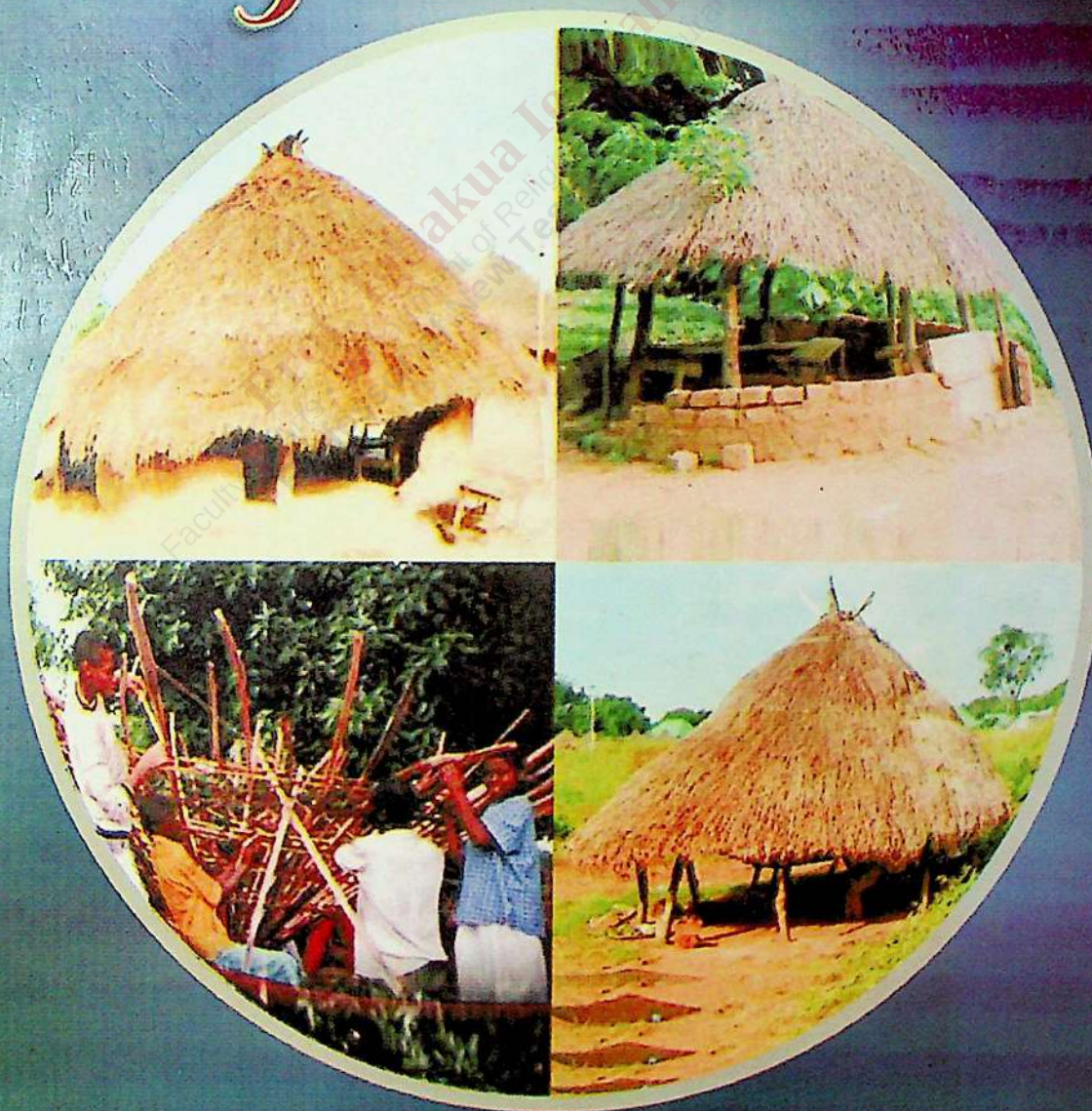


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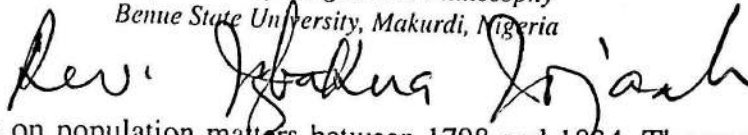
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BIBLICAL-CHRISTIAN EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIAL, ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF THE METHODS OF FAMILY PLANNING ON POPULATION CONTROL

By

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Introduction

In his series of essays on population matters between 1798 and 1834, Thomas Malthus called the world's attention to the dangers of the rapid growth of the world's population. He was particularly concerned about the negative effects of unchecked population growth on the "promotion of industry, morality, and regular conduct" (Rhys 259). Although Malthus was initially criticized for oversimplification in some quarters, the debate he and others initiated gradually attracted a United Nations World Population Conference in August 1974, at Bucharest. That conference affirmed that the principal aim of social, economic, and cultural development, of which population goals and policies are integral parts, is to improve the standard of living and quality of the people (Kupolati 1). Subsequent similar conferences impressed this fact of the interrelationship between population change and the quality of life at the family, community, and national levels on the minds of many nations' policy makers.

The United Nations International Conference on population that was held in Mexico City from August 6-13, 1984 particularly considered among other issues, the demographic, economic, social, and health consequences of adolescent sexuality including teenage pregnancy and fertility. The conference made 88 recommendations, most of which centered on means to regulate fertility (Brown 296-302). Governments of member States were particularly urged "to ensure that adolescents, both boys and girls, receive education, with due consideration given to the role, rights and obligations of parents and changing individual and cultural values. Suitable family planning information and services should be made available to adolescents within the changing socio-cultural framework of each country" (Brown 300).

Nigeria as a member nation of the UN took these injunctions seriously in view of the rapid population change in the country and its adverse effects on the socioeconomic life of the people. A brief review of the nation's history of development affirms this position. It can be seen that Nigeria's first National Development Plan (1962-1968) contained no definite population program. The Second National Development Plan (1970-1974) shows Government's consciousness, but also disregard of the effect of the rapid population growth on the nation's socioeconomic life. The document indicates that the nation's population was growing at 2.5% annual rate because of decline in death rates and conversely, high birth rates. In spite of Government's recognition that this growth rate was high, it felt no need for any emergency or panic action in view of Nigeria's "resource base and development potential" (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1970 77). The same disregard of any real or potential threat of the nation's rapid population growth on its socioeconomic development is seen in the Third National Development Plan (1975-1980) (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1975 293).

It can be said that the nation's leadership was blindfolded from seeing the obvious repercussions of a rapid growing population by the deceptive excesses of the oil boom days. However in 1985 the price of oil fell and drastically turned low, unprecedented economic crisis gripped the nation. Then, its leadership began to feel the need for population management among other alternatives for economic recovery. Austerity measures were adopted in 1985 and Structural adjustment Program in 1986.

In further pursuance of an adequate overhaul of the nation's economy the Federal Government put in place an inter-ministerial body to draft a population policy that will curtail the number of persons entering the reproductive age group and thus slow population growth rate and dependency ratio. The body produced the document it called "National Policy on Population for Development, Unity, Progress, and Self Reliance." That document emphasizes the improvement of the living standards of

Nigerians on a general note. To achieve this feat, the document recommended ten measures for checking population growth rate, fertility, and mortality levels as well as provides social amenities and health services especially to the rural people thus:

- i. For the protection of the health of the mother and child, to reduce the proportion of women who get married before the age of 18 years by 50% by 1995 and by 80% by the year 2000.
- ii. To reduce pregnancy to mothers below 18 years and above 35 years of age by 50% by 1995 and by 90% by the year 2000.
- iii. To reduce the proportion of women bearing more than four children by 50% by 1995 and by 80% by the year 2000.
- iv. To extend the coverage of family planning services to 50% of women of child-bearing age by 1995 and 80% by the year 2000.
- v. To direct a significant proportion of the family planning program in terms of family life education and appropriate family planning service to all adult males by the year 2000.
- vi. To reduce the number of children a woman is likely to have during her lifetime, now over 6, to four per woman by the year 2000 and reduce the present of population growth from about 3.3 per cent per year to 2.5 per cent by 1995 to 2.0 per cent by the year 2000;
- vii. To reduce the infant mortality rate to 50 per 1000 live births by the year 1990 and 30 per 1000 live birth by the year 2000 and the crude death rate to 10 per 1000 by 1990 and 8 per 1000 by the year 2000;
- viii. To make available suitable family life education, family planning information and services to all adolescents by 2000 to enable them to assume responsible parenthood;
- ix. To provide 50% of the rural community with basic social amenities by 1990 and 75% by 2000 in order to stimulate and sustain self-reliant development.

Family planning services shall be made available to all persons voluntarily wishing to use them. Priority attention shall be given to reaching high risk clients, for example, women under 18 or over 35, those with four or more children, those with previous complicated pregnancies of children, or those with chronic illness which increases the health risk of pregnancy. (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1988 13-14).

At the center of all these is the concern to "make family planning services easily affordable, safe, and culturally acceptable" (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1988 15). This national policy on population as shown above was adopted on February 4, 1988. The foregoing makes it obvious that family planning is the center of this population policy. And we have observed that it has received mixed reactions, a good number of people querying its ethical and moral basis. It is therefore, pertinent for us scholars of religion to examine the concept, family planning, to decipher its moral and ethical implications which are invariably, religious implications, on Nigerians. First then, we ask, what is family planning?

Family Planning/Birth Control Measures of Population Control

Different people depending on the definers' backgrounds have defined the concept, "family planning" differently. The demographer's emphasis differs from that of the economist and the health educator, for instance. The evaluation of such definitions is however, not the concern of this paper and so calls for no sampling of them. We shall equally not attempt a definition of the concept. However, for an informed assessment of the ethical implications of its methods to be possible, we need to make an analytical discussion of the concept.

The first of the two key terms in the concept, family planning, namely "family" denotes a social unit, comprising father, mother, and children, and in an extended sense, close relatives who share in the family's resources. Planning is the process of deciding in detail how to do something before you start to do it (Cobuild CD ROM). It thus involves the establishment of goals, policies, and procedures to achieve a feat. Family planning is therefore imbued with the idea of a husband and wife deciding ahead of time how many children they will have and when to have them. From this stance, the idea of family planning connotes the notions of fertility and procreation *within the family*. Family planning

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thus “stresses on proper spacing of babies in the family (emphasis mine) through regulating of pregnancies” (Ottong 115). We may thus summate that family planning is all about “birth control”.

It could be said that birth control is integral to human behavior from antique times as is attested in ancient literature. The Christian bible promotes prolific childbirth by such statements as “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). Yet it also records an explicit statement of birth control in regard to the action of Onan who “spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring ...” (Genesis 38:9-10). Ancient Jewish sources, Islamic texts, and Hindu scriptures all indicate that herbal contraceptives could induce temporary sterility (O’Grandy, Internet). In the period of the early Roman Empire, Augustus enacted laws to encourage the aristocracy to marry and produce children but the call was not all successful. Some scholars attribute the low birth rate in Rome in this period to the regular practice of hot baths, which can reportedly reduce male fertility. Not everyone wanted more children; some resisted the new emphasis on childbearing and resorted to magical contraceptives or other contraceptive means they thought were medically sounder (Carson CD ROM).

Other ancient tales, hailing from urban Mesopotamia (which was worried by population growth), tell of the gods taking steps to curb human fertility by sending plagues, famine, flood and miscarriage. From their earliest history, the Tiv of central Nigeria practice birth control by spacing their children. The husband abstains from his nursing wife until the child weans. At times when the prolonged total abstinence period could not be coped with, the *coitus interruptus* or withdrawal method is employed.

The basic reason for child spacing has been concern for the health of mother and child as well as family life. This is intrinsically associated with social norms, the couple, especially the husband, is looked upon as lacking self control when a nursing mother takes in for another birth. Economically, unspaced pregnancies and births keep the wife away from the farm, reducing the labor force and consequently productivity on the farm. When meticulously observed family planning pay off with many blessings for the family – from family health to improved social status.

Today, the message of family planning is being sung all over Nigeria. This is commendable, because the success of Tiv family planning bid hinged on their fertility awareness (understanding how conception is achieved). This largely explains the concerns this paper expresses about the new wave of family planning methods and practice in the country: They exhibit the conspicuous marks of a culture in decline. This decline has been precipitated in large part by a rapid retrogression in ethics and morality. Attending this moral retrogression has been a significant increase in the number and severity of social pathologies with which our culture is afflicted, not the least of which has been a significant increase in the levels of teenage sexual activity, pregnancy, illegitimate births and abortion.

Methods of Family Planning

There are two types of family planning each employing a number of methods. Natural family planning differs from the artificial in that the natural methods of family planning blend in with a methodology already existing in nature in the normal reproductive physiology of man and woman. Artificial methods work in the opposite direction by interfering with reproduction through the use of contraceptives. These may be chemicals like the pill or artificial devices like the coil (IUD), the condom, and sterilization. It is not necessary to discuss how these contraceptives work. It is enough for our purpose to inform that most contraceptives work to abort a pregnancy at its early stage so that the woman does not even realize it. The IUD or coil for instance, “acts by rejecting the fertilized egg, preventing its implantation in the womb, procuring an early abortion before the mother is aware of conception” (McSweeney 146).

The monthly pill works similarly: “when the pill is taken, a period having been missed and the symptoms of pregnancy been present, the woman will know, and the prescriber of the pill will know, that an abortion is being procured” (Gardner 304). There are however, some contraceptives that act by preventing fertilization of the ovum, for example, the “morning after” Pill. But these are not many. One can easily see that the use of contraceptives or artificial methods of family planning translates to the murder of the unborn child! The natural family planning methods are equally many. The commonest however, are the rhythm and the Billings methods. The rhythm method consists in counting the days between one menses and the next to find out when the woman is fertile so the “safe

period" could be known. The Billings method works by the woman observing the appearance of mucus which indicates that she is fertile. It has been discovered that many Nigerian women were already conversant with the method before the arrival of the improved form of it. They thus only need to be sharpened on it.

Responses to Family Planning for Population Control

Different people have received the message of family planning differently. The regional and religious background of people largely accounts for their attitude to birth control, especially where contraceptives are to be used. Beginning with the declaration by Pope Pius XI in his 1930 encyclical, *Cast Connubii*, which was maintained by the 1968 *Humanae vitae*, Roman Catholics totally prohibit contraceptives. Only natural Family Planning methods are allowed for the adherents of this Faith. The Church deems, with Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas, that sexuality has its end purpose as procreation, and to interfere with this end is to violate the natural law (Moraczewski 241). This remains the present policy of the Church on birth control.

Before the 1930s, all Christians were united in their rejection of contraceptives. The first departure from this stance was made by the Church of England during its Lambeth Conference of 1930. The Conference rose to advocate for the use of contraceptives. Today many major Protestant denominations hold a liberal position on the subject. The Islamic Faith has various attitudes to the question of contraceptives. This is perhaps because the Quran has no definite injunction to that effect. The only close statement to this matter goes: "You should not kill your children for fear of want" (Surah 17:31). Pro family planning adherents of this Faith argue that this passage refers only to infanticide. They cite the Hadith and Sunna which permit the withdrawal ('azl) method of birth control which, they argue, Prophet Mohammed himself practiced, to buttress their position. Those against birth control on the other hand say the statement includes all family planning methods (O'grady, Internet).

Christian Perspective on Contraceptives for Population Management

An assessment of the national population policy that centers on the use of contraceptives as the mainstay of population control should necessarily begin with the question of the reliability of a foreign controlled national policy. Next the intrinsically associated question of the ethical and moral basis of such a policy will be tackled. In this paper, this latter will be approached from the biblical view of the purpose of man in God's creation.

Margaret Sanger, an Irish woman, was the first person to use the terms "birth control" in relation to the reduction of fertility and so procreation. Sanger is the woman behind the edifice called International Planned Parenthood Federation whose Nigerian chapter bears the name Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria. It is informative to note that this Federation started with the aim to stop the growth of the Black population in the United States. To achieve this, Sanger suggested the use of the services of three or four colored (religious) ministers because she believed that the most successful educational approach to the Negro is through a religious appeal. Sanger made a statement that is very important for us in understanding the concept of family planning as being sold by the Planned Parenthood Federation of Sanger in nations of the world. While her plan was to stop the growth of the Black population in the United States, Sanger claimed, "we do not want word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population" (cited in Bob-Duru 141). Sanger's writings indicate that she was selling racialism in population control molds. She emphasized "more children for the fit, less for the unfit" (Bob-Duru 145) as the chief aim of birth control. It was her works that provided Hitler's basis for his sterilization law where people declared unfit were massively destroyed by sterilization, which Sanger styled "polite genocide". If the aim of family planning is to stop the growth rate of Blacks, then one will justifiably question the rationale behind the Nigerian Government's investment in the enterprise after all.

This question becomes more pertinent when one considers the ethical and moral implications of a population policy that centers on contraceptives when even developed nations with stable economies have only succeeded to achieve the opposite of their desired targets in using contraceptives. Writing in

this regard, a popular American gynecologist, Barrett L. Mosbacker, has these words: "a study of premaritally sexually active females aged 15-19 found that as sexual activities increases, the probability of pregnancy also increases – even when contraceptives are used consistently".... According to some studies the provision of contraceptives to sexually active minors both increases the level of sexual activity and the rates of pregnancy at the aggregate level (3).

The Nigerian situation is not different. According to statistical data adopted from Nigeria Fertility Survey across the nation, the Southeast where awareness and use of contraceptives is highest ironically records larger completed family sizes. This negative correlation between use of artificial contraceptives and lowered fertility raises serious economic questions that are imbued with ethical concerns. Why for instance, would a responsible Government expend the much desired foreign exchange and other resources on importing foreign technology that does not help matters? (Bob-Duru 144).

An equally pressing problem has to do with the morality of ensuring availability of contraceptives to sexually active adolescents in the name of "family planning". There is no gainsaying the fact that the belief that illegitimacy will be reduced if teenage girls are given an effective contraceptive is an extension of the same reasoning that created the problem. It reflects an unwillingness to face problems of social control and social discipline while trusting some technological device to extricate society from its difficulties. The irony is that the illegitimacy rise continues to occur while contraceptive use is becoming more, rather than less, widespread and respectable.

Providing contraceptives to the patients may actually be placing them at greater risk by giving license and a false sense of security. As Dr. Lewis Hicks, who practices obstetrics and gynecology in Lexington, Kentucky, and who no longer provides contraceptives to his unmarried patients, has observed: Even considering only the patient's body, we can do harm to patients by prescribing birth control pills for illicit sexual activity . . . What I mean is, when I write their prescription I know I am sending them out to wallow in the cesspool of sexually transmitted diseases. I can bank on their returning with a disease (cited in Mosbacker 4). Venereal disease, decreased fertility, increased cancer risks, inability to establish stable marriages, the dehumanization of the psyche, and loss of self respect, are but a few of the direct and indirect consequences of premarital sexual activity. The provision of contraceptives may thus actually increase the health risk to the patient.

Gardner argues that the use of contraceptives is as much the obedience to the biblical injunction to subdue nature as to swallow an aspirin tablet or to drink purified water (291). This calls for an examination of the Genesis account of the purpose of man in God's created world. Genesis 1:26-28 reports the creation of man. Here Genesis defines mankind's purpose and place in God's plan. God says man is to be made in our image, in our likeness. This means that mankind, both male and female, is God's representative on earth.

Secondly, because human beings are God's representatives on earth because they have his image they are to 'rule ... over all the earth' (26). Psalm 8:4-8 offers a poetic comment on this idea. Rule implies lordship but not exploitation. Man, as God's representative, must rule his subjects, as God does, for their own good. The words subdue and rule over imply that nature will not yield easily and that some type of coercion will be necessary. Because the created order has been affected by sin just as dramatically as the first human pair were, the natural created order will not do our bidding gladly or easily. We must exert a good deal of our strength and energy into our efforts to use nature. This is why we have problems as of population growth at a rate not desired. And we must continue to devise ways of controlling nature. However, while legitimizing human use of the world's resources, God gives no license for our abuse of his creation! The immediate example of how man is to rule the world was shown Adam in the Garden of Eden. He was asked to "work" it, that is "take care of it."

Thirdly, God deliberately created humanity in two sexes to be fruitful and increase in number. He thereby blessed sexual intercourse and indicated its importance in his plan. The God of Genesis repeatedly urged the first people to be fruitful (1:28; 8:17; 9:1, 7) and promised the patriarchs that they would be successful in fathering innumerable children. Sex is thus seen as an important part of God's very good creation (31). But sex was given within marriage. This then calls into question the reigning scientism of our age, where the solutions being proffered to our nation's population crisis focus almost

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Provision of family planning through the provision of contraceptive services the so called "safe and responsible" sex rather than on decreasing teenage sexual activity through moral suasion and public censure.

Conclusion

The foregoing has shown that having abandoned the "unenlightened" notion that moral considerations should inform public policy, our culture has expectantly turned to the medical community for a scientific/technological "solution" to the problem of teenage pregnancy. Inexorably, physicians have been drawn to the front line of the battle to stem the rising levels of teenage pregnancy, illegitimate births and abortions. But the reliability of such a policy is seriously called into question. Instead of reducing population growth rate, demographic indicators show the reverse since promiscuity has taken the stage and illicit adolescent sexuality has led to increase in the number of youngsters entering procreation age and consequently, increased birth rate.

While we are not opposed to the provision of family planning services, we observe that family planning services of a foreign culture is an abuse of our cherished culture of responsible parenthood as illustrated in the Tin case. It is here suggested that a proper sex education program should focus on creating awareness in the youths and adults of the dangers inherent in illicit sexuality rather than expending our scarce resources on the false security in the use of contraceptives. We also note that while population growth is largely responsible for many of our economic and social problems birth control measures must be such that involve no destruction of human life which bears the image of God. The only sure method in this regard is of course, natural family planning method. However in the true spirit of subduing the earth, artificial methods that only prevent fertilization should be used since it cannot be justifiably denied that life begins at conception – at the time of fertilization of the ovum.

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