

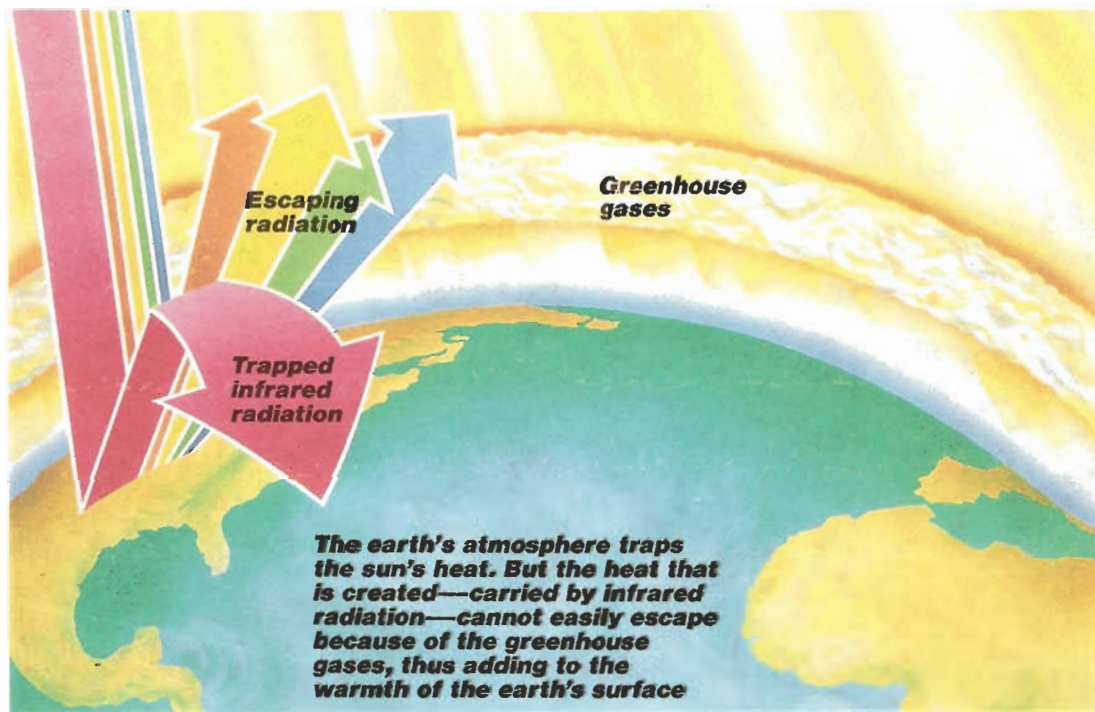
# World Population —What of the Future?



**R**UN-DOWN housing, unsanitary conditions, scarcity of food and clean water, disease, malnutrition—these and numerous other hardships are a day-to-day reality in the lives of a major part of the world's population. Yet, as we have seen, most people living under those conditions somehow manage to cope with them and carry on with their daily life.

What, though, of the future? Will people have to go on enduring such harsh realities of life indefinitely? To complicate matters, what about the doom and gloom that environmen-

tal scientists and others are forecasting as a result of the continued population growth? They tell us that we are fouling our own nest by polluting the air, water, and soil we depend on. They also point to the greenhouse effect—emission of gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, chlorofluorocarbons (refrigerants and foaming agents), that will result in warming of the atmosphere and changes in the global weather pattern, with dire consequences. Will this finally bring about the demise of civilization as we know it? Let us examine more closely a few of the key factors.



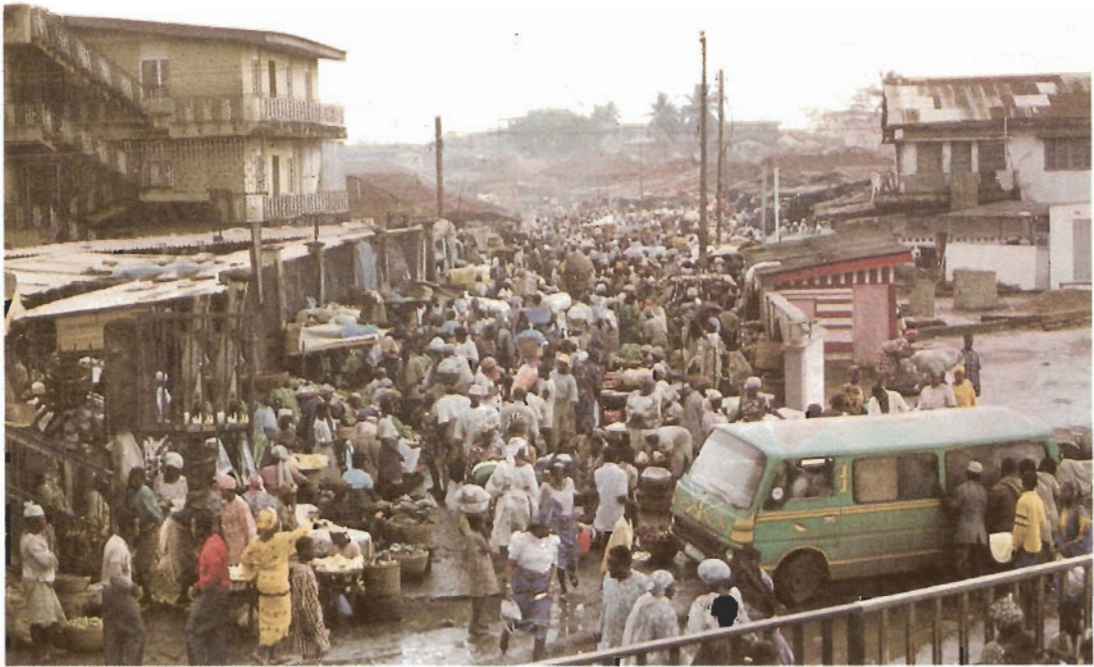
Few people had water piped to their homes, so one of my chores was to go with a bucket to fetch water from an outside faucet, called a standpipe. The problem was that during the dry season, many of the standpipes were locked to conserve water. On one occasion, we went one full day with no water to drink. Not a single drop! Sometimes I had to walk miles in search of just one bucketful of water. Carrying the water on my head for such long distances wore away my hair where the bucket rested. I had a bald patch at ten years of age! I am glad to say that the hair grew back.

### **Children as Security**

Looking back, I would say our lot in life was average, perhaps even above average for our part of Africa. I know lots of other families whose living standard was far worse than ours. Many of my friends at school had to sell at the market before and after school in order

to bring in money for their families. Others could not afford to have something to eat in the morning before school, and they would leave home hungry and be in school all day without food. I can remember lots of times when one of these children would come and plead with me as I ate my bread at school. So I would break off a piece to share with him.

Despite such hardships and difficulties, most people still like to have large families. "One child is not a child," many people here say. "Two children are one, four children are two." That is because the infant death rate is among the highest in the world. Parents know that though some of their children will die, some will live, grow up, get jobs, and bring home money. Then they will be in a position to look after their parents who have grown old. In a land with no social-security benefits, that means a lot.—*As told by Donald Vincent.*



## **Are There Too Many People?**

First of all, will the world's population go on expanding indefinitely? Is there any indication as to how far it will go? It is, of course, a fact that the world population is growing in spite of efforts at family planning. The annual increase is now about 90 million (equivalent to another Mexico every year). It appears that there is no immediate prospect of halting it. Looking ahead, however, most demographers agree that the population will eventually level off. The question in their mind is at what level and when.

According to projections of the UN Population Fund, world population may reach 14 billion before leveling off. Others, however, estimate that it may peak at between 10 billion and 11 billion. Whatever the case, the crucial questions are: Will there be too many people? Can the earth accommodate from two to three times the present population?

From a statistical point of view, 14 billion people worldwide would average out to 269 persons per square mile. As we have seen, Hong Kong's population density is 14,483 persons per square mile. Currently, the Netherlands' population density is 1,140, while Japan's is 848, and these are countries that enjoy above-average living standards. Clearly, even if the world population should grow to the extent predicted, the *number* of people is not the problem.

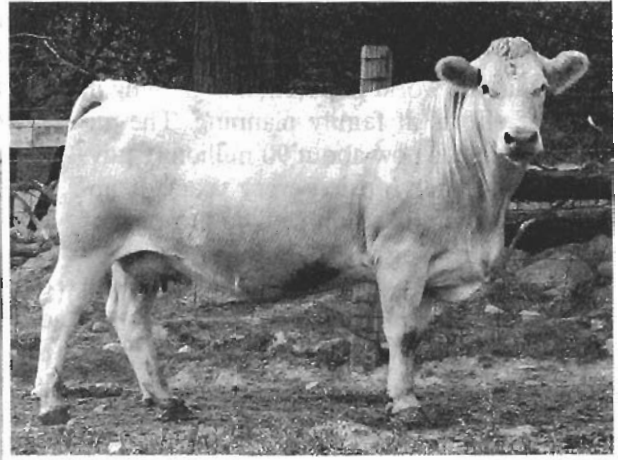
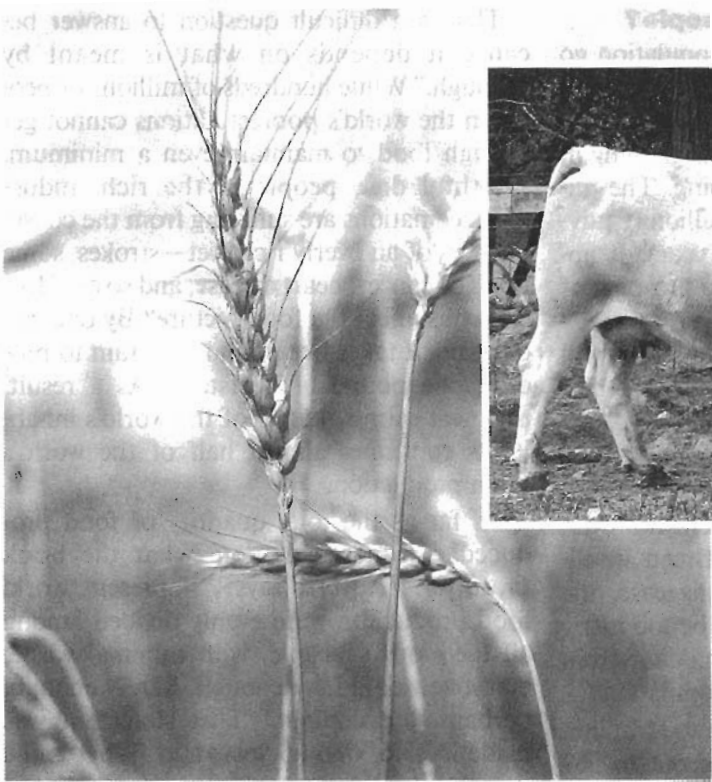
## **Will There Be Enough Food?**

What, then, about the food supply? Can the earth produce enough to feed 10 billion or 14 billion people? Obviously, the world's present food production is not enough to care for such a population. In fact, we often hear about famines, malnutrition, and starvation. Does this mean we are not producing enough food to take care of the population now, let alone two or three times more?

That is a difficult question to answer because it depends on what is meant by "enough." While hundreds of millions of people in the world's poorest nations cannot get enough food to maintain even a minimum, healthful diet, people in the rich, industrialized nations are suffering from the consequences of an overly rich diet—strokes, some types of cancer, heart disease, and so on. How does this affect the food picture? By one calculation, it takes five pounds of grain to produce one pound of beefsteak. As a result, the meat-eating quarter of the world's inhabitants consumes almost half of the world's grain production.

As far as the total quantity of food produced is concerned, note what the book *Bread for the World* says: "If present world food production were evenly divided among all the world's people, with minimal waste, everyone would have enough. Barely enough, perhaps, but enough." That statement was made in 1975, over 15 years ago. What is the situation today? According to the World Resources Institute, "over the past two decades, total world food output expanded, outpacing demand. As a result, in recent years, prices of major food staples in international markets declined in real terms." Other studies show that the prices for staples like rice, corn, soybeans, and other grains dropped by half or more over that period.

What all of this boils down to is that the problem of food lies not so much in the quantity produced as in the level and the habits of consumption. New genetic technology has found ways to produce varieties of rice, wheat, and other grains that can double the present output. However, much of the expertise in this area is concentrated on cash crops, such as tobacco and tomatoes, to satisfy the appetite of the rich rather than to fill the stomachs of the poor.



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### **What About the Environment?**

More and more, those who are keeping a close eye on the subject are coming to realize that population growth is only one of the factors posing a threat to mankind's future welfare. For example, in their book *The Population Explosion*, Paul and Anne Ehrlich propose that the impact of human activity on our environment can be expressed by this simple equation: Impact = population  $\times$  level of affluence  $\times$  prevailing technologies' effect on the environment.

By this standard, the authors argue that countries like the United States are overpopulated, not because they have too many people, but because their level of affluence depends on a high rate of consumption of natural resources and technologies that exact a heavy toll on the environment.

Other studies seem to bear this out. *The New York Times* quotes economist Daniel Hamermesh as saying that 'greenhouse emissions are more closely related to the level of economic activity than the numbers of emitters. The average American generates 19 times as much carbon dioxide as the average Indian. And it is entirely possible that, say, an economically vibrant Brazil with slow population growth would burn down its tropical forests more rapidly than an impoverished Brazil with rapid population growth.'

Making basically the same point, Alan Durning of the Worldwatch Institute observes: "The richest billion people in the world have created a form of civilization so acquisitive and profligate that the planet is in danger. The lifestyle of this top echelon—the car drivers, beef eaters, soda drinkers, and

throwaway consumers—constitutes an ecological threat unmatched in severity by anything but perhaps population growth.” He points out that this “wealthiest fifth” of mankind produces nearly nine tenths of the chlorofluorocarbons and over half of the other greenhouse gases that are threatening the environment.

### **The Real Issue**

From the above discussion, it becomes apparent that blaming population growth alone for the woes facing mankind today is missing the real point. The issue facing us is not that we are running out of living space or that the earth is incapable of producing enough food for a healthful diet for everyone or that all the natural resources will be used up anytime soon. These are merely the symptoms. The real issue is that more and more people are aspiring to a higher and higher level of material consumption without considering the consequence of their actions. This insatiable desire for more is taking such a heavy toll on our environment that the earth’s carrying capacity is fast being exceeded. In other words, the basic problem lies not so much in the number as in the nature of humanity.

Writer Alan Durning puts it this way: “In a fragile biosphere, the ultimate fate of humanity may depend on whether we can cultivate a deeper sense of self-restraint, founded on a widespread ethic of limiting consumption and finding non-material enrichment.” The point is well-taken, but the question must be asked, Is it likely that people everywhere will voluntarily cultivate self-restraint, limit consumption, and pursue nonmaterial enrichment? Hardly. Judging by the self-indulgent and hedonistic life-style so prevalent today, the opposite is more likely to occur. Most people today seem to live by the motto: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we are to die.” —1 Corinthians 15:32.

Even if enough people wake up to the facts and start changing their way of life, we would still not be able to turn things around anytime soon. Witness the many environmental activist groups and alternative life-styles that have appeared over the years. Some of them may have succeeded in getting into the headlines, but have they had any real impact on the ways of so-called mainstream society? Hardly. What is the problem? It is that the entire system—commercial, cultural, and political—is geared to promoting the concept of built-in obsolescence and throwaway consumerism. In this context there can be no change without a thorough reconstruction from the foundation up. And that would require massive reeducation.

### **Is There a Bright Future?**

The situation may be likened to that of a family living in a furnished and fully equipped house provided by a benefactor. To make them feel completely at home, they are given permission to use all the facilities in the house to their satisfaction. What would happen if the family began to damage the furniture, tear up the floor, smash the windows, clog up the plumbing, overload the electric

### **Why Is Food Often Expensive?**

Even though the real cost of food has been falling, the common experience is that food prices are rising. Why? One simple reason is urbanization. To feed the multitudes in the world’s ever-growing cities, food must be transported over great distances. In the United States, for example, “the typical mouthful of food travels 1,300 miles from farm field to dinner plate,” says a Worldwatch study. The consumer must pay for not only the food but also the hidden costs of processing, packaging, and transporting it.

circuits—in short, threaten to ruin the house completely? Would the owner just passively observe and not do anything? Not likely. He would no doubt take action to remove the destructive tenants from his property and then restore it to its proper condition. No one would say that such action was not justified.

What, then, about the human family? Are we not like tenants living in a well-furnished and superbly equipped house provided by the Creator, Jehovah God? Yes, we are, for as the psalmist put it: “To Jehovah belong the earth and that which fills it, the productive land and those dwelling in it.” (Psalm 24:1; 50:12) God has not only supplied us with all the necessities that make life possible—light, air, water, and food—but he has also provided them in great abundance and variety to make life enjoyable. Yet, as tenants, how has mankind behaved? Unfortunately, not very well. We are literally ruining this beautiful home in which we are living. What will the owner, Jehovah God, do about it?

“Bring to ruin those ruining the earth”—that is what God will do! (Revelation 11:18) And how will he do it? The Bible answers: “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin. And the kingdom itself will

not be passed on to any other people. It will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, and it itself will stand to times indefinite.” —Daniel 2:44.

What can we expect under the rule of God’s indefinitely lasting Kingdom? In the words of the prophet Isaiah, we are given a foreglimpse of what is to come:

“They will certainly build houses and have occupancy; and they will certainly plant vineyards and eat their fruitage. They will not build and someone else have occupancy; they will not plant and someone else do the eating. For like the days of a tree will the days of my people be; and the work of their own hands my chosen ones will use to the full. They will not toil for nothing, nor will they bring to birth for disturbance; because they are the offspring made up of the blessed ones of Jehovah, and their descendants with them.” —Isaiah 65:21-23.

What a bright future that is for mankind! In that new world of God’s making, no more will mankind be plagued with problems of housing, food, water, health, and neglect. At last, obedient mankind, under God’s guidance, will be able to fill the earth and subdue it, without any threat of overpopulation. —Genesis 1:28.

## Why “Propaganda”?

In 1622, Pope Gregory XV established a congregation, or committee, of 13 cardinals, 2 prelates, and a secretary to supervise missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church. He called it the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*—the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith—or *Propaganda* for short. In due course this word came to mean any effort to spread ideas or beliefs in order to make proselytes.

Today, “propaganda” is often associated with a distortion of facts, the dishonest influencing of people’s minds, as for example in time of war. But some authorities feel that even the best of advertising can fairly be described as propaganda, especially if it involves persuasion. Comments *The World Book Encyclopedia*: “Educators in democratic societies teach people how to think, but propagandists tell them what to think.”