

Peru's bishops rip lies of the neo-malthusian 'population lobby'

On May 1, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Peru placed itself at the center of a national debate over whether "population planning" should be introduced into the Peruvian government's development strategy, with a dramatic call for the government of Alan García to reject the pressures of "international neo-malthusian agencies" which insist Peru limit its population growth.

The Bishops' message came just as the "population lobby" hoped to secure an image of respectability as "experts" needed for development planning. At a May 4 press conference in Lima, Dr. Nafis Sadik, the executive director of the United Nations Population Fund, announced that, following a meeting with President García, the UNPF had decided to give Peru \$2.2 million, to help develop a population-control program severe enough to reduce the annual growth rate from today's 2.5% to 1.7%.

By May 7, the Bishops' message dominated Lima's press. Most damaging to the United Nations program was the Bishops' denunciation of the population lobby for attempting to slip back into Peruvian policy the economics of scarcity otherwise swept aside by García's government. Just as García's Peru has opened "uncharted paths" in rejecting financial policies which subjected its people to misery, so must the government now take the lead in defending Peru from population policies premised on the philosophies already rejected in the financial realm, the Bishops urged.

The philosophy behind the Bishops' call for a "daring" new approach to the "population" question was summarized simply by the secretary general of the Bishops' Council, Monsignor Augusto Vargas Alzamora. "Peru's greatest wealth is its people," he explained in an interview with *EIR* bureau chief Sara Madueño on May 20. "To try to reduce the number of Peruvians born in the future, is to impoverish them further."

Bishops uphold the sacredness of life

The following are excerpts from the Message of the Bishops of Peru, issued May 1, 1987:

In this year's Plenary Assembly, We, the Bishops of Peru, have viewed with particular concern the so-called Population Policy in the National Development Plan for 1986-1990. . . .

The Church declares and preaches the dignity of each person above all, and therefore the sense of responsibility in all areas of life and also in the procreation of children. . . . For that reason, before speaking of methods of family planning, we speak of the sacred value and the defense of life, of the dignity of persons, of the sanctity and stability of matrimony, of the human and Christian sense of sexuality, of responsible fatherhood in all its extensions: before conception, at conception, and after conception. (*Cf.* Genesis 2:24 and the recent "Instruction Concerning Respect for Nascent Human Life, and the Dignity of Procreation.") . . .

What concerns us is a certain view of responsible fatherhood which may disguise systems of state control of the couple's fecundity, and foster the selfishness of spouses.

The international neo-malthusian agencies utilize the Church's terminology as a way of disguising their intentions, ideologies, and philosophies. "Responsible fatherhood" must not be reduced to the so-called "freedom of options regarding the means to be used."

Before choosing methods, the couple must develop and be educated as persons. There is no freedom when the ethical and moral values involved in making a decision are ignored. . . . Before educating *for* something, education must develop people as persons, because only with full awareness of one's *being* as a *person*, can the human being freely and consciously choose what he develops *for*. . . .

It is said that we are many, too many. But the causes are ignored. . . . The deeper problem has to be located in the Peruvian family structure itself, whose stability and integrity has already been so weakened legally. . . .

The freedom of spirit with which the country's foreign debt problem has been addressed at the State level, in every way seeking uncharted paths to deal with it, without surrendering national sovereignty, is very laudable. But, we believe that the dignity and integrity of Peru must likewise be de-

fended against population policies inspired by the same philosophies and plans which pushed our Fatherland into its current economic difficulties, endangering the sovereign independence which we are fully entitled to as our right to freedom of personal and collective conscience.

What makes men and peoples great, are the moral and ethical values that dignify them. The philosophies of population policies that subtly have been imposed upon us, destroy those values and are a serious matter of conscience for the Church on our continent and especially for us in Peru.

The Church, those of us entrusted by the Lord to be pastors in this portion of His Kingdom, is conscious of the hard reality in which many of our people's families live. The

economic crisis expresses itself in situations of extreme poverty, misery, malnutrition, disease, and death, above all in the least favored sectors. We are also conscious of the anguish that it means for so many couples, to have more children than they can care for and educate properly. But we cannot be silent when the substance through matrimony or the family, is at stake. Progress cannot come from sacrificing the spiritual dimension of the human being. We will not have advanced at all by *having* more, if we *are* less as persons. A society cannot measure itself in terms of gross national product, nor in material well-being. It is necessary to maintain its human and spiritual values. . . .

Interview: Monsignor Augusto Vargas Alzamora

'Peru's greatest wealth is its people'

Monsignor Vargas is a bishop and secretary general of the Peruvian Bishops' Conference.

EIR: Can you comment on the rather suspicious "charitable" attitude of the United Nations, with the announcement of the executive director of the fund for population activities, Mrs. Nafis Sadik, of a \$2.2 million donation to Peru, to help the population policy?

Monsignor Vargas: It honestly seems to me that this attitude is hardly charitable, because Peru is in much greater need of help to make its impoverished population more productive. To try to reduce the number of Peruvians born in the future, is to impoverish them further, because Peru's greatest wealth is its people. It seems to me that the United Nations has too malthusian a view of Peru and of the world. Unfortunately, the U.N. has the experience India lived through, and we all know how they operated there. We would not want their Indian experience to be repeated here in Peru.

EIR: In the joint press conference given here in Lima recently by Mrs. Sadik and Peru's health minister, Dr. David Tejada, the latter argued for his ministry's decision to set up a birth-control program, pointing out that it is time for Peruvians to banish three myths: It is a myth, Tejada said, that we are a rich country; it is a myth that we are an underpopulated country; and it is also a myth, he added, that "every child is born with his bread under his arm." Do you believe, Monsignor, that Minister Tejada's observations reveal a racist view

of Peruvians, because he undervalues us as creative human beings, by saying that we are poor and always will be, and that the future holds nothing but misery for us?

Monsignor Vargas: I think that there is certainly a prejudice there against our race, because calling those three statements a myth dismisses popular wisdom too hastily. Obviously, when our popular wisdom speaks of every child arriving with his bread under his arm, it means a child conceived in a home where there is love, which has—since the great majority of Peru's population is Catholic—God's blessing. The means of living will hardly be lacking if one has really acted conscientiously, no matter how many children there are in a home. That saying reflects this popular wisdom; thus, for us, it is not a myth.

As for Peru having no natural resources, it seems to me that this contradicts that great wise man Raimondi, who said precisely the opposite. [Raimondi was an Italian scientist who explored Peru in the 19th century, and said of its great wealth of natural resources, "Peru is a beggar sitting on a mound of gold."—ed.] One could say that science has advanced, that Raimondi saw too much, and that the wealth he referred to does not exist. But experience has shown us that we constantly discover new veins of wealth, whenever Peru goes to work. It is evident that Peru is a country whose wealth is difficult to make use of, but that is precisely why we need population, so that Peru's men may work, and have great goals in mind to make the country greater, and make the lives of those who live in Peru more fruitful.