannot—pressure.

Technologically advanced countries can make one of their greatest contributions by initiating a new order of intensity in research into reproductive biology. They have starved their research facilities of funds in this field. The result is that we are still only on the threshold of understanding the complexities of conception, and therefore only at the outer edge of the necessary knowledge to help make family planning in the developing countries beneficial on a meaningful scale.

Annual worldwide expenditures for research in reproductive biology now total roughly 50 million dollars. The hardheaded estimate is that the sum should treble to 150 million dollars annually—for the next ten years—if we are to develop the knowledge necessary for the most effective and acceptable kinds of family planning.

Our parsimony in this matter in the United States is illustrated by the discouraging fact that out of a total budget of nearly one billion dollars, the National Institutes of Health this year are spending less than ten million dollars for research in population-related phenomena. Hundreds of millions of dollars for death control. Scarcely 1% of that amount for fertility control.

And research efforts should range far beyond biology.

Demography, as a fully developed science, remains in its infancy. It is likely that fewer than half the world's births are even registered. And while the crude estimates of birth rates almost inevitably turn out to be too low, it is essential that more precise data be developed in those areas where the population problem is the most acute.

Similarly, there is a pressing need for far more research in the socio-cultural aspects of family planning. There is manifestly a great deal more to population planning than merely birth control. Attitudes, motivation, preferences differ from country to country, and this essential research can clearly best be conducted locally. The developed nations should be generous in their financial support for such studies and surveys.

Above all else, there is a need to develop a realistic sense of urgency in all countries over the population problem.

Programs are beginning to show progress in limited areas. But no reduction in birth rates has yet been achieved anywhere in the underdeveloped areas which can significantly affect overall world population totals.

This means that family planning is going to have to be undertaken on a humane but massive scale. Other massive efforts in our century—for example, in the field of public health—have been mounted and have been successful. And granted all the difficulties, there is no insuperable reason this one cannot be.

The threat of unmanageable population pressures is very much like the threat of nuclear war.

Both threats are undervalued. Both threats are misunderstood.

Both threats can—and will—have catastrophic consequences unless they are dealt with rapidly and rationally.

The threat of violence is intertwined with the threat of undue population growth. It is clear that population pressures in the underdeveloped societies can lead to economic tensions, and political turbulence: stresses in the body politic which in the end can bring on conflicts among nations.

Such violence must not be allowed to happen.

You and I—and all of us—share the responsibility of taking those actions necessary to assure that it will not happen.

There is no point in despair.

There is every point simply in getting busy with the job. That is surely what God gave us our reason and our will for: to get on with the tasks which must be done.

I do not have to convince you of that here at Notre Dame.

You, and the Roman Catholic Church at large, are completely dedicated to the goal of development. One has only to read the Second Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, and Pope Paul's *Populorum Progressio* to understand that. Both these impressive documents call for a solution to the population problem as it relates to development. Such controversy as remains in this matter is merely about the means, not at all about the end.

I am confident that you in this university, and those in the Catholic community that reaches out around the globe, and the fatherly and compassionate Pontiff who stands at your helm—as well as men everywhere of whatever religious allegiance—I am confident that all of us are dedicated to that end however much we may disagree on the specifics of the means.

The end desired by the Church—and by all men of good will—is the enhancement of human dignity. That, after all, is what development is all about.

And human dignity is severely threatened by the population explosion—more severely, more completely, more certainly threatened than it has been by any catastrophe the world has yet endured.

There is time—just barely time—to escape that threat.

We can, and we must, act.

What we must comprehend is this: the population problem *will* be solved one way or the other. Our only fundamental option is whether it is to be solved rationally and humanely—or irrationally and inhumanely. Are we to solve it by famine? Are we to solve it by riot, by insurrection, by the violence that desperately starving men can be driven to? Are we to solve it by wars of expansion and aggression? Or are we to solve it rationally, humanely—in accord with man's dignity?

There is so little time left to make the decision. To make no decision would be to make the worst decision of all. For to ignore this problem is only to make certain that nature will take catastrophic revenge on our indecisiveness.

Providence has placed you and me—and all of us—at that fulcrum-point in history where a rational, responsible, moral solution to the population problem must be found.

You and I—and all of us—share the responsibility, to find and apply that solution.

If we shirk that responsibility, we will have committed the crime.

But it will be those who come after us who will pay the undeserved . . . and the unspeakable . . . penalties.

**WORLD BANK**

1818 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20433, U.S.A.

Telephone number: (202) 477-1234

Cable address: INTBAFRAD WASHINGTON D.C.

**European Office:**

66, Avenue d'Iéna, 75116 Paris, France

Telephone number: 723-54-21

Cable address: INTBAFRAD PARIS

**Tokyo Office:**

Kokusai Building

1-1 Marunouchi 3-chome

Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100, Japan

Telephone number: (03) 214-5001

Cable address: INTBAFRAD TOKYO

**INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT**

1818 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20433 U.S.A.

Telephone number: EXecutive 3-6360

Cable address: INTBAFRAD

**Office for Europe:**

4, Avenue d'Iéna, Paris 16e, France

Telephone number: 533-2510

Cable address: INTBAFRAD PARIS