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(AUS 130.26)

## EASTER PREFACE

I'm sure you must have noticed the growing frequency of newspaper articles recently on population: it's a subject that's getting increased coverage as the current World Population Year approaches its high-point in the world conference on population which is scheduled to take place in Bucharest in August. In Hongkong, a series of seminars ~~for~~ <sup>for</sup> population year is to be formally inaugurated by the governor tomorrow. So, the topic is going to be around for a while; and it is one that should be of concern to every Christian. The aim of the United Nations is to promote an awareness of the reality of the problem that's facing mankind, and to stimulate policies and action that will enable the world to cope with its increasing population. There are, unfortunately, no easy solutions — unless you entirely disregard human dignity, or rights or freedom. And the questions involved are far more complicated and wide-ranging than often appears in short, sensational newspaper articles. A Christian interest in the problem, and a contribution to finding solutions, should come from our faith and hope and love, and from the attitude to life, to people and to the world which these imply. The message of Easter is the heart of our religion — it's also, or shd. be, the source of our concern for our world and its future, giving us a vision and dimension which are often lacking in piece-meal approaches to problems of a world-wide scale. However badly defined the population problem may be at present, it is certainly one that has world-wide implications; and the brotherhood of all mankind under God is something we just cannot opt out of. We would, rather, be failing in our Christian response and mission not to contribute as we can

to the more full human development of mankind. Human life, ~~itself~~ <sup>humanity</sup> itself and our world, we believe has a divine value, dignity and destiny because Christ has died for love of us all, and has risen to bring us the salvation of a new life and intimacy with God Himself. The cross of Christ remains in our world, but so does His love, His joy and peace, and the hope His resurrection brings. Fear and panic are never good counsellors: to induce fear and panic in peoples' minds and hearts cannot be a Christian approach coming from love of the God of love; nor can it be a very human approach, because it enslaves people rather than allowing them to develop freedom and responsibility, does not respect their dignity and rights. So perhaps our first contribution ought to be to refuse to be stampeded, to question the fullness of the facts that alarmists use and their vision of the whole problem and its context. The experts in the population question (who are not <sup>the</sup> popular journalists) have been at pains to point out the global dimensions of the problem, that we are so interdependent now in the quality of our lives, in our expectations and aspirations for the future. Here too, what should be the Christian feeling for others as children of God together with ourselves, suggests a dimension which we ought to contribute — that relationships of people and nations all around the world are involved, together, in seeking solutions. Perhaps in HK we are much more insular, parochial, than we care to think: it's an attitude we shd. try to change now, to get our society to realise we're not independent of the rest of the world's problems and that just solutions cannot depend on the privileges of one tiny place. Give it a thought now, as we listen to a song for Eastertide: "They cast their nets", about Christ appearing to His disciples by the lakeside

They cast their nets

Easter celebrates life, hope, joy, peace. The quantity or quality of all of these in our world today may be seriously questioned: as indeed may the real enthusiasm or contribution to them of Christians who believe in the presence of the risen Christ among us. But assigning blame doesn't help: in the gratitude and humility of our prayers we shd. come to realise both of these things. And, especially in Eastertide, the responsibility that our faith in Christ does give us to be (as the wants of us) the messengers of His good news and of the news of His resurrection and liberation of mankind. Human progress and development now, does involve Christ, or it is not really progress at all. People can and do either help or hinder the evolution of humanity towards the transformation that is God's design for the world. In the face of the real problems confronting our world, let's remember His, remember our responsibility, our oneness with Christ and with each other; and in our prayer with God, ask for the wisdom & understanding that will help us to play our part in bringing His joy and peace to all of human life and its problems, and not least the great current one of population.