

AIRGRAM

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HANDLING INDICATOR

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RECEIVED

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FROM : Amembassy RIO DE JANEIRO

DATE: November 5, 1968

SUBJECT: Hopeful Signs for Birth Control Advocates

REF : Rio's A-1092 SOC 13-3 BRAZ
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1. The recent visit of World Bank President McNamara to Brazil following his Buenos Aires speech gave a strong boost to the cause of population control. Although he did not publicly address himself to the issue while in Brazil, his prior pronouncements received wide publicity and did not prevent him from being enthusiastically received, especially in the North-east.

Within the context of this airgram, the most notable fall-out from the McNamara whirlwind was the strong editorial support of the prestigious Estado de Sao Paulo. Its lead editorial of October 26, entitled "The Demographic Explosion and Mr. McNamara," spoke of "our strict obligation to solicit the attention of our readers...to the decisive importance that (economic questions) have acquired for all people and most particularly for those still in the phase of underdevelopment" as the reason for attaching so much importance to McNamara's speech. Continuing to emphasize the economic aspects of the population control issue, the editorial by and large side-stepped the religious aspects of the issue: "...the most delicate situation of countries, like ours, whose populations grow excessively creating for themselves the risk of being subjugated by insoluble, positively catastrophic problems... The IBRD cannot remain indifferent to 'the wave of children which drowns the educational systems, literally consumes the margin of savings, and inundates the labor market.' The ex-advisor of President Johnson is wholly right when he says that 'there is no power on earth that can guarantee economic progress with a speed capable of allowing all those children to grow healthy, with good education and able to occupy the place to which they have a right in a competitive world.' This is reality. It would be childish to try to combat the irrefutable words of Mr. McNamara with ideological arguments."

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Such consideration as the editorial gave to religious objections was remarkable: "Unhappily this is not a problem whose solution depends only on scientists and governments. To have an idea of the extreme difficulty inherent in the adoption of a world policy on births, it is sufficient to note that all the warnings and suggestions of economists and demographers were violently contradicted a few months ago by the Papal Encyclical Humanae Vitae. His Holiness who, in many aspects of human problems seems to be close to the progressives, has adopted in regard to birth control a position that aligns him with those who desire a return to centuries past when dogmatic prejudices placed this delicate question at the discretionary will of the Church, as though it had implications only for the spiritual order. And this attitude of Rome cannot fail to trouble all who...know that the economists are right to be alarmed about the demographic explosion that shakes our disturbed planet."

2. Other recent signs that debate on birth control policy was not shut off by the pronouncements of Humanae Vitae are the favorable publicity given Gunnar Myrdal's remarks at the Candido Mendes faculty in Rio and the hard-hitting statements made by former Planning Minister Roberto Campos after McNamara's visit. Moving into the political aspects of the birth control issue Campos warned that "Ecclesiastical opposition and governmental indifference will not slow the population control movement in Brazil. But they will have a disastrous consequence - modern, practical contraceptives will be available only to persons of high or middle income ... To the less favored classes will remain the danger and trauma of abortion..." In regard to the immorality of using contraceptives, Campos has reportedly replied that the promiscuity caused by the housing shortage is much more immoral.

One potentially powerful stimulus to birth control, which may particularly motivate those inclined to view it as a threat to Brazilian greatness, is the predictions which Herman Kahn makes for Brazil in his book The Year 2000. These have been widely excerpted and purportedly show that Brazil will be in the third rank of South American nations by the end of the century if present birth rates continue.

3. The voices of reason cited above should not lead one to conclude that an early change in official outlook is probable. The recent meeting of the central committee of the National Conference of Bishops drafted a statement (for unexplained reasons not released until several days after the meeting) which defended the encyclical. It drew heavily on Pope Paul's injunction to the United Nations to put more food on the table of life instead of limiting the number of those invited. Addressing themselves directly to policy makers the Bishops reminded that "We, who in all our history and in the most diverse ways have given you fraternal cooperation

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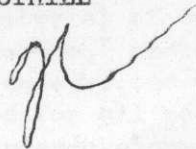
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in the performance of your specific missions, humbly ask that mere worldly political and economic interests do not cause you to oppose the arduous mission of the Church because you need the protection of God for the success of your undertakings."

4. The Church clearly continues divided on the birth control issue. Criticism of the encyclical within the Church assumed a definite and more aggressive form with the appearance of a lengthy study which described it as "treating marriage as something more biological than human." Authored by Dom Paulo Koop, Bishop of Lins (Sao Paulo) and a group of liberal priests, the study appeared in "Vozes," a Catholic magazine published in Petropolis. The study may have struck a responsive chord within the ranks of the clergy in concluding that the encyclical "...leaves the intelligence of man unsatisfied with the conclusions taken." Both within and without the Church birth control remains an issue very much alive and unresolved. The initial blow of Humanae Vitae seems to have passed without unduly negative results. Barring further developments which might strengthen the applicability of its holdings to secular decisions, the outlook is for a very gradual but steadily increasing acceptance of the necessity for birth control.

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