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I hereby submit a response to the Public Engagement Exercise on Population Policy.

Peter Au-Yeung

## **A Response to the Public Engagement Exercise on Population Policy 2013**

I am a Catholic doctor who has received training in philosophical bioethics and I am going to comment on various areas in the Consultation document, especially in areas which impinge on Catholic bioethics. In my opinion, the demographic time-bomb which besets many countries and regions throughout the world consists of two elements, an extension of longevity which increases the number of elderly in any given population and a tendency for young couples to reduce the number of children they have, which reduces the number of young people entering the workforce. The former is a confirmation of the wonderful progress we have made in the advance in medical science and treatments, whilst the latter derive from a large number of factors – including local factors (such as the high cost of living as well as the high cost of having and raising children) and global factors such as the promotion of the myth of global overpopulation (and of Man's negative impact on the environment) as well as the spread of ideologies undermining family values and traditions, such as the advancement of the global LGBT agenda.

I would first of all like to draw the attention of the Government to the teaching of the Catholic Church on the matter of population policy – “The state has a responsibility for its citizens' well-being. In this capacity it is legitimate for it to intervene to orient the demography of the population. This can be done by means of objective and respectful information, but certainly not by authoritarian, coercive measures. The state may not legitimately usurp the initiative of spouses, who have the primary responsibility for the procreation and education of their children. It is not authorized to intervene in this area with means contrary to the moral law.”<sup>1</sup>

The section in the consultation document which relates most to Catholic bioethics is Chapter 5, Fostering a Supportive Environment for our People to Form and Raise Families. In a sense, it could be argued that one of the root causes for our population woes include the reluctance of couples to have and raise children, borne out of a perception (real or otherwise) that the future of Hong Kong would not be a good one for their children as well as the great expense of having a child. This is evident in the low fertility rate of Hong Kong women which varied between the low of 0.9 to the high of 1.2 between the years 2001 to 2011,<sup>2</sup> which is well below the replacement value of 2.1 in a developed society like ours. Hence I would agree that the Government should consider measures to build an environment which would

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2372

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.fhb.gov.hk/statistics/en/statistics/total\\_fertility\\_rate.htm](http://www.fhb.gov.hk/statistics/en/statistics/total_fertility_rate.htm) (accessed 22/2/14)

encourage couples to have children.

But before commenting on this, it is worth noting that in the last fourteen years for which we have government statistics, some 11,000 to 21,000 abortions were legally performed in the SAR yearly, representing a loss of over 215,000 future workers between 1999 and 2012.<sup>3</sup> Of course these official figures do not take in account abortions done north of the Shenzhen river, or to abortions of questionable legality done here. Be that as it may, strategies to conserve babies already conceived via the discouragement and reduction of abortion together with the promotion of adoption would contribute to halting the decline of the future workforce.

A number of suggestions were listed in box 5.2 of the consultation document including both direct subsidies or allowances as well as ways to reduce the opportunity cost of childbearing. It is obvious that both can be useful but particularly that “policies that reduce the opportunity cost of having children seem to have a greater influence on fertility than direct financial incentives.” (*ibid*) This is also reflected in the last question on p.41 about affordable housing, education and childcare. However, in addition to family-friendly practices in the workplace, the government should also be mindful that policies which undermine the traditional family, would also increase the reluctance of couples to have and raise children, be it the first or the next one. Such policies include those which make for easier divorce, as well as those policy areas which promote homosexuality and LGBT rights.

The one area that I would disagree with in the suggestions to increase birth rate would be that of improved access to artificial reproductive technologies. I am opposed to such technologies which “seem to be at the service of life and ... are frequently used with this intention,” but often they “actually open the door to new threats against life.”<sup>4</sup> As a Catholic doctor and bioethicist, I hold the view that techniques which assist procreation “are not to be rejected on the grounds that they are artificial. As such, they bear witness to the possibilities of the art of medicine. But they must be given a moral evaluation in reference to the dignity of the human person, who is called to realize his vocation from God to the gift of love and the gift of life”.<sup>5</sup> The principles which must be respected for infertility treatment to be acceptable to the Catholic Church are clearly listed in that document — respect for a) the right to life and to physical integrity of every human being from conception to

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<sup>3</sup> [www.hkpll.org/listings/香港過往14年出生和墮胎數字](http://www.hkpll.org/listings/香港過往14年出生和墮胎數字) (accessed 22/2/14)

<sup>4</sup> Evangelism Vitae (Act Apostolic Seeds (AAS) 87(1995), pp401-522), No. 14

<sup>5</sup> Instruction *Dignities Personae* on Certain Bioethical Questions, AAS 100 (2008) 858-887, No.12

natural death; b) the unity of marriage, which means reciprocal respect for the right within marriage to become a father or mother only together with the other spouse; c) the specifically human values of sexuality which require “that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses”.”<sup>6</sup> It is thus suggested that the government should not promote or employ such methods to increase the local population’s birth rate.

The preferred solution is to employ the techniques which satisfy the above requirements to help couples conceive. These include the use of techniques employing the concept of fertility awareness such as Natural Family Planning and Natural Procreation Technology (NaPro Technology). The latter combines fertility awareness with modern medicine with the aim of treating those barriers to natural conception preventing pregnancy in the first place and then using fertility awareness to improve the chances of conception by natural means. Pregnancy rates of up to 98% over 6 consecutive cycles had been reported.<sup>7</sup> At present, NaPro is not available in Hong Kong, so the government is urged to consider bringing this technology to Hong Kong. Of course the use of Traditional Chinese Medicine to improve the bodily functions of the parents to help them conceive would most likely also satisfy the requirements of the Church for licit techniques in help couples conceive.

Apart from the comments relating to Chapter 5, I would also wish to make a number relating to other sections of the Consultation Document. Chapter 2 explored the question of measures to encourage female homemakers to work or re-join the labour force and enquired of the public for their comment. It should however be noted that whilst this might increase the workforce for now, it may act as a disincentive for women to have more children, thus it may end up as a measure of expediency which will improve the situation in the short term whilst promoting manpower shortages some 20 years down the line.

As someone who had settled in the United Kingdom and ended up staying here in Hong Kong after intending to come back initially for a couple of years over 20 years ago, I would also like to make some comments about Chapter 4, especially paragraphs 4.9 and 4.10. Although my natal city of Hong Kong holds many attractions, the city which I had chosen to make my home abroad London, also has many attractions which still beckons to me. The better air quality, the richer cultural

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<sup>6</sup> See FN5.

<sup>7</sup> Hillers TW, Daly KD, Prebuilt AM, et al: Cumulative Pregnancy Rates in Patients with Apparently Normal Fertility and Fertility-Focused Intercourse. J Report Med 1992 Oct;37(10):864-6

environment and the less hectic (less pressure cooker) pace of life (amongst others) still hold attractions for a person bringing up a family of three children. Certainly the problem of air quality is one that has been cited as deterring talent from abroad, and the government should really make greater efforts in tackling it. Yet there are also considerations which have stopped me migrating back with my family to the UK. One of these certainly include the passing of laws in the UK (pushed through by Prime Minister Mr. Cameron in a sinister manner) on homosexual marriage which I consider to be a very negative attribute of contemporary West European society, which should be stopped from reaching these shores.

In conclusion, I would like to see the government discourage abortions, build an environment which would encourage couples to have children (or more children), promote Natural Family Planning and introduce NaPro Technology to help couples conceive in its efforts to improve the population demographics of Hong Kong.

Dr Peter Au-Yeung

MBBS MRCP FRCA FHKAM(Anaesthesiol)

NB Although the Diocesan, Bioethics Committee of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong had not had the opportunity to respond, were they to submit comments, I would as its Chairman suggest that they adopt most of the contents of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> paragraph of the response above. However, this is a response I am making in my personal capacity.