Guest Comment on Rabbi I. Jakobovits' on "Population" for Child and Family

I am pleased to applaud the views of Chief Rabbi Jakobovits, one of the most eminent authorities on the Jewish teachings on maid medico-moral problems. His article eloquently and cogently expresses the wisdom of the Jewish tradition on an issue of the greatetst import for all humankind. I identify with all his major points, including his trenchant criticism of the "individual conscience" argument.

Two points raised by Dr. Jakobovits deserve further elaboration.

In mentioning them briefly, he has offered directions for consideration,

further fruitful/dixemssion, and I should like to carry that discussion just one step further.

The first of these is the halakhic (=Jewish law) judgment on non-Jewish use of contraception in order to curb population growth. Jewish law is designed primarily for Jews, upon whom it lays a large number of obligations and prohibitions affecting all aspects of life. But it also contains a body of teaching that it declares obligatory upon Gentiles ("the sons of Noah"). Noahide law in the Halakhah expresses Judaism's universalist norms.

(Eliyahu Benamozegh, the Rabbi of Livorno, Italy, in the last century, maintained that Naohide Law was essentially rational, whereas the bulk of Halakhah, directed at Jrws, was revelational, and that even the rational elements are interpreted as revelational.)

While there may be no headlong rush of the nations to Jewish teachers breathlessly awaiting our considered verdict, it might be of some interest to thoughtful non-Jews to know what a great religious tradition, albeit a minority one, thinks about the demographic

crisis.

Here the author has indicated that, from a technical hy-halakhic view, the absence of a legal imperative to Nachides to perpetuate the species (the verse "be fruitful and multiply" in Genesis, although addressed to Adam and Eve, and hence presumably universal, is regarded as a blessing, not a commandment) renders the p demographic problem with regard to Noahides as different from that of regarding Israelites. Jews, under Scriptural commandment to reproduce, would find the way to contraception barred to them whereas non-Jews would not be so limited.

HERE However, I would here quibble with Dr. Jakobovits. Reexted halakhic reasons xx x x x x x I believe the major/obstacle to contraception in general for Jews is not the violation of the Biblical commandment to reproduce, but the non-explicit prohibition to "spill the seed." (This is, of course, not the place to enter into halakhic recorded conversation, but the point should be made for further clarification.) This first way well have way where for worker way.

The second major area that of research which I find stimulated by the author's incisive comments is that of the "cup of sterility", mentioned in the Talmud, and a clear source of halakhic permission for oral contraception. He raises two problems here: the probable lack of complete effectiveness of this contraceptive, and the fac that it was not mass-produced/ (as is the Pill). While these are technically irrelevancies, they do constitute elements in a broader view of the problem. And indeed, as the author clearly implies, the demographic crisis must be considered not only from a narrow technical-halakhic perspective, but from a wider moral perspective as well. For the beflieveing tradiuteenal Jew,

Halakhah consitutes the minimum of religious obligation; beyond the Halakhah lies the endless realm of Agadah or moral values that defy the precise formulation and that id sharacteristic of Halakhah. And speaking from the vantage of this Jewish tradition, we must say that, provided these minimimal halakhic requirements are observed, the moral question must focus on the issue of survival. (Rabbi Jakobovits hints at this when he refers to pikuach nefesh.) Now, survival is a value which leads to different results depending upon the circumstances. Thus, if the ZPG advocates are right and the exponential population growth of the world jeapordizes human life on the planet, then in general survival would dictate a ploicy of population control as a moral good. Speciafically, overpopulated countries would be under moral obligation to keep their growth down. But. discriminatory as such conclusions might seem to the superficial observer, such strictures would not apply to Canada or even the United States, as Dr. Jakobovits writes, becuae these and similar countries are by no means overpopulated. But then we must turn to such nations and peoples who, contrariwise, are threatened not by overpoulation but underpopulation. The same moral /imperative that impels us to protect imperilled species of fish or wildlife in order to preserve the ecology of nature ought to make us concerned about the ecology of nations, culutres, and ethnic groups. Are Armenians, Jews, and American Indians m less valuable in the cultural ecology of man than the whale or ostrich in the balance of nature? The richness of nature and of sw human the varieties diversity and of culture must all be preserved and their survival assured. Hence, Jews, whose survival is endangered by demographic attenuation -- and Dr. Jakobovits is most convincing here in the

frightening picture he has drawn -- must, on moral grounds, transcendxthex forgo the halakhic warrant for oral contraception and exceed the *** *** exceed the halakhic norm for fulfillment of the commandment to " e fruitful and multiply" (defined as, at least. bearing one male and one female child). Dr. Jakobovits is unquestionably right about the real motivation of most liberal, well-to-do whites in their seal for population control. It most certainly contains an element of genuine conviction about the dangers of population explosion, but there are other elements as well. One of them is a defensiveness about appearing to conclude that the other fellow ought to refarin from having a large family: since it is mostly the Third World that is endangered by excessive growth, not the suburbab white, the latter fears that his idealism might be misinterpreted as self-serbing. Hence, he sacrificially limits his own family in the rather childish confidence that all the rest of mankind will, in appreciation, follow suit. More important, as Rabbi Jakobovits points out, is the hedonistic motive. Another child to feed, clothe, and educate means less luxury and indulgence for those who already were born and who enjoy the right to life.

In a word, if we accept survival as a moral value, and if we assume (as I believe we must) that such survival must be considered not only for mankind as a whole, but for individual branches of mankind, then the moral problem is far more completed than the simplistic picture of the population control advocates have led us to believe.

For stimulating thinking in this direction, and for presenting such a cogent advocacy of a point of view that is decidedly nonconformist and unpopular, Dr. Jakobovits and the editors of Child and Family are to be warmly congratulated.