Decisions on
children should
be left to the
couples.

Communal colour

K

erala's Catholic Church is exhorting its flock
to have more children. Church leaders are apparently "very much worried" about the dwindling Christian population in the state. Christians constitute 19 per cent of Kerala's popula-tion today, down from 19.5 per cent a decade earlier. Fifty years ago, Christians constituted 24 per cent of the state's population. With couples choosing to have only one child and some even
opting not to have children, the
Christian population in Kerala
is falling, the Church fears. And
to address this problem it is
calling on couples to have more
children. It is considering offer-
ing them economic and other
incentives to have larger fami-
lies, to reverse sterilisation pro-
cedures and so on. Families with
more than two children will be
given financial support. The
Church proposes to take up its
anti-abortion campaign with
renewed vigour. It is unfortunate that the Church is viewing the population issue along religious lines. It is giving it a communal colour.
The Catholic Church in Kerala is, of course, not alone in looking at population issues through the communal lens. The Muslim clergy and Hindu groups too have raised the alarm from time to time claiming that their respective populations are dwin-dling vis-a-vis others and hence members of the community should have more children and not prac-tise birth control. Muslim clergy have often warned that India's population policy and family planning programmes are aimed at limiting the Muslim popu-lation and have called on the community to stay away from these programmes. Hindu groups often paint dire scenarios of how the Muslims and their -reluctance to adopt birth control measures will one day result in Hindus in this country being swamped by Muslims. Christian clerics too peddle such outra-geous ideas. These alarmist calls are flawed in their assumptions, their conclusion and strategies.
If couples are choosing to have small families it
is because they would like to provide well for the few children they have. Whether or not to have children, how many and when - these are personal decisions that should be left to the couple. It is not for the cler-gy or religious groups to interfere in these matters. In a country where lakhs of children are orphans or don't have homes, families or food, the clergy should be encouraging couples to treat orphans as their own, to adopt children. Calls to "go forth and multi-ply" will only increase the country's population problem and deepen the communal divide.

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