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The Church's Stake In Rural People

*Condensed from address given by
Dr. O. E. Baker, Professor of Economic
Geography, University of Minnesota, at
the National Catholic Rural Life Con-
ference, December 3, 1942, Peoria, Ill.*

In 1880, the farming people were raising two-thirds more than enough children to hold the farm population permanently stationary, and the city people were just about reproducing themselves. In 1920, the farming people were producing a surplus above maintenance needs of fifty to per cent and the city people were failing to reproduce themselves. By 1940, although the average farm family had nearly twice as many children as the city family and the rural non-farm family some 50 per cent more than the city family, the rural surplus was no longer sufficient to balance the urban deficit.

About a quarter century hence, perhaps sooner, the increasing number of deaths seems likely to balance the probably decreasing number of births, and then a stationary population will be reached. Gradually this stationary condition will merge into a declining population, and this decline in population will tend to accelerate with the passage of time—unless new factors arise to alter the situation.

Many causes have been assigned to explain the rise and decline in populations in the past but it is clear that in our present civilization a declining birthrate is associated almost everywhere with the growth of cities, the decline in religious belief, the domination of materialistic concepts of success, including love of luxury and of "conspicuous consumption," also an increasing cost of living, particularly for the poor.

FACED WITH DEILEMMA

We are faced, therefore, with this dilemma: that 10 per cent of the families of the Nation could, if provided with a little more capital in the form of fertilizer, agricultural machinery, good seed, etc., provide an adequate diet and ample clothing material for the remaining 90 per cent of the Nation's families. But if these 90 per cent had as low a birthrate as characterizes the urban people at present the Nation would be doomed to an accelerating decline in population after a few decades. Such decline would be associated with profound economic, social, and probably psychological and political consequences.

It is not necessary that people who work in cities live in cities. The 1930 Census revealed that, almost without exception, the suburbs of the large cities were growing more rapidly in population than the cities themselves. If these suburban homes could have an acre or two of ground around them, and the parents in these suburban homes could realize that there is nothing equal to the care of farm animals, such as chickens or a cow, as an aid in developing in children a sense of responsibility, the effectiveness of the family might be preserved.

The widespread failure of the family to function adequately among people employed in the cities is not necessary; indeed, if the religious conviction be strong even families living in cities can reproduce the race and transmit culture and wealth from generation to generation. But until religious conviction is more widespread, I believe it will be necessary, if decline in population and national strength is to be avoided, that a much larger proportion of the people live in a rural environment, where the conditions are more favorable than in the cities for the normal functioning of the family. My hope is that after the war this need will be clearly recognized and that a major purpose of national policy will be the preservation of the family as an institution for the reproduction of the race and the transmission of wealth and culture from generation to generation.

A man that is deeply in love with himself will probably succeed in his suit, owing to lack of rivals.—Anon.

Eskimo To Jesuits

SEATTLE—With young men being sent to Alaska to work for the defense of that country, George Sippy reversed the procedure.

and came to Seattle to begin preparation for the winter season of hunting work. The 21-year-old man, who is an American citizen, is the first member of the Eskimo tribe and the second to Sippy to visit the forest country.

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