

CATHOLICS FOR A FREE CHOICE

CATHOLIC VOICES
AT ONE WITH THE
CAIRO CONSENSUS

*A Dossier Prepared for the
Five-Year Review
of the United Nations
International Conference on
Population and Development*

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

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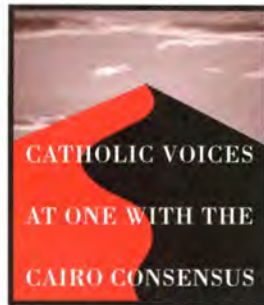
CATHOLICS AND CAIRO: A COMMON LANGUAGE

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Catholics and Cairo: A Common Language

One of the most daunting tasks in international discourse is the discovery and crafting of a common language. This imperative becomes all the more difficult and demanding when the issues seeking expression are charged with intense feelings, emotions, and differences in worldview.

The United Nations 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and its Programme of Action adopted in Cairo constitute a pivotal moment in the articulation of a common language of conscience. Furthermore, Cairo provided the Catholic church with an unprecedented opportunity to enter the world dialogue in terms not unfamiliar to its own traditions and mission.

THE CAIRO CONFERENCE AND THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION

Every ten years since 1974, the United Nations has convened an international conference on population and development. Past conferences have been held in Bucharest (1974) and Mexico City (1984). In 1994, 180 governments came to Cairo, Egypt, to attend the third United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (hereafter, Cairo or the Cairo Conference).

At Cairo, the governments of the world agreed to a list of proposed actions for the future – these are contained in a Programme of Action, which spans over 100 pages and comprises sixteen chapters. Chapters three through sixteen develop the qualitative and quantitative goals agreed to at Cairo. Of particular interest to Catholics and other people of faith are the principles in chapter two that provide the ethical framework for the Cairo approach to population and development.

Earlier population conferences were rightly criticized for focusing solely on limiting family size and reaching demographic targets, often using

inflammatory language, such as “population explosion” and “zero population growth.” This demographic approach emphasized reduction of population and neglected women’s human rights.

The Programme of Action represents a refreshing step forward. It recognized the importance of ethics, values, interrelationships, sustainability, poverty eradication, and especially the connection between the empowerment of women and lower fertility rates. The document articulates a broad vision that puts human dignity above demographic goals; women’s equality and men’s responsibility over mandated family planning. It crafted language on reproductive and sexual health and rights.

This year, the five-year assessment of Cairo will be conducted through a series of regional, national, and international meetings. This assessment is enhanced considerably by religious voices reflecting on the principles and goals of Cairo and its Programme of Action. Among these religious groups, a Catholic reflection is especially crucial because of the strong and sometimes controversial role played by the Vatican and the Holy See during the Cairo process.

THE VATICAN AT CAIRO

Cairo sought to deal with some of the most volatile issues in our personal, political, and religious lives: reproduction, sexuality, development, and women’s human rights. Remarkably, it chose to link these themes together and to deal with them in the overarching categories of rights and responsibilities.

Rights emerge from the individual, innate, and inviolable core of each person. Responsibilities are grounded, for the most part, in the community, in the demand to treat others with equal dignity and rights, and in the insistence that the consequences of

all our actions be measured by more than our own advantage and identity. The dialogue and tension between rights and responsibilities, between individual and community, between belief and conscience, between wealth and poverty, indeed between men and women were addressed in Cairo to an unheard-of level of agreement. To find the words and consensus to express the world's conscience on such controversial matters is extraordinary. One might have supposed that the Holy See would be gratified by the serious purpose, religious resonance, Catholic language, and moral tone with which Cairo went about its work.

The field of agreement between the Catholic church and the Programme of Action is large and impressive. Nonetheless, sharp differences emerged (these are dealt with in part 2 of this paper).

Unique among religious bodies of the world, the Catholic church enjoys a privileged status as a Non-Member State Permanent Observer at the United Nations through its governmental entity, the Holy See. In this capacity, the Holy See takes part in United Nations conferences and can exercise, as it did at Cairo, voting rights.

However, any government will not necessarily reflect the beliefs and practices of the people it purports to represent. There is a distinction between the Catholic church and its tradition as a whole (i.e. the entire body of believers) and the administration of that church as it is represented by the Holy See at the United Nations. This distinction is especially important to keep in mind because the laity, theologians, and the bishops at large have no meaningful voice or vote on the selection of the pope and the policies of the Holy See. Therefore, a truly Catholic position on a particular issue must take into account not only the official position of the Holy See, but also the way this position is received and lived out in the body of believers. This widely accepted approach insists that Catholic teaching is made up of two entities: the teaching hierarchy (pope, cardinals, and bishops) and the teaching of the laity -- the *sensus fidelium*.

For all these reasons, the strong Vatican rejection of major items in the Cairo document was puzzling and disappointing. The Vatican has every right to state its reservations. The difficulty many experienced with the Vatican's position derived from its unwillingness to enter the process of discussion

or to propose language that could win the support of the world. This difficulty was compounded by the Vatican's reluctance to affirm the revolutionary character of the Cairo Conference as it put issues of population in an overall ethical framework fortified by insistence on women's rights and health.

Furthermore, the Vatican's actions at Cairo weakened Cairo's message, particularly for the Catholic observer. While there are many Catholics who do not agree with the positions taken by the Vatican at Cairo, more still do not realize how consistent the Programme of Action is with Catholic teachings. In reality, Cairo and the Vatican had more areas of concurrence than disagreement. The Vatican came to Cairo with deep suspicions and an apparent unwillingness to trust the global process of reaching agreement on ethical issues, and, therefore, its message at Cairo was often inconsistent with church teachings. In particular, the Vatican's actions distorted what Cairo actually said on women's human rights, health, and family.

Reproductive rights are dealt with in the Programme of Action under the larger rubric of human rights for women. The same strategy is followed in addressing reproductive health through the more expansive issue of a right to health. This is one of the great contributions of Cairo. It constantly seeks a larger context, one in which there is universal agreement, before it deals with controversial specifics. Thus, all of the world agree on human rights for women even if they may disagree on reproductive rights. The same is true of a right to health and the more difficult issues of reproductive health, safe motherhood, abortion, and sexual health.

One of these difficult issues turned on the definition of "family." As Cairo sought a comprehensive definition, the Vatican feared that a consequence of so broad a definition would be the validation of homosexual unions.

The Vatican became most adamant over the issue of abortion. It finds abortion and contraception immoral in every circumstance. It rightly opposes coercive use of these methods. Delegates at Cairo agreed with the need to end coercion but also believed that people should be informed of all these choices. The Programme of Action leaves to religions and conscience the dialogue about whether particular individuals or traditions should choose among the options they are

given. In a world climate in which choices seen as moral by one side are branded as immoral by the other, the Cairo Conference had no other way to proceed.

The articulation of moral choices should never be so absolute that they have no reference to the real situations in which people live. Catholic theology and teaching have always affirmed the right of conscience and contextualized moral choices. Cairo did insist that where reproductive health is concerned, all legal options open to the individual should be safe and people should be informed fully about the consequences of deciding one way or the other.

CATHOLICS AND CAIRO

Cairo, in many ways, is a universal declaration of human rights applied to population, sexuality, and women's lives. Had the document been cast in the narrow terms the Vatican demanded, it would have divided and splintered the world community. A new language of shared values needed to be formulated, a language of universal rights and responsibilities. The agency to speak that language, the United Nations, gained the world's confidence more readily than the respected but sometimes ideological voice of the Vatican.

The debates at Cairo made it clear that in many moments, the Vatican and the global community frequently spoke with the same voice. The Vatican, however, often declared its position on the more controversial issues as definitive, neither inviting nor allowing participation or nuance in order to achieve consensus. The United Nations cannot adopt a language of ethics and values that the human family at large neither understands nor accepts. If people are fundamentally reliable, then open debate, accommodation, and global consensus may offer us our best hope for choices that are moral, profoundly human, and irresistibly fair.

For the purposes of this article and to help clarify the distinction between the official and the living church, the terms "Holy See," "Vatican," and "delegation" are used to represent church governance. The terms "church," "church teachings," and "church tradition" are used to represent a broader definition of Catholicism, to include the laity, theologians, and the hierarchy.

While it is written from a Catholic perspective, we hope this article will be of use and interest to readers from other religious, ethical, or philosophical traditions. And by no means does our analysis pretend to be exclusive: Cairo's vision reflects the values of many belief systems.

PART 1 AREAS OF AGREEMENT: SHARED PRINCIPLES

The Vatican claimed that the Programme of Action lacked an ethical framework and was the work of aggressive Western feminists: "One of the principal concerns of the Delegation of the Holy See regarding the Draft Final Document is its lack of a clear ethical vision."ⁱ The document that the Vatican so soundly excoriated, however, is actually remarkable for its principles and values -- values forged and agreed to by over 180 nations from around the world and clearly articulated in chapter two of the Programme of Action.

The principles, the foundation for the Programme of Action, are consistent with Catholic values -- especially as they relate to population and development -- reflecting how much the Catholic church has in common with the global community. These principles are the legacy of Cairo. Regardless of what happens with regard to proposed actions or financial commitments, the principles are critical to the development of a common language of values. And despite initial appearances to the contrary, the Vatican and those supporting reproductive rights do agree on these values.

PRINCIPLE 1: UNIVERSALITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Following the United Nations tradition of support for human rights, the Programme of Action includes strong support for individual rights. Catholic endorsement of the fundamental vocabulary of human rights moved forward dramatically as social justice documents and the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* from Vatican II were adopted in the 1960s. Since then, the church has become an international advocate for human rights, even though, like many other political and religious bodies, it has a mixed record in this area.

Catholic support for human rights -- such as bodily integrity, right to life, and right to health -- is linked to the value placed on human dignity by the church, biblically grounded in the creation of human

beings in the image of God (Gn 1:26) and the spirit of Christ (Jn 1). These rights are human, therefore universal, and transcend boundaries of gender, race, religion, and nations. However, while the church upholds the universality of human rights, its record on women's rights is varied.

Within the international community there is a debate over the universality of human rights. In this debate, the Vatican agrees with human rights organizations that a core group of human rights are universal because of our common human dignity and should be freely exercised independent of the current political, cultural, or economic atmosphere of a particular location. The other side of the debate argues that human rights are not necessarily universal and indeed are culturally conditioned. In this way "culture" has often been used to defend human rights abuses and to prevent the implementation of development programs.

While the church teaches that preservation of culture is an important consideration in any global mandate, it insists that culture is not an absolute value that justifies everything from the oppression of women to the bondage of children and genocide. The Jewish prophets and Jesus himself exemplified the Christian belief that people of good will often resist aspects of their own cultural heritage.

PRINCIPLE 2: PEOPLE AS CENTRAL CONCERN OF DEVELOPMENT

The true measure of development, according to both the Programme of Action and the church, is whether it meets people's human needs and aspirations and whether it does so in accord with their human dignity.

Development policies have at times been the subject of serious criticism by faith-based organizations, including both official and independent Catholic groups. Development policy has often been focused solely on economic rather than human development. In contrast, delegates at Cairo reaffirmed the emerging global consensus that people's lives, not markets or production, should be the central concern of all development policies.

PRINCIPLE 3: RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

The United States President's Council on Sustainable Development notes that people in developed countries -- only 20 percent of the world's population -- consume 85 percent of the world's resources.ⁱⁱ In light of this observation, we are made aware that we can do better and that the human cost

of resisting development is incalculable and unconscionable.

The Catholic social justice tradition and preferential option for the poor provide a basis for the church's teaching on development. The church maintains that industrialized nations should assist, through technology transfer and debt forgiveness, the developing world's ability to use its resources for its own development. In particular, John Paul II has criticized both capitalism and socialism for neglecting to put human needs and the common good above material profit.

PRINCIPLE 5: POPULATION-RELATED GOALS

Although often perceived as unwilling to acknowledge problems caused by rates of population growth, the church does consider hunger and other developmental problems to be exacerbated by population growth. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council insisted that parenthood be exercised responsibly. Parents who bring children into the world recklessly and thoughtlessly are censured. At issue is not limiting births or determining family size, which the Vatican accepts, but the means by which this limitation is achieved.

PRINCIPLE 6: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Because developing countries were able to voice their concerns over sustainable development at Cairo, a larger recognition of the overconsumption of developed countries was written into the Programme of Action. This principle is also seen in the church belief that developed countries must eliminate their overconsumption as a way to maintain sustainability and to achieve responsible stewardship.

The Catholic church supports consideration of environmental concerns in development policy. For many centuries, the church, prompted by Scripture, principally Genesis, believed that domination of the earth by people was God's will. To its credit, the church has begun to appreciate the vital interrelationship among human beings, other forms of life on the planet, and the planet itself. Now the church sees the world itself as a sacrament, namely a reality endowed with the presence of God and with grace. There remain those in the Catholic community who fear that ecological spirituality may lead to pantheism. This hesitancy has not prevented popes from speaking bravely about an ecological crisis, our common environmental responsibility,

and the need to impose limits on human domination and overconsumption of natural resources.

PRINCIPLE 7: ERADICATING POVERTY

The Programme of Action's focus on eradicating poverty and the special attention it gives to the neediest of poor countries is an important aspect of the Cairo consensus for Catholics. Cairo is consistent with church teachings on the preferential option for the poor and economic justice for all in insisting that "special priority" be given to the least developed nations of the world.

It has been observed that poverty imposes imperatives on the affluent. Jesus makes it quite clear that neglect of the poor is neglect of God. The Catholic tradition resonates with this teaching, from the medieval legends of the poor as saints and of God disguised in poverty to modern proclamations of a preferential option for the poor. Indeed, the Catholic church is often seen as the church of the masses, the poor, and the workers.

There are different ways of addressing poverty; sometimes the least effective, but by no means inconsequential, is charity and alms giving. On a deeper level, however, the church calls for the transformation of structures that create poverty. On the deepest level of all, the poor must be addressed as equal in dignity to those who are affluent. On this, the church and Cairo agree.

PRINCIPLE 10: RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In Cairo, education was emphasized as the means to the full development of human resources. Traditionally, girls and women have not been given equal access to educational opportunities. Investment in education is critical to the empowerment of women and the achievement of their human rights.

Catholic teachings support the importance of education. From monasteries to universities, the church has been a pioneer in educating people in their spiritual and social responsibilities.

PRINCIPLE 11: CHILDREN AS A PRIORITY

Cairo maintained children's rights to standards of living and adequate health care, as well as the right to be protected from injury and exploitation. The church protects children as innocents. The church was so concerned with the injustices perpetrated against children that the Pontifical Council for the Family organized three international meetings of

experts prior to Cairo to address this subject: prostitution of children in Bangkok, Thailand (1992); child labor in Manila, Philippines (1993); and street children in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1994).

However, it is important not to overstate the hierarchy's support of children's rights. While the church often speaks and acts on behalf of the well-being of children, it defines children's rights as almost exclusively derivative of parental rights. Furthermore, the Vatican is more likely to support parental rights over children's rights, as further recognition of the patriarchal family unit. Parents have a primary right to educate and raise their children, but it is not an absolute or exclusive right, such as prevails in some cultures where children are defined as property. Society at large and the church must establish and affirm children's rights when parents violate or neglect them.

PRINCIPLE 12: MIGRANT RIGHTS

The Programme of Action acknowledges that migrants often have the least access to resources and services provided in development plans and calls on countries to guarantee fundamental human rights to all migrants. The church's record here has been impressive and effective. The church has organized and spoken on behalf of migrants. It has often demanded that nations support immigrant and migrant populations by not only considering them as workers, but also respecting their cultural identity. The church has offered migrants pastoral service, and through the pope and national conferences of bishops has acted as their advocate before the world community. In fact, on the issue of migrant rights, the church and United Nations are more in agreement with each other than with developed nations.

PRINCIPLE 13: RIGHT TO ASYLUM

Cairo explicitly calls on nations to grant protection for refugees escaping persecution. This stance is well in line with church tradition, which condemns political and religious persecution and urges nations to provide asylum for those in exile as a duty of the common good. In fact, church buildings have traditionally been sanctuaries for the persecuted. The church at large, sometimes selectively, has offered protection to the vulnerable.

PRINCIPLE 14: INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

In the past, the church has in many instances favored evangelization and cultural transformation over the preservation of indigenous identities.

History tells how colonization of indigenous people by Western powers was often accompanied by the imposition of Christianity. The church, however, has recently been more sensitive to indigenous traditions. Nonetheless, it is disappointing that national church leaders, speaking on behalf of their own people, have not been sufficiently heard by the Vatican. Indigenous rights are not only the rights of indigenous minorities. The church cannot be truly incarnated in a culture unless it takes on the character of that culture. If the church appears as an alien presence in the culture, it will not reach the people there on a profound level or in an authentic way.

PRINCIPLE 15:

DEVELOPMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The final principle agreed to in Cairo addresses the need for all nations to take responsibility in assisting global development while acknowledging that each nation has its own needs, capabilities, and responsibilities. It also states a special obligation of more developed countries to advance set agendas and to maintain sustainable levels of growth. The church has historically been sensitive to the diversity of nations in regard to population and development strategy, and it has put pressure on the North to contribute to the equitable development of the South.

PART 2

AREAS OF DEBATE: WOMEN, HEALTH, AND FAMILY

When the United Nations produces an international document such as Cairo's Programme of Action, its goal is to secure the support of as many nations as possible. Thus, it provides an extensive drafting process aimed at achieving consensus, with many versions of a document and numerous preparatory meetings -- with considerable input by nongovernmental organizations -- to discuss objectives. A government delegation objecting to any part of the document may have a section, phrase, or word placed in brackets for further debate and possible deletion. During the Cairo process the Holy See and a handful of other nations—including Argentina, Benin, Guatemala, Honduras, Malta, Morocco, and Nicaragua—bracketed most language referring to reproductive rights, sexuality education, abortion, contraception, the definition of family, and safe motherhood. In fact, the Vatican focused most of its energy at Cairo on objecting to the existing consensus on reproduction and sexuality rather than

proposing language or lending force to the many other issues discussed at the Cairo Conference and important to Catholics.

In the end the Vatican joined the global consensus on the Programme of Action as a whole, but placed reservations on the following list of specific phrases:

- contraception
- couples and individuals
- family planning
- reproductive health
- reproductive rights
- sexual health
- sexual rights
- widest range of family-planning services
- women's ability to control their own fertility

The Holy See also placed general reservations on eight of the sixteen chapters: "Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health"; "Health, Morbidity, and Mortality"; "Population, Development, and Education"; "Technology, Research, and Development"; "National Action"; "International Cooperation"; "Partnership with the Non-Governmental Sector"; and "Follow-up to the Conference."

Cairo, of course, did not detail ethical values as a religious tradition would detail them. It could not do this, given the diversity of its constituency. It did, however, search for a common, global ethic based on human rights and responsibilities. Cairo afforded an opportunity for the Holy See to make its points regarding the importance of human dignity in population policy. The Holy See might have done this more convincingly by affirming more forcefully the many positive features in this document and by engaging in a constructive dialogue with the world on the complex issues of reproduction and sexuality.

The Holy See delegation's concerns over three principles in the Programme of Action -- women's human rights, the right to health, and the definition of family -- led to reservations on a number of Cairo objectives. Disagreement was over application, as the church has historically supported all three of these principles. However, a gap exists between what the Vatican said at Cairo and what Catholic tradition allowed the Vatican to say. In reality, official church statements could have been brought

to bear to support the United Nations positions on women, health, and family.

PRINCIPLE 4: WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

As part of the new development paradigm created at Cairo, women's human rights were supported as a principal goal. Prior to Cairo, women's lives were not always treated with dignity and respect in population policies; women were often considered only in terms of their reproductive capacity, and their aspirations and needs were made secondary to demographic outcomes.

While the church has a strong record of speaking in support of human dignity and objecting to human rights abuses, its record on women's human rights is ambiguous. It is not that church teachings do not support gender equity or the dignity of women, but that the Vatican has shown itself to hold a limited understanding of women's human rights, and in particular, the ability of women to control their own fertility.

The Holy See is careful never to assert women's equality with men without a qualifier, usually the notion of "women's special dignity." In the Vatican's worldview, men are the normative human beings and women are understood primarily in terms of their reproductive and mothering capacities. What seems to be a laudable principle -- women's dignity -- actually circumscribes women's options and equality. No such assumption is ever made with regard to men, whose dignity is presumed simply to stem from their humanity.ⁱⁱⁱ

When the Vatican addresses rights for women, they are more often rights to be protected through the agency of others. They are not political, social, or economic rights through which women themselves exercise power as autonomous moral agents. And while the Vatican does support the universality of human rights, a division exists between the Vatican and women's human rights advocates over the question of what a human right is. In the case of human rights dealing with reproductive health, sexuality, and women's empowerment, the Vatican holds that Western feminists, among others, are attempting to establish "new" rights. In reality, Cairo sought not so much an expansion of human rights but an expansion of what the global community means when it says human rights.

Catholic support for women's rights comes from the biblical tradition of gender equality. Theologians, men and women, working within the Catholic tradition have rediscovered the role of women in Scripture and early tradition and have found it to be more open, creative, and decisive than current Vatican policy. Scripture begins, in the first chapter of Genesis, with the grand theme of gender equality in the creation account. Not only is there no subordination of women, there is indeed a radical gender equality. The Christian Scriptures present to us the startling ease that Jesus has in bringing women into a discipleship of equals. The greatest of all messages about Christ, the Easter experience, is borne by a woman who becomes the apostle to the apostles and, indeed, their teacher. Paul readily speaks of the prominent role women play in the creation of the early church: Women are appointed as deacons, coworkers, and even apostles (Romans 16).

This discrepancy between the statements of the Holy See delegation at Cairo and church teachings is illuminated by the delegation's criticism of two areas of the Programme of Action: empowerment of women and reproductive rights.

EMPOWERMENT Of Women

Cairo's focus on the empowerment of women is a culmination of decades of progress in the field of population and development, accelerated as women entered the international dialogue and research showed that women's status was a factor in family size and efficacy of development programs. The Programme of Action was the first United Nations document on population that explicitly recognized the importance of women's rights as a crucial factor in development and indeed, as a worthy goal in itself. Cairo declared that development policies should not center on controlling women's fertility, but on empowering women to make decisions about their own reproduction. This empowerment could be advanced by ensuring access to information and resources and providing social, political, and economic conditions that favor autonomous decision making.

The Vatican and even Pope John Paul II himself have spoken of women's empowerment and call for the support of women in their dual roles as mother and part of the labor force. But this very positive view of women in the public sphere is presented with an emphasis on the woman's role as mother: "The true advancement of women requires

that labour should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role.”^{iv}

Vatican support of the economic empowerment of women demurs when this empowerment leads women to a sense of their sexual and reproductive options. As the Catholic tradition developed, men were made the norm for human experience, and women far too readily were defined in church teachings in terms of their reproductive and maternal capacities. In this scenario, little accrues to women simply because they are human. More often, women are praised when they are submissive, when they are mothers, and when they serve the needs of men or their children. Within this framework, the Vatican sees the exercise of women’s human rights as threatening the traditional family unit.

And although the church has spoken of the contributions women can make in the public forum, this belief does not extend to the role of women in the church. Actions speak more clearly than words. No woman is ordained in the Catholic church. The governing structure of the Holy See includes no women in decision- or policy-making roles and no women in the church’s pivotal electoral body, the College of Cardinals. There is no requirement that women be consulted regarding the development or content of Vatican documents and no indication that such consultation occurs voluntarily except in very limited and rare examples. Official church policies prohibiting important forms of women’s participation in the church make it difficult for people to believe that the church is committed to gender equality. The fact that these policies of exclusion are difficult, if not impossible, to derive from Scripture or tradition further weakens the Vatican’s position.

We cannot expect an all-too-human church to be centuries ahead of the cultural development of gender equality. It is unpardonable, however, when the church seems to be behind, or worse, when it resists such development.

REPRODUCTIVE Rights

The Vatican has recently been supportive of rights of women in society, but it continues to try to deny women reproductive rights. Cairo went beyond defining reproductive health to affirm reproductive

rights as an integral aspect of human rights. According to the Programme of Action, reproductive rights are grounded in previously recognized human rights, such as the right to bodily integrity and nondiscrimination, and specifically the right to decide freely the number and spacing of children and reproductive autonomy – a right first recognized in 1968 at the International Conference on Human Rights in Teheran, Iran.^v

The Vatican objected at Cairo to the Programme of Action’s treatment of reproductive rights, choosing this moment to invoke the preservation of culture and tradition and proclaiming the danger of establishing “new fundamental human rights.”^{vi} However, Catholic teachings supply many elements that support reproductive rights, primarily the church tradition advocating for the universality of human rights. The Vatican recognizes that human dignity is tied to the ability to exercise free will and individual conscience. In the contemporary world, religions gain credibility and become persuasive when they recognize the importance of free will, allow alternatives, and then guide or persuade people by appealing to their highest motives.

There is something demeaning and morally offensive about putting burdens on women without allowing them a voice and a vote about their own lives and the consequences they may be asked to endure. Women at large must be trusted to be concerned about life issues and to make responsible decisions. Political participation, equality in the workplace, protection from violence – all rights supported by the Vatican – cannot be addressed without first affirming women’s moral capacity and integrity. Women cannot be expected to make decisions freely outside the home if society or the church preempts their personal decision making concerning the reproductive activity of their bodies.

Church teachings on the common good and justice show us that we cannot achieve moral order if individuals are coerced or repressed. Because women in the church have been excluded from defining elements of the common good, reproductive rights have not been adequately addressed in the Catholic church. Women, indeed all people, do best in dialogue, not when they are asked only to take dictation.

It is telling that the Vatican chose this moment in the Cairo negotiations to argue for cultural preservation. It argued, for example, that access to

contraception and legal abortion are staunchly opposed in other cultures and that democracy does not suit the culture of the Vatican. This may be true, but it raises the question of who defines this culture. Such "sensitivity" to culture is not evident when the culture of women, for example, is at issue or when cultures that strongly support contraception and legal abortion are denied these options because they do not adhere to the Vatican view of acceptable public policy.

There is a tendency to criticize Western culture as too feminist and to favor more traditional alternatives. However, when African and Asian bishops ask for different attitudes on the position of the Vatican, as they did in recent synods at Rome, they are not heard. When women of the South and East spoke to delegates on the importance of reproductive rights and health, their positions were dismissed. Culture has been invoked to silence the voices of women in the dialogue on reproductive rights. Surely those who have most at stake in every pregnancy should be allowed a decisive voice and choice on their own behalf.

PRINCIPLE 8: RIGHT TO HEALTH

The church's support of the right to health has biblical grounding in the healing tradition of Christ. A "right to medical care" is established in the 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* places the burden of respecting health on all of society. Pope John Paul II often calls upon nations to provide health care to all citizens as a basic economic right necessary for human dignity. By acknowledging the universality of the right to health care, the Catholic church is acknowledging the need for health care to be independent of geography, language, ethnicity, gender, or religion.

While the church asserts the right to health as a fundamental right, absolutely necessary for human dignity, the Vatican does not support health when applied to reproduction and sexuality, as clearly demonstrated in the Holy See's objections to the sections on reproductive health, safe motherhood, abortion, sexual health, and sexuality education for adolescents as agreed to at Cairo. At issue was how to specify and define health.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Cairo's Programme of Action was the first United Nations document to explicitly define reproductive health. Much of the language included in the recommended actions for obtaining reproductive

and sexual health is noncontroversial, such as prenatal, postnatal, and maternal health care and treatment for those affected with HIV. However, even this section of the Programme of Action provoked numerous objections on the part of the Vatican.

In addition to the church's strong support of health as a fundamental human right, Catholic health care is guided by the tradition of treating the whole person, recognizing that separating the body from the soul or treating only one aspect is not the best method of promoting overall health. Yet church leadership over and again singles out reproductive health and attempts to limit services and information available for this aspect of health. For women, reproductive health is central to overall health. At some point, women are placed in bondage to reproduction and biology if only periodic abstinence ("natural family planning") is tolerated.

To tell the world that "natural family planning" is the only means by which pregnancies may be avoided -- as the Vatican does -- is to speak with an ineffective voice. The world knows that such teaching is rejected by a virtual unanimity of Catholic couples and by the vast majority of Catholic theologians. The historical record shows that all the cardinalatial and episcopal committees formed by the popes to deal with this issue recommended a change in church teaching and the acceptance of artificial contraception as a moral option. The prohibition of artificial contraception is not so much church teaching as it is papal teaching.

Furthermore, Catholic teaching on responsible parenthood strongly rejects coercion by any group or individual attempting to restrain couples from making responsible decisions about procreation. Denying access to information about certain options was perceived by many in the global community as morally and practically coercive, especially when access and information are denied to those who are not Catholic or those whose consciences tell them that contraception is a moral choice. In any case, even according to church teachings, without options one cannot act morally. The Vatican remains free to address and influence the consciences of people by moral suasion. The world community objects, however, to efforts to eliminate access to artificial contraception, sterilization, and abortion completely with legal force and punishment.

SAFE MOTHERHOOD

The Vatican bracketed the term "safe motherhood" in the Draft Programme of Action and objected to its use at the Cairo Conference. Its opposition to the term, the Vatican delegation said, was based on a fear that inclusion of the term would open the door for abortion.^{vii} But "safe motherhood," by definition, covers many services and programs that the church unequivocally supports, including efforts to improve women's health in pregnancy through prenatal care and nutrition.

All women face risks in pregnancy and childbearing. Poor women face especially high risks. For example, Bolivia, the poorest country in South America, has a maternal mortality rate of 600 per 100,000 live births,^{viii} compared with 12 per 100,000 in the United States.^{ix}

The Vatican delegation's decision to reject the term "safe motherhood" outright, without any attempt to make a distinction between its acceptance of the components it supports and its resistance to abortion without exception, led to an inconsistent position on motherhood. All women's lives are defensible, and it is disingenuous for the church to claim to defend life while simultaneously opposing measures necessary to save women's lives. The Vatican's refusal to support safe motherhood at Cairo gave the impression that a woman's health is secondary to her reproductive functions.

ABORTION

Despite much talk about the issue, the Programme of Action principally deals with abortion in one paragraph, which makes four major statements:

- abortion should not be promoted as a method of family planning;
 - incidence of abortion should be reduced through access to family planning services;
 - abortion should be safe where legal; and
 - where illegal, the consequences of illegal/unsafe abortions should be addressed.
- During Cairo, the Vatican objected to all but the first.

Abortion is a complex moral and social issue – potential mothers know this best. However, the Vatican's position on abortion is compromised by its unwillingness to accept contraceptive services and devices even though they reduce abortions by diminishing the number of unwanted pregnancies. For example, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, data from Hungary show that as

contraceptives became more available over a thirty-year period, abortion rates fell from over 60 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 in the 1950s to under 40 per 1,000 in the 1980s.^x One of the best ways to reduce recourse to abortion is through access to a range of effective contraceptive options.

Even taking into account Vatican opposition to abortion, we remain puzzled about why the Vatican objects to abortion being safe where legal. "There is no such thing as a 'safe' abortion: Whether legal or not, abortion is lethal for the child and destructive of the mother and society," declared the US cardinals before the Cairo Conference.^{xi} This dismissal of safe abortion by the hierarchy is insensitive to the realities women face and to the number of women who die from unsafe abortions every day.

Because women everywhere resort to abortion, the alternative to safe abortion, of course, is unsafe abortion. Again, it is the hierarchy's preoccupation with eliminating abortion from the world that prevents the real issues of justice and health for women from being addressed. Such an absolutist position fails to acknowledge the ambiguity and doubt regarding fetal life and ignores the moral complexities surrounding each situation.

While the legal status of abortion appears to have relatively little connection to its overall pervasiveness in a country, it does influence the safety of conditions under which the procedure must be performed. Illegal abortion is associated with a high incidence of maternal death and disability. For example, while Mexico and United States have similar abortion rates, maternal deaths per 100,000 live births are almost ten times higher in Mexico, where abortion is illegal.^{xii}

In countries where abortion is illegal, it is the poor who are left to face abortions under the worst types of conditions. And in countries where abortion is legal, but safe abortions are costly, it is again poor women who shoulder the burden. The church tradition of a preferential option for the poor has been interpreted by many Catholics to support the safety of abortion and to oppose unsafe abortions when safe options are available. It is possible to be opposed to abortion without supporting unsafe procedures; concern for public safety is not the same as moral endorsement.

Despite Vatican disapproval, the Cairo Conference was right to address the catastrophic

health consequences for women of unsafe abortion. Mercy requires that we eliminate pain whenever possible; justice demands that we do not abandon poor women or women in need of help.

SEXUAL HEALTH

Cairo acknowledged the link between sexuality and gender relations, affirming that relationships between partners have profound consequences for sexual health and behavior. The Vatican, in response, accused the Programme of Action of "promoting a self-centered and casual view of human sexuality, an approach so destructive of family life and the moral fiber of society."^{xiii} In Catholicism, a long tradition of aversion to sexuality is the root of current Vatican conservatism on reproduction and women. Despite recent attempts to expunge this historical antipathy, church teachings often continue to reflect its influence.

Until Vatican II, pleasure was rarely, if ever, linked to sex in a positive way by the church. Sex was often presented as a necessary evil and is termed such by church teachers such as St. Augustine. The purpose of sex was procreation, not pleasure or even relationship. For more than a thousand years, the church taught the superiority of sexless marriages and urged all married priests to reject sex with their wives and to refuse to conceive children.

Today, the Vatican's suspicion of sexuality persists. Part of this mistrust is based on amnesia concerning biblical references to sexual pleasure as a value in its own right. A preeminent example of this tradition is the Song of Songs. In this most frank and erotic of all biblical books, sexual pleasure between lovers and spouses is celebrated. In addition, one of the overriding images of God's love for the human family in both testaments is the relationship between the bridegroom and bride. Jesus has been misinterpreted by some as hostile to pleasure. In reality, Jesus says little about sex but is deeply troubled by power and authoritarianism. The church's suspicions of sexual pleasure and its negative judgment about it do not derive from the Bible. They emerge from second- and third-century Greco-Roman ideas about pleasure and pain, ideas that the mind needs to control the body and that pleasure or emotions are less human or less acceptable than cognitive life.

Female sexuality, in particular, was and is often viewed negatively by the church. Women are blamed for men's sexual desires and presented as

temptresses. Celibacy is protected, admired, and rewarded by special privileges in the church. Holiness is equated with abstinence. In the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the church at its highest level of authority condemned and censured anyone who dared to say celibacy is not superior to marriage.

The Vatican's views on sexuality translate into an isolation in church policy of sexual health from other forms of mental and physical health, which has real impact on human lives. This impact is most conspicuous in the Vatican's treatment of HIV/AIDS. Forbidding the use of condoms when one partner is already infected is an irresponsible application of church teachings on contraception.

Realizing the impracticality of the Vatican's position on condoms, the French bishops in 1996 presented a 235-page document on AIDS acknowledging the usefulness of condoms in preventing the spread of HIV. The use of a condom, the bishops said, "can be understood in the case of people for whom sexual activity is an ingrained part of their lifestyle and for whom [that activity] represents a serious risk."^{xiv}

An escalating chorus of voices from recent official church teachings, theologians, and laity supports positive views of human sexuality. Spirituality and sexuality are seen today as linked. The celebration of our bodies and sexuality brings us spiritual awareness and even love itself. Human sexuality is seen as committing each person to concern for the other or else it forfeits its human and virtuous content. Sexuality, like love, should be sensitive, considerate, generous, compassionate, and concerned. Christianity insists that we love our neighbors as ourselves. This principle is expected to govern our sexual relationships.

Furthermore, in the sometimes less-than-ideal lives people must live, differing levels of tolerance, compassion, and resiliency matter. By denying the sexual or reproductive realities and needs of people, the church cannot effectively heal lives.

ADOLESCENTS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

During the Cairo Conference, the Vatican accused the Programme of Action of accepting "almost as an unrestricted right, that each individual including adolescents from an early age, may be 'sexually active.'"^{xv} In reality, the Programme of Action balances the needs of adolescents for access to services and information on sexuality and

reproduction with the rights and duties of parents and other adults to provide needed guidance and direction to maturing young people, calling on societies to promote mutually respectful and equitable gender relations and to provide education and services in order to deal with sexuality positively and responsibly.

Instruction in sexuality must, of course, fit with the age and condition of the person to be instructed. The intent should not be information only but formation of a responsible conscience and sensitivity to the lives of others.

Paralleling the Vatican's difficulty in affirming women as moral agents, there is only limited support of adolescent sexuality in Catholic teaching. When it is mentioned, the duty of educating adolescents on the issue of sexuality rests with the parents.

The Vatican is concerned that too much knowledge too soon, sexual information offered with no value orientation, and contraceptives made too readily available will be seen as tacit endorsement for irresponsible sexual behavior. These points could be made without discouraging the benefits of sexuality education. Adolescents deal with issues of sexuality every day. The church's policy of abstinence before marriage does not address the realities of adolescent lives or respect their capacity to make meaningful decisions about their sexuality. Abstinence should be encouraged, but not without information about alternatives, even if they are less than ideal.

While Cairo was concerned with the possible and the practical, the Vatican insisted on abstract moral imperatives, which led it once again to become an obstacle to the global community's consensus.

PRINCIPLE 9: DEFINING FAMILY

During the Cairo drafting process, John Paul II told pilgrims in Vatican City that the United Nations was attempting to destroy families: "I am going back to the Vatican to combat a project prepared by the United Nations, which want to destroy the family."^{xvi} Despite the pope's early characterization of the Cairo Conference, the Programme of Action clearly supports families in significant ways.

Principle 9 names the family as the basic unit of society and calls for its protection on these grounds. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to the family

as a "domestic church," a "privileged community," and "the original cell of social life."^{xvii} Indeed, society is always most stable when families are secure and when governments invest resources in them. But while both the Vatican and the Programme of Action concur that family is important, their definitions of what constitutes a family differ.

Cairo acknowledged a wide spectrum of families, reflecting the global reality of diverse family structures. In contrast, the Vatican objected to the diverse characterization of families in the Programme of Action out of fear that this diversity would threaten the patriarchal system that the church has supported and encouraged throughout the twentieth century. By using "families" instead of "family," the Holy See delegation believed Cairo would establish "a formula which would recognize all free unions, homosexual couples, etc. as equiparated with the family."^{xviii} Envisioning a "real family"^{xix} as only a husband, a wife, and children, the Vatican lobbied to include language giving special protection to this configuration of a family and in the end officially entered a reservation to the use of "couples and individuals."

In reality, family diversity has existed throughout human and biblical history. In biblical times, there were several perspectives on the family, none of which readily corresponds to the modern nuclear family. In the Hebrew Scriptures, patriarchy prevailed as well as polygamy, men were allowed concubines, and wives could be dismissed for even trivial reasons. In Matthew 19, Jesus objects strongly to this patriarchal model, especially when it allows a man to divorce a woman because she is property and forbids a woman to divorce a man on the same grounds.

Family structure is not set by nature but reflects the culture and economy in which it is embedded. A male-dominated nuclear family, consisting of a working husband, a wife who works in the home, and several completely dependent children, is a relatively recent development in history. Cairo, in suggesting that diversity reflects current realities and aspirations, is making a statement that has always been true. Out of fear that the Programme of Action would be interpreted as endorsing same-sex marriage, the Vatican failed to acknowledge that Catholic tradition supports and affirms diverse family forms such as extended families, multigenerational families, families without children,

and other constructs of family that embody love and acceptance.

There are some who observe that the Holy See has not always matched its performance on family life with its rhetoric. Marriages were dissolved in the past so that one partner might enter formal religious life. Annulments are granted today to one spouse or parent over the staunch objections of the other. And although the Holy See speaks beautifully of marriage, it continues to insist that celibacy is a superior state of life. It punishes priests who marry with exclusion from ministry; it does not, as a matter of course, allow married people to be ordained.

REFLECTION: CONSCIENCE AND CONSENSUS

Catholicism, despite appearances to the contrary, has a profound sense that rules are not rigid. Some of this sense comes from the New Testament resistance to law; some comes from the dynamics of canon law, which readily builds exceptions into the system; and some comes from a strong investment in forgiveness and reconciliation. All this protects church teaching and practice from many of the rigidities of fundamentalism and biblical literalism.

One of the hallmarks of Catholic moral teaching has been its capacity for nuance. Catholic tradition speaks with vigor about principles in the public forum but encourages latitude in pastoral practice. To appreciate the full range of Catholic teaching one must take into account not only the articulation of the principle but also the way the principle is lived out in practice.

For Catholics, conscience is always the court of last appeal in moral decisions. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "a human being must always obey the certain judgement of his conscience."^{xx} Even though the official church seeks to qualify conscience with such words as "informed" or "right," it nonetheless allows that an objectively wrong action is a virtue if those who perform it are convinced in conscience they are doing good. One of the most influential church thinkers, St. Thomas Aquinas, said that it would be better to be excommunicated than to act in a way that contradicted conscience.^{xxi}

Given this tradition, why does the official church so often become rigid and ideological? More specifically, why were resiliency and consensus so difficult for the Vatican during Cairo?

We are amazed at how impressive church rhetoric is and how often it resonates with the global consensus. There is no reason not to conclude that the rhetoric is genuine and that it springs from a profound belief in what is being said.

Nonetheless, the consequences and practice that the world community expect to flow from such rhetoric do not follow in the Catholic church. The strong statements on the equality of women are difficult to reconcile with the marginalization of women in decision-making structures in the Catholic church and their absence from key Vatican offices and, of course, from the priesthood. The ringing words about parents rather than the state determining the number of their children and the appeal that parents should follow their consciences in doing so do not fit in easily with the rejection by the official church of the overwhelming number of Catholic parents who believe in conscience that artificial contraception can be a moral choice in structuring their families. The statements about the sacredness and sacramental character of sexual love are inconsistent with the denial of sexual love to church leaders.

This inconsistency happens, we believe, because the Vatican has been unwilling to admit that it sometimes makes mistakes, that it has sometimes misled, and that substantive change is possible in the system. The Vatican and the Catholic church have impressive power and resources. An admission of errors made in good faith in the past cannot destabilize the credibility of such an institution. A willingness to state, furthermore, that the world has impressive moral wisdom of its own in no way makes the Catholic church a less welcome participant in the global dialogue.

Morality can at times become the tool of a political program rather than a principle of rights and truth. Sexual norms are sometimes formulated not to illuminate the ethical content of the choices people make but to legitimate the denial or restriction of personhood for those who defy a convention. To sanction torture in the rooting out of heresy is to establish the overriding claims of orthodoxy. To forbid all sexual activity to homosexuals is to promote the exclusive claims and value of heterosexuality. To deny all contraception is to insist that pleasure and relationship must always be subordinate to reproduction. All these have been taught by the Vatican.

The Vatican declares that access to abortion, contraception, or the use of condoms is never

permissible. These positions are rigidly held and admit no exceptions. Thus abortion is not permitted even in cases of incest, rape, a seriously deformed fetus, or risk to the life of the mother. Contraception is prohibited even for women who have had so many births that another would imperil their health or lives. Condom use is condemned even to save one's partner from AIDS. Assisted reproduction is rejected even if done to correct a biological defect. At Cairo, such positions dominated the Vatican's diplomacy and eclipsed all other manner of church teaching and discourse.

The Catholic community at large and indeed the pastoral and theological communities take different positions on all these issues. One finds substantial latitude in the behavior and beliefs of Catholics, in the pastoral practice of priests, and in the teachings and analysis of Catholic theologians.

The Vatican position at Cairo reflected papal rather than necessarily Catholic thinking and tradition. Its position was narrowly focused rather than comprehensive, diplomatic rather than magisterial, political rather than morally conscientious. The Holy See delegation sought to bring the Cairo document as close as possible to the pope's thinking without expecting full concurrence from the world community, and yet the Vatican was at the same time convinced that it would withhold endorsement of the document if it did not receive complete concurrence. This stance did not reflect the flexibility that exists in the Catholic tradition.

The Vatican repeatedly expressed its concern at Cairo that the rest of the world does not affirm an impressive ethic on life, reproduction, sexuality, and family. The global community is aware that it faces life and death decisions regarding abortion, contraception, HIV/AIDS, and sexuality education. The Vatican, despite being a sovereign state, is immune from these concerns because of the character of its population and the purpose of its existence. Aware of this dilemma, the Vatican might have been resilient and flexible at Cairo on how its moral principles are applied to the world's governments as they confront concrete realities and diverse belief and ethical systems.

Yet there is reason for hope. History contains examples of church flexibility and growth, as well as Catholic teachings informed by global values. Substantive changes have occurred.

For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared, in 1948, that adult men and women had a right to marry and to found a family and, indeed, that they had equal rights in entering and dissolving a marriage. There was tension between the world community and the Catholic church on the question of divorce. Yet then, as now, there was a basis for dialogue. Article 16 of the Declaration goes on to use language echoing Catholic documents that the "family is the natural and fundamental" basis of society and that it is "entitled to protection by society and the State."

In the past fifty years, Catholics and sometimes the official church as well have moved closer to the United Nations' position. In 1948, for example, the church taught that celibacy was superior to marriage and asked many of its members to give up their right to marry and found a family. In 1948, Catholics responded favorably; now, they do not. Fifty years ago, virtually no Catholic marriages were officially dissolved; now, annulments are frequent, and many Catholics divorce and remarry without annulments.

An openness to sexual and reproductive ethics and rights is gaining ground in the Catholic church. Despite the vehement opposition of the Vatican, Catholics in many countries favor access to legal abortion and contraception and civil rights for homosexuals -- unthinkable even fifty years ago. Catholics support legal options even when they are not convinced that people have the moral authority to exercise them well.

At Cairo, it is relevant to note that, although the Vatican was a fully active and engaged participant, its sexual and reproductive agenda did not prevail. This fact was instructive for the both Vatican and the world. In the grand human dialogue, the church sometimes teaches the world (as the Vatican has done brilliantly on the evils of coercion and self-indulgence and on the sacred character of sexual experience and marital commitments), and sometimes the world teaches the church (as Cairo and the United Nations may be doing on human rights, women's human rights, and reproductive and sexual rights).

The church is always less than the truth it proclaims. It does not control this truth but serves it and searches for it. The church sometimes advances because of a reflection on its own traditions; very often it grows, however, because it hears and learns from the world. The Reformation and the

Enlightenment not only benefited the global community, they also enriched the church.

One of the more encouraging results of Cairo is an awareness of how the United Nations heard the church and respected its voice. It is now time for the church to hear the world community as it speaks with responsibility and consensus. When the church possesses truth, it is always a truth the world possesses in some way. The Creator does not love and enlighten only a few and leave all the others to their own devices. And so humility is always in order and hope is always justified.

NOTES

ⁱ Msgr. Diarmuid Martin, *Statement at the Beginning of the III Session of the PrepCom*, April 4, 1994: para. 7.

ⁱⁱ The President's Council on Sustainable Development, *Population and Consumption Task Force Report*, US GPO, Washington, DC: 1996: p. 33.

ⁱⁱⁱ Women-Church Convergence, *Equal is as Equal Does: Challenging Vatican Views on Women*, Washington, DC: Women-Church Convergence, 1995: p. 2-3.

^{iv} Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981: para. 19.

^v The Proclamation of Teheran said the following about reproductive rights: "Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and the spacing of their children." United Nations International Conference on Human Rights, Proclamation of Teheran (Teheran, Iran), May 13, 1968.

^{vi} *Statement at the Beginning of the III Session of the PrepCom*: para. 12.

^{vii} Dennis Poust, "No Consensus," *Catholic New York*, April 28, 1994.

^{viii} United Nations Population Fund, *The State of World Population 1997* New York: UNFPA 1996, p. 86.

^{ix} Alan Guttmacher Institute, "The Role of Contraception in Reducing Abortion," *Issues in Brief*, 1997: p. 4.

^x "The Role of Contraception in Reducing Abortion": pp. 2-3.

^{xi} US Cardinals Conference, *Concerns Expressed to Clinton on Cairo Conference*, May 29, 1994.

^{xii} "The Role of Contraception in Reducing Abortion": p. 4.

^{xiii} US Cardinals Conference, *Concerns Expressed to Clinton on Cairo Conference*, May 29, 1994.

^{xiv} French Bishops Council, *AIDS: Society in Question*, February 12, 1996.

^{xv} *Statement at the Beginning of the III Session of the PrepCom*: para. 7.

^{xvi} Philip William, *UPI*, April 17, 1994.

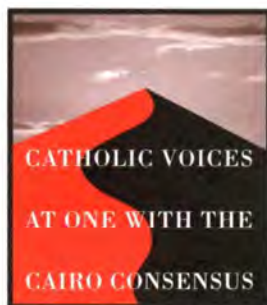
^{xvii} *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 2204-2207.

^{xviii} *Notes on the Draft Final Document of the ICPD*: p. 2.

^{xix} *Gravissimum Educationis Momentum*: para. 3.

^{xx} *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 1800.

^{xxi} As quoted in T. O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality*, Crossroad, 1978/1990, chapter 8.



The Holy See and Cairo

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development gave rise to unprecedented attention by the Vatican to a United Nations meeting. "No issue has affected John Paul II in a more profound way throughout his fifteen-year papacy than the Cairo conference," observed Raymond Flynn, then US ambassador to the Vatican. Five months before the ICPD convened, Reuters reported that the pope had "pulled out all the stops in an attempt to influence the conference."

Throughout the year leading up to the conference, Pope John Paul II and other top Roman Catholic church officials campaigned with a vengeance against the consensus taking shape around the UN conference. John Paul met in March 1994 with Nafis Sadik, executive director of the United Nations Population fund and secretary general of the ICPD. Face to face, he upbraided Sadik and criticized the draft Programme of Action as formulating "population issues in terms of individual and 'sexual and reproductive rights,' or even in terms of 'women's rights'."

Then came his letter to every head of state, claiming that the document promotes a "lifestyle" that is "totally individualistic, to such an extent that marriage now appears as something outmoded." This lifestyle, the pope wrote, is "typical of certain fringes within developed societies, societies which are materially rich and secularized."

In late March, John Paul summoned all ambassadors assigned to the Vatican for a papal lesson on population. A month later, he spoke by telephone and in person with President Clinton on the matter.

Through the spring and summer, the pope took every opportunity in general audiences and other public appearances to attack the conference with fiery rhetoric. The conference aims to "destroy the

family," John Paul said. It is the "snare of the devil," promulgates a "culture of death," and represents a "serious setback for humanity." On one visit to a neighborhood church in Rome, the pope told parishioners, "I am going back to the Vatican to combat a project prepared by the United Nations, which want to destroy the family. I say simply no, no. Think again. Convert your hearts. If you are the United Nations, you must not destroy."

Other senior church officials joined in. Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, said the ICPD could cause "the most disastrous massacre in history." Trujillo accused the United States and other Western countries of "biological colonialism" for advocating family planning methods the Vatican opposes—that is, any methods other than those relying on periodic abstinence, or "natural family planning."

A gathering of 114 of the church's 139 cardinals in June endorsed the Vatican's fight with a statement charging that the Cairo document would legitimize "abortion on demand, sexual promiscuity and distorted notions of the family."

At the final preparatory meeting in April in New York, Holy See Delegate Diarmuid Martin infuriated participants when he accused conference leaders of flouting the "cultural, ethical, spiritual, and religious values" of people in developing nations and of indulging in "reticence towards a coherent moral vision." NGO representatives jeered his remarks, and in a curt response, the chairman of the session, Fred Sai of Ghana, turned the charge of ethical shortcomings back against the Holy See.

Unbowed, the Vatican attempted to secure allies for its crusade, but months of diplomatic efforts netted few recruits. After one staunch soldier, President Carlos Menem of Argentina, failed

to rally Latin American heads of state to adopt a joint "right to life" platform for the Cairo conference, it seemed that the pope began turning over stones to find comrades. In August the Vatican reached out to Islamic fundamentalists, paying calls on repressive regimes such as Libya. A Libyan news agency reported that, in return for Libya's support in condemning the Cairo conference, Vatican diplomats were supporting Libyan efforts to resolve differences with Western governments around the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am jet over Lockerbie, Scotland.

During their campaign against the conference, Roman Catholic church leaders were especially critical of the US government and its positions on issues related to the Cairo conference. The US bishops issued a statement calling on the US government to "reverse its efforts" on the conference.

Higher up the hierarchy, the US cardinals wrote a letter to President Clinton that distorted the emerging Programme of Action in order to attack it. They claimed, for example, that the document advocated increased use of sterilization, even though neither the draft document nor its final articulation promoted particular methods of regulating fertility and never used the words "sterilization," "ligation," "vasectomy," or "surgical contraception."

Meanwhile, the US administration, in the person of Vice President Al Gore, made extraordinary efforts not to offend the Vatican while defending the conference agenda. For Gore's trouble, a top Vatican official, papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, publicly insulted him by name, suggesting that the Vice President was lying about US intentions.

The Vatican also courted US opinion with an op-ed article written by Navarro-Valls and published by the *Wall Street Journal* a few days before the ICPD opened. The conference, Navarro-Valls wrote, would be "a crucial challenge to Christianity's most fundamental doctrine on the sanctity of life as it has to come to be and exist in the family. The Holy Father is not merely defending a sort of odd Catholic view about life and family. He is in fact pointing to the key issue on which future humanity must make a choice. This issue of human life and population undergirds all others. A false step here leads to a general disorder of civilization itself."

Indeed, the Vatican's vision of civilization did seem to be at stake. The conference became a debate "between modernity and tradition, between dogma and reason," the Italian daily *La Repubblica* observed. What the Vatican decried, others acclaimed. The overwhelming majority of world governments, religious leaders, and a broad array of public interest organizations with historically diverse views on population issues had come to a consensus on humane population policies and sustainable development; the Vatican dug in its heels, crying that the new views of sexuality, reproduction, and families meant the end of civilization.

With the preponderance of governments in strong support of the plan—a sign that it was no manifesto of radical liberalism—the Vatican made efforts to cloak its disapproval in acceptable terms. But, crowded with straw men, Vatican criticisms often had a ring of absurdity: "The conference's themes," Navarro-Valls asserted in his op-ed, "include coerced family planning, abortion, homosexuality and versions of women's rights that are harmful to women." Readers would have to do their own research to learn that the document clearly and repeatedly condemned coercive measures, did not mention homosexuality, and enjoyed the support of women's advocates the world over.

When the conference began on September 5, Vatican diplomats were undeterred by their lack of success to date. As soon as delegates set to work on the document, of which 10 percent had been marked for continued debate at Cairo, the Holy See seized upon the paragraph on abortion and, for five days, would not let go. To some extent, the Holy See held the conference hostage to the high value the UN placed on achieving consensus. The Vatican also took advantage of its own vestigial aura of authority in international circles; with as little support as the Vatican had mustered, few countries would have been able to win such a long hearing for their particular agendas.

Even after delegates had reworded sections to appease the Holy See, the pope's envoys forced delay. So exasperated were delegates that at one session they booed a Holy See representative.

"Does the Vatican rule the world?" asked Egyptian population minister Maher Mahran. "If they are not going to negotiate, why did they come?"

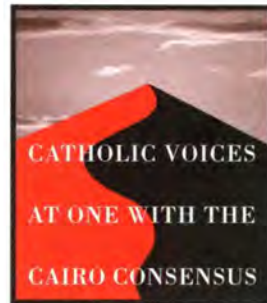
Delegates and NGO representatives grumbled about the Holy See's obstructionist behavior, and at least two petitions circulated calling for a change in the Vatican's status at the United Nations. While the movement to repeal the Holy See's status was limited, frustration with the delegation ran deep. It was exacerbated by the widespread understanding that the Pope's positions on reproductive matters do not reflect the attitudes and practices of Catholics around the world. "The bottom line is the credibility of the papacy," one government delegate told Reuters. "If no one follows him, for whom does he speak?"

The Holy See had refused to endorse the two previous UN population conference documents, in 1974 and 1984, and no one expected anything different in Cairo. But in the end, the Holy See surprised most observers by joining the consensus on about half the Programme of Action.

From news reports of the ICPD, many might have been led to believe that the single issue of abortion accounted for the conflict between the Holy See and the majority of the delegations in

Cairo. But in reality, Cairo's statements about abortion account for only a tiny portion of its remarkable 20-year plan for the world's future. To be sure, Cairo explicitly addressed the public health problem of unsafe abortion for the first time in a UN document. But the document also says "in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning."

As evidenced by the Vatican's statements decrying the broad themes of the conference, the Holy See's conflicts centered not only on abortion, but on the notion that couples and individuals should have access to a range of contraception, including but not limited to natural family planning, on the prominence of women's rights and women's equality, and on the recognition of the centrality of reproductive and sexual health in ethical population policies. The Vatican's differences with the world consensus on these issues has not changed, and can be expected to arise again during the five-year review of the implementation of the ICPD.



The Church at the United Nations

Through an entity called the Holy See, the Roman Catholic church enjoys unique governmental status at the United Nations, where the Holy See is a Non-Member State Permanent Observer. While there are numerous UN observers (intergovernmental organizations, liberation movements, and specialized agencies of the UN system), the Holy See and Switzerland are the only two currently holding that status as “states.”

THE HOLY SEE, VATICAN CITY, THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH—ARE THERE DIFFERENCES AMONG THEM?

The Roman Catholic church is a religious society without a political identity under the law. Vatican City is an independent city-state within Rome that serves as the site of the church’s government and is itself governed by the head of the church, the pope. The Holy See is “the supreme organ [of government] of both the Catholic church and the Vatican City State,” according to the authoritative work on the Holy See’s international relations, written by Archbishop Hyginus Eugene Cardinale, who was a Vatican diplomat.¹ Vatican City is temporal and territorial; the Holy See, a more nebulous construct, is religious.

The term Holy See has multiple meanings. In one sense it is simply the pope’s “see,” or diocese (the authority and jurisdiction of a bishop), including not just Vatican City but also Rome. In another sense, as the “central government” of the church, it refers to the pope, the Roman Curia, and the College of Cardinals together.² Also called the Apostolic See, the Holy See refers to the pope’s “authority, jurisdiction, and sovereignty” in both the “spiritual and temporal governance and guidance” of the church, including Vatican City.³

Although the Holy See is not the same thing as the Roman Catholic church—which encompasses

the adherents as well—“it exists and operates within the international community as the juridical personification of the Church.”⁴

Legally, the Holy See and Vatican City are distinct entities with a relationship unique in international law. The Vatican city-state exists to administer the properties belonging to the Holy See and to insure the ecclesial independence of the Holy See. The Holy See holds sovereign authority over Vatican City and carries out international relations on the city-state’s behalf as well as on behalf of the Roman Catholic church.⁵ While Vatican City does not enter into diplomatic relations, the Holy See is active in the United Nations and maintains full diplomatic relations with 157 countries.⁶

IS THE HOLY SEE CONSIDERED A STATE?

No, despite its designation as a non-member “state” permanent observer, “the Holy See is not a state,” according to Cardinale.⁷ It is a religious entity without defined temporal territory.⁸ Diplomatically, however, many countries treat the Holy See “as being on the same footing as a state” because of the influence of the pope, as leader of Catholics worldwide.⁹ According to its Permanent Observer Mission, the Holy See can enter into treaties as the “juridical equal of a state.”¹⁰

In international law, statehood traditionally rests on four criteria: a permanent population; a defined territory; a government; and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.¹¹ The United Nations Charter, while requiring statehood for membership, does not define a “state.”

Unlike the Holy See, Vatican City is considered a state. At less than half a square kilometer and with fewer than 1000 residents—only about half of those being citizens—it is the smallest entity in the world

claiming statehood.¹² In order to administer and safeguard the property of the Holy See, the State of Vatican City was established by the 1929 Lateran Treaty, between the papacy and Italy, which had seized the Papal States during the Italian unification.

WHY IS THE HOLY SEE, A RELIGIOUS NON-STATE—AND NOT VATICAN CITY—ACTIVE IN THE UNITED NATIONS?

There was confusion over Vatican/Holy See terminology at the United Nations during the 1950s. Official UN documents referred to UN relations with the “State of the Vatican City,” but in an exchange of letters with the UN secretary-general in 1957, the church sought and secured the agreement that it was the Holy See that maintained relations with the United Nations.¹³

The decision, according to Cardinale, was based on the church’s desire to stress the pope’s spiritual leadership rather than his temporal sovereignty.¹⁴ “This opportune classification immensely broadened the perimeter of the papacy’s interest” in the United Nations’ many activities.

At the same time, the Permanent Observer Mission sees to the interests of Vatican City as well as those of the Holy See. “It is up to the Holy See to decide . . . whether, in actual fact, the representatives it sends to international Organisations and meetings are to act in its own name, or in that of the State of the Vatican City, or even in both at once, according to the subject matter. In any event the sending authority is the Holy See and not the Vatican City State.”¹⁵

WHAT DOES PERMANENT OBSERVER STATUS MEAN?

Permanent Observer status is a matter of custom; there is no provision for it in the United Nations Charter. The custom originated in 1946, when Switzerland named a “permanent observer” to the United Nations and the UN secretary-general accepted the designation.¹⁶ To become a Permanent Observer, a state must be a member of at least one specialized agency of the UN system (such as the International Atomic Energy Agency), must be “generally recognized” by UN member states, and

must apply to the UN secretary general for the status.¹⁷

Permanent Observers cannot vote in the General Assembly, but as a matter of custom they have full access to meetings and documents. Permanent Observers may address the General Assembly and participate in its debates.¹⁸ (The Vatican’s observer status in the World Health Organization is similar—a voice but no vote.)

Observers can take part in UN conferences, such as the Fourth World Conference on Women. The UN agency organizing each meeting decides what level of participation to allow observers, and non-member states typically are granted the full status enjoyed by UN member states, including a vote on any question that is put to a vote. The United Nations works hard, especially in conferences, to avoid relying upon votes, preferring to operate by consensus in adopting documents such as the programs of action by which UN conferences address global issues. The practice of operating by consensus gives states with minority views—even lone dissenters—a stronger voice in proceedings than they would have otherwise.

Additionally, recent General Assembly resolutions have called for all “states” participating in conferences to be accorded “full voting rights.”¹⁹

Taken together, these factors have enabled the Holy See to exercise a presence equal to that of any UN member state—including some power to block consensus—at recent conferences such as the 1992 Conference on the Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro; the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, in Cairo; and the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, in Copenhagen. The same will be the case at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing.

HOW DID THE VATICAN GET INVOLVED IN THE UNITED NATIONS?

The Holy See owes its participation in the United Nations to the membership of Vatican City in the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which the city-state joined because of its operation of postal and radio services. The United Nations, soon after its

formation, invited these organizations and their members to attend UN sessions on an ad hoc basis.²⁰ The Holy See began attending the General Assembly, the World Health Organization, and the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in 1951 as an ad hoc observer.²¹ In 1956, the Holy See was elected a member of the UN Economic and Social Council and also became a full member of the International Atomic Energy Agency.²²

HOW DID THE VATICAN BECOME A NON-MEMBER STATE PERMANENT OBSERVER?

While the Holy See was an ad hoc observer, the pope's representative at UN meetings was an auxiliary bishop of New York, who also carried out other duties in the archdiocese. The relationship between the Vatican and the United Nations was one of "mutual experimentation," a Catholic periodical said at the time.²³ Pope John XXIII moved toward closer relations in 1963 when he endorsed the United Nations in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) and, as he was dying, sent Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens to summarize the encyclical in an address to the General Assembly.

In 1964, Pope Paul VI named a permanent observer, following Switzerland's precedent. UN Secretary-General U Thant accepted the designation and announced it within three weeks.²⁴

Paul VI did not pursue full membership. Under the UN Charter, membership entails a state's acceptance that it may be required to commit military power in collective measures to suppress acts of aggression "or other breaches of the peace."²⁵ By Lateran Treaty and by choice, the Holy See and Vatican City are committed to neutrality.²⁶

FOR WHOM DOES THE VATICAN SPEAK AT THE UNITED NATIONS?

Church officials describe their role in the United Nations as being unique:

As a full member of the international community, the Holy See finds itself in a very particular situation, because it is spiritual in nature. Its authority—which is religious and not political—

extends over one billion persons scattered throughout the world and belonging to the most diverse ethnic groups and geographic regions. Its strength . . . consists in the respect that its words, its teaching, and its policies enjoy in the conscience of the Catholic world—a respect that is widely shared by many people who do not belong to the Church. The real and only realm of the Holy See is the realm of conscience.²⁷

When Pope Paul VI arrived in New York in 1965 to address the United Nations, he told the crowd at Kennedy Airport that he offered "to your terrestrial city of peace the greetings and good wishes of our spiritual city of peace." Addressing the General Assembly, he presented the church as an "expert in humanity," and in asking nations to work together as equals, he referred to himself "as a representative of a religion that believes salvation is achieved through the humility of its divine Founder."²⁸

In a papal address to the General Assembly in 1979, John Paul II also claimed a special role. "The nature and aims of the spiritual mission of the Apostolic See and the church make their participation" in UN activities "very different from that of the states, which are communities in the political and temporal sense," he said.²⁹

Monsignor Diarmuid Martin, a leader of the Vatican delegations to Cairo and Copenhagen, referred to "the social teaching of the church" as "the principal inspiration of the positions taken by the Holy See at the conferences."³⁰

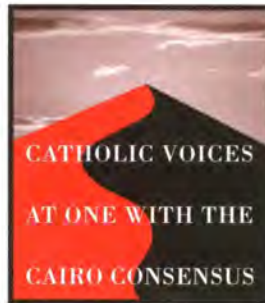
Archbishop Renato R. Martino, the Vatican's "Permanent Observer" to the United Nations—as the ambassador for a Permanent Observer state is called—also speaks of a religious mission. Asked about the Vatican role in the United Nations, when there is no "voice" for Protestant religion, Islam, or Judaism, Martino quoted a Moslem supporter: "The Vatican has a right to be present" partly because, "if you would ask the Moslem to come forward and speak, we would not know who would be the one to speak," whereas there is "one voice" for the Catholic church. Martino added that the Catholic church's "one voice is a message of salvation, found in the Scriptures and lived in the tradition of the Church over the centuries. It is an objective truth

that remains changeless. . . . During the month preceding the Cairo Conference, Pope John Paul II and the world episcopate have applied these eternal truths to the topics addressed by the conference.”³¹

What place does a religious body—claiming to possess the universal “objective truth” and to speak infallibly on moral matters—have in an intergovernmental institution like the United Nations?

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Catholics and Contraception: A Struggle for Control

"If anyone says that it is not better and more godly to live in virginity or in the unmarried state than to marry, let him be anathema." (From a declaration of the church, Council of Trent, 1545–1563)

Sincere people worldwide are baffled by the Roman Catholic prohibition of all contraceptives from condoms to pills. The hierarchy's vehement and absolute opposition to abortion would seemingly lead it to champion contraception to reduce the need for abortion. The church also accepts that population pressures exacerbate poverty and contribute to human suffering; contraceptives could help alleviate those pressures as well. Instead, some church leaders, especially Pope John Paul II, have intensified the opposition to contraception.

The above quote exalting chastity points to the reason: in a church in which all officials are male and celibate, power and control is maintained when the sexual and reproductive functions are resisted. Throughout church history, fear of women and sexuality runs deep. Sexual intercourse, Catholics are told, is not a good if engaged in for pleasure or love alone—it must carry an openness to pregnancy and childbearing. These "goals" redeem sexuality from time honored notions of evil. More importantly, these limits serve to keep distance between the priestly elite and the ordinary Catholic. They serve as a form of control over the lives of all, but most tragically of women, who bear the brunt of avoidable mortality and morbidity.

St. Augustine (354–430): Sexual Pleasure = Sin
A zealous convert after a lustful youth, Augustine dominated moral theology for more than a millennium and has recently re-emerged as a principal influence on ultraconservative theology. Augustine linked original sin, lust, and sex: he asserted that sexual pleasure was the path by which original sin was transmitted from generation to generation. Sexual intercourse, inherently tainted, needed always to be salvaged by the pure motive of

procreation; contraception was implicitly evil. Augustine strongly opposed periodic abstinence, the method today's Vatican extols.

Medieval Years: Monks Put Their Stamp On Sexuality

From Augustine's death to the twelfth century, writings on sexuality were codified by monks and monk-bishops. They gave the prohibition of contraception more of a "corporate stamp. . . ."¹ Popes and bishops, in turn, promoted monasticism and clerical celibacy to prevent the clergy from having heirs with claims to church property.

1140: First Code Says Contraception a Sin

Gratian, a monk, compiled the first collection of canon law that was accepted as authoritative within the church. It declared contraception a sin, but not a grave one.

1230–34: A Pope Calls Contraception Murder

The first papal injunction against birth control came when Pope Gregory IX, the creator of the Inquisition, compiled existing authoritative decrees into the universally binding *Decretals*. The *Decretals* condemned contraception as murder.

1588: Pope Sixtus V Adopts a Population Policy

Pope Sixtus V issued the bull *Effraenatum* (Without Restraint), which used the rhetoric of birth control as murder; the bull applied to contraception the penalties designated for homicide. The bull was directed partly against the sexual activity of the clergy and served Sixtus's crusade to eradicate adultery and prostitution in Rome. Rome had also endured the plague in 1581 and famine in 1578 and 1583, providing additional reason for Sixtus's

condemnation of behavior that would restrain population growth.

Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation: Fresh Thinking

The Renaissance and Counter-Reformation brought fresh thinking and new influences to bear on Catholic ideas about marriage and sexuality. The theology of Thomas Aquinas was dominant. He had asserted that contraception violates nature's order because sex is clearly nature's way of propagating species. But he set the stage for moderate reform by saying that marital intercourse is good and therefore so is the pleasure in it. Theologians defended sex as legitimate when one used sex to pay the "marriage debt"—that is, to meet the sexual demands of one's partner.

Council of Trent (1545–1563): Religious Rivalry Rules the Day

Catholic-Protestant rivalry fueled competition for strength in numbers and, therefore, support for the prohibition of contraception. Similarly, in reaction against the Protestant rejection of clerical celibacy, Catholicism insisted that celibacy is better than sexual marriage. The bishops declared at the Council of Trent: "If anyone says that it is not better and more godly to live in virginity or in the unmarried state than to marry, let him be anathema."

Yet the church's posture toward contraception eased in two ways during the Counter-Reformation. Confessors were told to respect penitents' good faith and not interrogate them so vigorously as to "disturb" those who were ignorant of the "natural law" and unlikely to mend their ways. Also, it was deemed lawful for a wife to go along with a husband who practiced coitus interruptus.

Seventeenth Century: Reasons to Limit Births

In 1679, Innocent XI renewed the condemnation of sex for pleasure, but the condemnation was not severe. Restricting intercourse to avoid having too many children won theological approval. Poverty and the need to provide for the education of existing children were accepted as grounds to limit sexual activity, marking new approval for the idea that "economic and educational reasons were valid moral reasons for not wanting more children."²

Nineteenth Century: The Birth Control Movement

1853: The human ovum had been discovered, and with it, scientific support of the belief that women must be infertile on some days during their menstrual cycles. In this year, the Roman Penitentiary said couples who had sex only on days they believed the wife was infertile did not need to be disturbed by confessors, if the couple had sound reasons for abstaining from sex.

The birth control movement grew through the early twentieth century. The idea that overpopulation causes famine and war gained currency. But declining birthrates threatened to weaken the church, as well as individual nations, and nationalism became an instrument of propaganda in the churches fight against the birth control movement.

Bastille Day, 1872: Contraception and War
Catholic moralists blamed France's military defeat by Prussia on waning fertility and predicted the decline and fall of an underpopulated France. In a Bastille Day speech in 1872, a Swiss cardinal told a French audience. "You have rejected God, and God has struck you. You have, by hideous calculation, made tombs instead of filling cradles with children; therefore you have wanted for soldiers."³ World War I aggravated population related fears, and an alliance of churchmen and politicians enacted laws against contraception in many countries.

Late 1800s through 1940s: Feminism First Seen as a Threat

The birth control movement was seen as part of a broader threat to the church: feminism. Many Catholic bishops and priests tried to exert influence against women's suffrage. In 1944, the chairman of the US bishops' conference lamented "a new wave of perverted feminism that is obviously bent on turning women still more away from the home and towards extradomestic occupation." Contraception was integral to the problem; the conference considered planned parenthood a threat to the "integrity" of the home.⁴

1930: Pope Attacks "Wicked Childless Parents"
Pope Pius XI's 1930 encyclical *Casti Connubii* denounced "those wicked parents, who seek to remain childless"⁵ or who avoid childbearing "not through virtuous continence. . . but by frustrating the marriage act."⁶ "Since. . . the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately

frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious," the document said.⁷

1951: The Church Gets Rhythm

In 1951, Pope Pius XII declared the rhythm method was available to all couples who for serious motives—including economic and social ones—wish to avoid procreation "for a long time, perhaps even for the duration of the marriage." The overriding restriction on which Pius insisted (as does John Paul II) was that rhythm not be used "habitually" for less than "grave" reasons; in fact, if a woman's health demands that she not become pregnant, she must abstain, not simply use rhythm. Abstinence is possible, Pius XII said; otherwise God would not require it.

Earlier fears of inadequate population had been translated into directives against contraception; now population pressure seems to have contributed to a reserved acceptance of a contraceptive practice that St. Augustine had damned.

1953: The Appearance of the Pill

It fell to Pius XII to respond to "the pill," which emerged in 1953. In 1958, he forbade the use of the pill if the aim is contraception. But he confirmed that the pill can be used for therapeutic, noncontraceptive purposes—despite its contraceptive side-effect—under the principle of double effect. The pill was licit to clear up menstrual pain, but not prevent a pregnancy expected to kill the mother: to cure illness, but not to save lives.

1963-1966: The Papal Birth Control Commission

In 1963, Pope John XXIII convened a commission on population and birth control, handing the question to a panel that ultimately included bishops, theologians, physicians, demographers, and married couples.

July 29, 1968: Pope Paul VI Reaffirms Prohibition, Inspires Dissent

In 1966, the birth control commission created by John XXIII and continued by his successor, Paul VI, issued a majority report in favor of permitting the use of contraception. A minority dissented, arguing that to change the teaching—admitting error—would undermine the authority and credibility of the Vatican. After two years of pondering, Paul categorically reaffirmed the prohibition of contraception in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Of

Human Life), while glorifying the exception made for rhythm (or periodic abstinence).

Dissent loudly greeted the encyclical and continues more quietly to this day. Theologians note that the principle of probabilism gives Catholics the right to dissent from doctrine on a moral matter if there is a "solid probability" in favor of the dissenting opinion. "If . . . after appropriate study, reflection, and prayer, a person is convinced that his or her conscience is correct, in spite of a conflict with the moral teachings of the Church, the person not only may but *must* follow the dictates of conscience rather than the teachings of the Church," theologian Richard McBrien explains.⁸

1970s: Elements of Dissent

Scholars criticize *Humanae Vitae* because it reduces sexuality to biological or physical facts. Theologians point out that *Humanae Vitae* fails to see individual sexual acts in the context of the marriage as a whole and assesses marriage "exclusively in physical terms"—the production of children—without regard to its other results or products.⁹ Theologians criticize as hypocritical the assertion that one can enjoy sex during the infertile period, while fully intending to avoid conception by remaining abstinent on fertile days.

1980s: Eruptions and Reaffirmations

In large part, Catholics in the pews went their own way while priests looked the other way. In 1980, a synod of bishops spoke urgently of the prohibition's non-reception among the laity and called for new exploration of the issue. Bishop Patrick Iteka of Mahenge, Tanzania, said that for socioeconomic reasons, African families had to be planned. Indonesian bishop Sudartanto Hadisumatra said the church should help couples reduce the number of children they bore. Archbishop Angelo Fernandes of New Delhi asked for a pastoral statement on contraception that would respond to his people's situation.¹⁰

But the synod's closing statement reaffirmed *Humanae Vitae*, saying that "the transmission of life is inseparable from the conjugal union."¹¹ John Paul's closing sermon was even more severe. He said immediate compliance is expected.¹²

Ever since the 1960s:

The Challenge of Modern Feminism

Feminism has presented an enormous challenge for the church in the areas of sexual and marital ethics

and the exclusively male priesthood. Throughout this century, the church has linked contraception and feminism as intertwined evils. Members of the hierarchy continue to make statements that indicate that one root of the contraception prohibition is a restrictive view of women.

"I want to remind young women that motherhood is the vocation of women. . . . It is women's eternal vocation," Pope John Paul II said in his weekly general audience in January 1979.

"However, a radical feminism which seeks the rights of women by attacking and denying fundamental, clear and constant moral teaching does not reflect or promote the full reality and true dignity of women," the pope explained in a 1989 letter to US bishops.

1988: Motherhood First and Foremost

In his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (*On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*), John Paul again focused on maternity and virginity. Because men neither bear nor nurse children, "parenthood . . . is realized much more fully in the woman," the pope wrote. "In many ways [a man] has to learn his own 'fatherhood' from the mother."

The 1990s: Recent Dissent

A few brave souls continue to question and even disagree with *Humanae Vitae*. At a meeting of the US National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop Kenneth Untener of Saginaw, Michigan, told the assembly that the logic of the birth control position is "not compelling" to Catholics, even priests and some bishops. If the church's positions were put to a blind vote, he speculated in a 1991 interview, most US bishops would opt to change it.

A statement on AIDS by France's bishops in 1989 suggested that using a condom may be better than death. "The whole population and especially the young should be informed of the risks," they said. "Prophylactic measures exist." And Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, told a television audience, "Chastity is possible," but if AIDS-virus carriers fail to abstain from sex, they "should use all known means" to protect others from the disease.¹³

That contraception is an issue of power can be seen in *Humanae Vitae*. Historian Francis X. Murphy, C.S.S.R., writes, "Actually, what the document amounts to is an assertion by the Pope that, as the

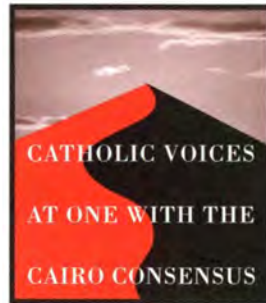
supreme interpreter of natural law, his fiat is final in expressing the Church's moral viewpoint."¹⁴

Journalist Robert Kaiser, who wrote the authoritative chronicle of the birth control commission and the aftermath of *Humanae Vitae*, makes the point compellingly that the issue is power. Referring to Jesuit John Ford, one of the four theologians behind the minority report of the birth control commission, Kaiser wrote this:

Unwittingly, Father Ford gave the game away when he said the encyclical reaffirmed "the power of the magisterium to bind consciences." For Ford, the point was not truth. It was power. The point was not to teach, but to rule.¹⁵

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Abortion and Catholic Thought Through History

Most people believe that the Catholic church's position on abortion has remained unchanged for 2000 years. Not true. Church teaching on abortion has varied continually over the course of its history. There has been no *unanimous* opinion on abortion at any one time. While there has been constant and general agreement that abortion is almost always evil and sinful, the church has had difficulty in defining the nature of that evil. Church hierarchy has consistently opposed abortion as evidence of sexual sin, but they have not always seen early abortion as an act of homicide. Though not commonly known, the "right to life" argument is a relatively recent development in church teachings. The debate continues today.

Also contrary to popular belief, the prohibition of abortion is not governed by claims of papal infallibility. This fact leaves much more room for discussion on abortion than is usually thought, with opinion among theologians and the laity differing widely. In any case, Catholics may follow their own conscience on moral matters even when it is in conflict with hierarchical views. The current pope's attempt to make his position on abortion the defining one at the ICPD in Cairo is only one stop on a long journey of shifting majority and minority views within the Catholic church.

In 400 AD, St. Augustine expressed the mainstream view that early abortion required penance only for the sexual aspect of the sin. Eight hundred years later, St. Thomas Aquinas agreed, saying abortion was not homicide unless the fetus was "ensouled," which he was sure took place well after conception. Church teaching that abortion is a serious sin and grounds for excommunication only became established 150 years ago.

The following brief chronology cannot do full justice to the twists and turns of theological thinking over the centuries. However, it can put the debate

on abortion within the Catholic church in a historical perspective and show the importance of continued debate and open hearts and minds.

THE FIRST SIX CHRISTIAN CENTURIES: BEFORE 600 AD

Early Christianity:

Moving Away from Paganism

Pagan religions had a calm acceptance of contraception and abortion, including the use of barrier methods, coitus interruptus, and various medicines that prevented conception or caused abortion.

Early Christian leaders, to distinguish Christianity from Pagan beliefs, developed ideas about contraception and abortion, marriage for procreation and the unity of body and soul. They taught that even sex for reproduction was bad and sex for pleasure was heinous. Chastity became a virtue in its own right.

100 AD: The Debate Begins

One of the earliest church documents, the *Didache*, condemns abortion, but asks two key questions: 1) Is abortion being used to conceal the sins of fornication and adultery? and 2) Does the fetus have a rational soul from the moment of conception or does it become an "ensouled human" at a later point? This idea of "hominization"—the point at which a developing embryo becomes a human being—would become one of the cornerstones of the debate about abortion and remains unsolved even today.

Early 400s: St. Augustine

Says Abortion is Not Homicide

St. Augustine (354–430) condemns abortion because it breaks the connection between the conjugal act and procreation. However, in the *Enchiridion* he says, "But who is not rather disposed to think that

unformed fetuses perish like seeds which have not fructified," clearly seeing actual human life beginning at some point after the fetus has begun to grow. He held that abortion was not an act of homicide. Most theologians of his era agreed with him.¹

The general legislative agreement at this time said abortion was a sin requiring penance if it was intended to conceal fornication and adultery.

THE MIDDLE PERIOD: 600–1500

ca. 675: Illicit Intercourse is the Greater Sin

The *Irish Canons* place the penance for "destruction of the embryo of a child in the mother's womb [at] three and one half years" while the "penance of one who has intercourse with a woman, seven years on bread and water."²

ca. 8th Century: Recognizing Women's Circumstances

In the *Penitential Ascribed by Albers to Bede*, the ideal of delayed hominization is again supported, as well as acknowledgment of women's circumstances: "A mother who kills her child before the fortieth day shall do penance for one year. If it is after the child has become alive, [she shall do penance] as a murderess. But it makes a great difference whether a poor woman does it on account of the difficulty of supporting [the child] or a harlot for the sake of concealing her wickedness."³

1140: Gratian Code Holds Abortion Not Homicide when Fetus Unformed

In 1140, Gratian compiled the first collection of canon law—the Gratian code—that was accepted as authoritative within the church. In the canon *Aliquando*, Gratian concluded that, "abortion was homicide only when the fetus was formed.⁴ If the fetus was not yet a formed human being, abortion was not homicide.

1312: Council of Vienne Confirms Aquinas On "Delayed Hominization"

The position of this council, still very influential in Catholic hierarchical teaching, confirmed the conception of man put forth by St. Thomas Aquinas. He said that the fetus is first endowed with a vegetative soul, then an animal soul, and then when the body is developed, a rational soul. This theory of "delayed hominization" is the most consistent thread throughout church history on abortion.

While St. Thomas Aquinas opposed abortion as a form of contraception and a sin against marriage, he maintained that abortion was not a sin of homicide unless the fetus is ensouled, and thus, a human being.⁵

PRE-MODERN PERIOD: 1500–1750

1588: Making the Penalty for Abortion Excommunication

Concerned about prostitution in Rome, Pope Sixtus V issued the bull *Effraenatum* (Without Restraint) and applied to contraception and abortion, at any stage of pregnancy, the penalties designated for a homicide. The prescribed penance was now excommunication. There were no exceptions for therapeutic abortion.⁶

1591: Quickly Relaxing the Rules

Only three years after Pope Sixtus V issued his *Effraenatum*, he died and Gregory XIV succeeded him. Gregory felt Sixtus's stand was too harsh and in conflict with penitential practices and theological views on ensoulment. He issued *Sedes apostolica* recommending that, "where no homicide or no animated fetus is involved, not to punish more strictly than the sacred canons or civil legislation does." This papal pronouncement lasted until 1869.⁷

1679: Denying Abortion to Pregnant Girls Facing Murder by Their Families

Abortion had consistently been considered wrong if used to conceal sexual sins. Pope Innocent XI attempted to define the "outer limits of permissible teaching" when he rejected the idea that abortion is permissible even in situations in which the parents of a girl would murder her for becoming pregnant. The church was still teaching delayed hominization, but said hominization occurred some time before the moment of birth.

THE MODERN ERA: 1750–PRESENT

1869: Requiring Excommunication for All Abortions

Pope Pius IX's *Apostolicae sedis* completely ignores the question of hominization and requires excommunication for abortion at any stage of pregnancy.⁹ He said all abortion was homicide. His statement was the first implicit endorsement of immediate hominization by the church.

1917: Excommunicating Doctors and Nurses Performing Abortions

In the *Code of Canon Law*, the first new edition of canon law since Gratian's in 1140, excommunication was required for both the woman and any others, such as doctors and nurses, who take part in an abortion.¹⁰

1930: Condemning Therapeutic Abortions

Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical *Casti Connubii* (Of Chaste Spouses), condemning abortion in general, and specifically in three instances: in the case of therapeutic abortion, which it is killing an innocent; in marriage to prevent offspring; and on social and eugenic grounds as practiced by some governments.¹¹ Pius's stance on abortion continues as the hierarchical view. This document did not purport to be infallible teaching, but as an address by the pope to the bishops it carried great moral authority.

1965: Protecting the Embryo From the Moment of Conception

Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, section 51 declared: "Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception; abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes." Here, abortion is now condemned on the basis of protecting life, not as a concealment of sexual sin.

1974: Arguing for the "Right to Life"

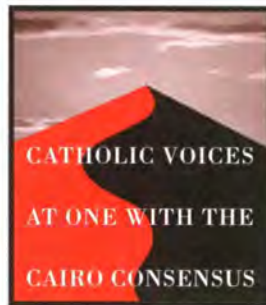
The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith issued the "Declaration on Abortion," which argues against abortion on the grounds that "one can never claim freedom of opinion as a pretext for attacking the rights of others, most especially the right to life." The key to this position is that the fetus is human *life* from the moment of conception, if not necessarily a full human being. The church has now fully changed the terms of argument.

Today: Abortion Ban is Absolute

The Catholic church hierarchy of today does not permit abortion in any instance, not even in the case of rape or to save the life of a pregnant woman.

NOTES

1. St. Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, 15. 17. (CSEL 42.229-230).
2. John T. McNeill and Helena M. Garner, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Octagon books, 1974), pp. 119-120.
3. McNeil and Garner, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 225.
4. John Noonan, ed., *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 20.
5. Joseph F. Donceel, S.J. "Immediate Animation and Delayed Hominization," *Theological Studies*, Vols. 1 and 2, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 86.
6. *Codex iuris fontes*, ed. P. Gasparri, vol. 1, (Rome, 1927), p. 308.
7. *Codex iuris fontes*, ed. P. Gasparri, pp. 330-331.
8. *Actae Sanctae Sedis*, 5. 298.
9. *Codex iuris canonici*, c. 2350.
10. (AAS 22.539-92).



Catholics For A Free Choice An Organizational Summary

Catholics for a Free Choice is the voice of Catholics worldwide who hold progressive views on women, reproduction and sexuality. CFFC's work deals with some of today's most debated cultural and moral issues in some of the most significant forums, including the United Nations conferences on women, the environment, and population and development. With a skillful and accomplished staff of researchers, writers, and analysts, CFFC has become an important source of information and analysis worldwide on a range of subjects, including reproductive health and ethics, religious fundamentalism, population policy, and Catholic church reform. CFFC carries out its work through policy analysis, outreach and advocacy, and education and communications. CFFC was established in 1973 and has headquarters in Washington, DC, four partner organizations in Latin America, and a US staff of twenty.

CFFC articulates sound ethical arguments – based on Catholic teachings – that support the right to follow an informed conscience in making moral decisions about sexual and reproductive matters. CFFC counters the efforts of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to see that public policies reflect Vatican positions. In one recent campaign, Catholics for Contraception, CFFC organized a leadership committee of more than 1,000 Catholics in the United States to voice support for international family planning assistance.

CFFC creates room in the dialogue on reproductive rights for progressive religious voices to present their views on an equal footing with religious institutions. A CFFC initiative, Catholic Voices, is aimed at lifting up Catholic support for the plan of action adopted by the

International Conference on Population and Development. In partnership with the Park Ridge Center for Health, Faith and Ethics, CFFC is also co-sponsor of Religion Counts, an inter-religious group of scholars, experts, and leaders providing a positive, ethically sensitive religious contribution to discourse on issues surrounding population, reproductive health, and development policies. Its Women, Religion, and Public Policy project is an effort to extend outreach across faith lines and across national borders to examine religion's influence on public policies related to women.

The organization has ECOSOC status at the United Nations, and was a prominent NGO participant in the activities surrounding the 1994 ICPD and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women.

CFFC's positions and activities are backed by original, accurate research and study of myriad resources, including church documents and references. Publications feature a quarterly magazine, *Conscience, A Newsjournal of Prochoice Catholic Opinion*, and a number of titles including *Catholics and Reproduction: A World View*, an unprecedented collection of opinion and behavior surveys from around the world; *When Catholic and Non-Catholic Hospitals Merge: Reproductive Health Care Compromised*, a groundbreaking study of the loss of reproductive health services in the United States as a result of consolidations in the health care industry; *Evolution of an Earthly Code*, a history of the changing church position on family planning and population; and *Catholic Options in the Abortion Debate: Reforming Irish Law*, a submission to the Irish government's Interdepartmental Working Group.

CFFC works nationally in the United States and internationally, particularly in Latin America and Europe, to provide materials to Catholics, policy makers, and the media. We work in close collaboration with four partner organizations in Latin America: Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Catholics for the Right to Decide) in Mexico, Argentina, and Bolivia, and Católicas pelo Direito de Decidir (Catholics for the Right to Decide) in Brazil. CFFC is a respected member of the international reform and renewal movement in the Catholic church.

CFFC has been led since 1982 by Frances Kissling, a leader in both the church reform and the women's rights and health movements internationally. CFFC's board of directors includes theologians, public health experts, and women's' rights leaders. The organization's funding comes from some of the world's most respected philanthropic foundations, such as the Ford Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation, as well as from individual Catholics.

**The Rome Declaration
On the International Conference
On Population and Development**

January 5, 1999

Religion Counts

Religion Counts representatives met in Rome in January 1999 to draft and issue this statement, articulating religious support for ethical approaches to population and development, and specifically demonstrating solidarity with groundbreaking agreements made at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development.

THE ROME DECLARATION ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

January 5, 1999

RELIGION COUNTS

Religion counts. Religious values and thought have helped to build the foundation for human well-being and they continue to inspire and guide billions of the world's people. Religions have maintained a sense of the sacred and sustained humanity in times of trial. They have nurtured spiritual growth, spurred intellectual inquiry, and provided moral guidance.

The world's faiths have developed in different cultures and historical contexts. They nonetheless share common moral sensibilities. The different traditions highlight complimentary values. In many indigenous faiths there is a comprehensive understanding of the relationship of human beings to the earth; in Hinduism a great appreciation of diversity and tolerance; in Buddhism a deep understanding of suffering and compassion; in Confucianism a powerful awareness of reciprocity and duty in human relationships; in Taoism an enduring emphasis on harmony and balance; in Judaism a profound regard for the sanctity of life; in Christianity a rich understanding of charity and mercy; in Islam a boundless devotion to equality and justice. These attributions have not been exclusive but are embraced across religious boundaries. They are religion's shared gifts to the world community.

These values are splendidly expressed in the *Programme of Action* adopted in Cairo in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The conference articulated a new approach to population and development issues in which development policies focus on people rather than markets and population policies treat women not as receptors of family planning but as directors of their own reproductive decisions. The *Programme's* positioning of health and education as central components of human development replace a prior concentration on fertility regulation and population control. Finally, the ICPD acknowledged over-consumption in the developed world as both socially unjust and ecologically damaging. These developments represent a fundamental transformation in the way the world community and its policy makers address concerns related to population and development.

The ICPD's PRINCIPLES

The ICPD grounded these advances in a set of principles put forth in the second chapter of its *Programme of Action*. These principles are consistent with four moral norms that reflect core affirmations of the world's religions:

Equality, evidenced in the ICPD's assertions that women and men, whatever their difference, are equal in dignity and rights, and that education and comprehensive physical and mental health services are prerequisites for full participation in human societies.

Justice, which the ICPD states is violated in poverty and great disparities of wealth, and which is at the foundation of its assertion that families, in their diverse expression and as a basic unit of society, deserve defense and support.

Freedom, embodied in the ICPD's rejection of coercion in reproductive decision-making and its recognition that all women and men are meant to be free moral agents.

Respect, embodied in its call for public policies that are sensitive to cultural identities, and its insistence that nations not marginalize migrants and refugees.

RELIGIOUS INSIGHTS INTO THE *PROGRAMME OF ACTION*

People of faith readily recognize many of the values and principles in the concepts and commitments in the *Programme of Action* because they resonate with moral convictions that are deeply rooted in the heart of religious traditions. These principles provide the foundation in the document for addressing the interrelated issues of population and development, including those that require fundamental social transformation.

The *Programme of Action* establishes the elimination of poverty as a crucial means for achieving full human rights and for meeting the objectives of humane population policies and sustainable development. The recommendations challenge economic systems that cause and perpetuate poverty, exacerbate disparities in wealth among people and nations, and recklessly degrade the environment. These recommendations reflect historic teachings of the world's religions, giving a clear mandate to people of faith to advance the *Programme of Action*.

At the heart of the document is a challenge to patriarchal societies. Male dominance bears significant responsibility for women's illiteracy, sexual and physical violence to women, and women's lack of educational and economic opportunity and inadequate access to health care. Religions through history and even today are complicit in sustaining male domination in the societies of which they are part. In recent decades, religious traditions have begun to recognize that their integrity compels them to advance towards full gender equality, including within the religious communities themselves. Both traditional sources and findings of modern religious scholarship are fully in keeping with the ICPD recommendations on women's rights and political participation, education, reproductive health and rights, and socio-economic opportunity in the public and private spheres. Eradication of male dominance is imperative for the sanctity of all creation.

Reciprocity and mutuality in relationships is the appropriate moral and ethical foundation for policies related to sexuality. Prompted by the personal articulation of people's experiences, a reexamination of traditional teaching on sexuality is taking place within most religious communities.

Sexual and reproductive health are of significant religious concern as integral components of human well-being. Both women and men must exercise responsibility in their sexual behavior. Most faith communities accept modern forms of contraception and family planning, and even where there is official religious condemnation the evidence suggests that a great many adherents make use of artificial contraception without a sense of being unfaithful to their traditions. Sexual and reproductive health care, including education and access to comprehensive health services, should be available to all women and men.

The challenge is to provide reproductive and sexual health services to those women and men for whom it is still inaccessible. Religious communities should be advocates for the recommendations for the *Programme of Action* in these areas.

People with HIV/AIDS have human dignity that must be respected. There is no justification for stigmatizing them. Religious leaders and teachers have a particular duty to dispel the myth that AIDS is a punishment from God. In many countries, this devastating disease is killing millions of people, leaving children orphans, partners bereft, and communities crippled. Those who value life should support access to services that prevent the transmission of HIV. The world's religions are compelled to assert their most fundamental teachings on the sanctity of life by advancing comprehensive sexuality education, assertive positions on the use of condoms, confidential HIV/AIDS testing, and support for those affected by the disease.

Abortion continues to be a divisive and complex issue. The *Programme of Action* addresses the question of abortion in a very limited way. It notes that abortion should not be a method of family planning; that abortion can and should be reduced through access to family planning services; it should be safe wherever it is legal, and, where illegal, the consequences of unsafe abortion should be addressed as a public health issue.

Certain realities should be made clear. Where there is a full range of family planning services, the incidence of abortion decreases. In the absence of provisions for safe abortions, even when legal, the rate of maternal death is increased. When abortion is illegal it is poor women who suffer the greatest consequences in the loss of life and health. Children who are the result of unwanted pregnancy can suffer abuse or abandonment. Those who oppose even the modest provisions of the ICPD language on abortion need to be accountable for these realities.

Reflection on these hard truths has caused many people of faith, even those personally opposed to abortion, to conclude that provisions for legal, safe, and accessible abortions are defensible on religious and moral grounds. While the religious traditions differ on the issue of abortion, the *Programme of Action's* limited statements on abortion do not violate the teachings of any of our traditions. Therefore religious leaders and communities can and should support the ICPD on this issue.

CALL FOR ACTION

As *Religion Counts* joins with others in the five-year review of the *Programme of Action*, the following considerations demand our commitment:

1. **Principles count.** The principles articulated in chapter two of the *Programme of Action* must serve as the benchmark against which implementation of specific actions laid out at the ICPD are evaluated. For example, a comprehensive review of family planning programs must not only address their efficacy, but also the extent to which they embody the ICPD's principles.
2. **Partnerships count.** Governments and non-governmental organizations have the opportunity to enlist the support and participation of religions as large and powerful allies for the implementation of the *Programme of Action*. It would be tragic for both religious communities and advocates of the ICPD consensus if this opportunity for collaboration and cooperation were not realized.

3. **Commitments count.** As a matter of moral integrity, nations must keep their financial and programmatic commitments as signatories to the *Programme of Action*. Religious communities and other non-governmental organizations must insist that their governments meet these obligations.

4. **Religions count.** Religions must commit themselves to the realization of the ICPD's goals and assume an active role in the implementation of the *Programme of Action*, including empowering women, eliminating poverty, making provisions for comprehensive health care, and promoting a sustainable environment.

Religion Counts affirms the powerful message of the *Programme of Action*. All nations, all peoples, and all religions share this world in relationships of interdependence. The immense challenges taken on in Cairo five years ago by the countries of the United Nations can only be addressed in an environment of mutual respect.

Religion counts. This is a moment to make it count for the common good of all humanity and the whole of creation.

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CATHOLICS
AND CAIRO:
A COMMON
LANGUAGE

CATHOLIC VOICES

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**HOLD FOR RELEASE UNTIL:
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**UNPLANNED PREGNANCY COMMON WORLDWIDE
Neither Legal Status of Abortion nor Health Risk
Deters Women from Terminating Pregnancies**

Four in 10 Pregnancies Unplanned—Half of Which End in Abortion

Each year, about 35 of every 1,000 women of childbearing age in the world have an induced abortion. Despite variations in the legal status of abortion, when women living in more and in less developed regions are compared, their overall abortion rates are strikingly similar (39 abortions per 1,000 and 34 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age, respectively). The slightly higher level in the *developed* than in the *developing* world largely reflects that the *developed* world includes Eastern Europe, the area with the highest rate of abortion (90 per 1,000 women).

Of the estimated 210 million pregnancies that occur throughout the world each year, about 38% are unplanned, and 22% end in abortion, according to a new report by The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI)

- In *developed* countries (where average desired family size is small), of the 28 million pregnancies occurring every year, an estimated 49% are unplanned, and 36% end in abortion.
- In *developing* countries (where average desired family size is still relatively large), of the 182 million pregnancies occurring every year, an estimated 36% are unplanned, and 20% end in abortion.

“It is clear that women the world over go to great lengths to terminate an unplanned pregnancy. It is not only our responsibility but our duty to respect that decision. We must do our best to ensure that abortion takes place only under safe conditions and to see that women

have the means to prevent pregnancy in the first place,” comments Jeannie I. Rosoff, AGI’s president.

The new report, *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide*, examines the major factors that contribute to unplanned pregnancy and the reasons women give for choosing to terminate pregnancies. It provides the most up-to-date information on abortion in both legal and illegal circumstances around the world.

About 26 million women have legal abortions each year, and an estimated 20 million have illegal abortions. The conditions women face when they choose to have an abortion differ enormously from one part of the world to another:

- 25% of the world’s women live in parts of the world where abortion is permitted only to save a woman’s life or is prohibited altogether.
- 10% reside in countries where abortion is allowed when it is necessary to protect a woman’s physical health or her life.
- 4% live in places where abortion is permitted for these reasons or to protect a woman’s mental health.
- 61% of women live under more liberal laws: 20% in countries that permit abortion for socioeconomic reasons, as well as for the narrower grounds described above, and 41% in countries where women may obtain the procedure without being required to give a specific reason (at least in the early months of pregnancy).

Millions of women who live in countries that place severe restrictions on abortion nevertheless attempt to end their pregnancies by unauthorized and often unsafe means. The World Health Organization defines an unsafe abortion as a “procedure for terminating an unwanted pregnancy [carried out] either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimal medical standards, or both.”

Abortions carried out under such conditions place women’s health and lives at risk. For example, of the estimated 600,000 annual pregnancy-related deaths worldwide, about 13% (or 78,000) are related to complications of unsafe abortion. In *developing* regions (excluding China), where abortion is often illegal or highly restricted, abortion mortality is hundreds of times higher than in *developed* countries (330 deaths per 100,000 abortions compared with 0.2-1.2 per 100,000). Mortality due to abortion is highest in Africa—an estimated 680 deaths per 100,000 procedures.

Based on analyses of government data and other research, the information in the Institute’s new comprehensive study on abortion worldwide comes mainly from countries in

which pregnancy termination is legal and the number of abortions is collected by the government. However, some regional estimates and some estimates for countries in which abortion is illegal are also included.

Jeannie Rosoff comments further, “In the poorest countries, women are exposed to the highest risks of death and disability from unsafe, usually illegal abortion—often leaving whole families bereft of mothers and wives. The major victims are women living on the edges of survival, with few prospects that their governments can or will do much to improve their lot.”

The findings from *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide* point to several possible policy responses to reproductive health and social problems faced by individual countries or regions. In addition to providing sexuality and family life education, introducing contraceptive services where these are nonexistent, and expanding and improving them where they are inadequate, the report suggests that

- where abortion services are of high quality and easily accessible, governments need to give priority to maintaining them; and
- where abortion is provided predominantly in unsafe conditions, governments must try to create a consensus in favor of addressing the harmful social and health consequences of this situation.

###

For a full copy of the report, contact Christiane Kirchgaessner at:

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The Alan Guttmacher Institute is a not-for-profit organization focused on reproductive health research, policy analysis and public education, with offices in New York City and Washington, D.C.

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SHARING

RESPONSIBILITY

WOMEN
SOCIETY
& ABORTION
WORLDWIDE

Catholics
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It's time we made
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COMMUNICATION

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Catholics for Contraception

PUBLIC
EDUCATION
CAMPAIGN
1997-1999



the facts
of life

About the Cairo Consensus & The Hague Forum

In 1999, the international community will be engaged in a five-year review of the ICPD *Programme of Action*. Dubbed "Cairo Plus Five" or "ICPD + 5," this process will assess the progress made to date, examine the obstacles remaining, and produce practical recommendations aimed at making the conference's 20-year goals a reality.

About the Cairo Consensus

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in September 1994, was a watershed for global population and development initiatives.

Countries now accept that population concerns are at the heart of sustainable development strategies. Rapid population growth and high fertility hold back development. They help to perpetuate poverty. They make it hard for countries to concentrate on the future, because resources are soaked up by present needs.

But the Cairo conference also put an end to the concept of "population control." The conference recognized that smaller families and slower population growth depend not on "control" but on free choice — the idea, borne out by 30 years of experience, that most women, given the choice, will have fewer children than their mothers did.

Choice means access to reproductive health care, including a range of family planning information and services, but it doesn't stop there. Women and men must feel that the services available and the quality of care meet their reproductive health needs.

The Cairo agenda also means more attention to education for women and girls. It means leadership, encouraging family and community support for women's choices. It means more women active in the community, in government at all levels and in the private sector. It means protection for women's legal rights. It means, in three words, empowerment, equity and equality. It is a powerful idea. It is an idea whose time has come.

The ICPD's 20-year programme is ambitious but practical. It is the outcome of three years' hard negotiation, and was agreed to by all 179 countries, rich and poor, north and south, industrialized and developing, that attended the Cairo conference.

By 2015, it calls for:

- Universal access to quality and affordable reproductive health services, including family planning and sexual health;
- Significant reductions in infant, child and maternal mortality;

- Broad-based measures to ensure gender equity and equality and the empowerment of women;
- Universal access to primary education; and
- Closing the “gender gap” in education.

About The Hague Forum in 1999

The five year review and appraisal of the implementation of the ICPD *Programme of Action* provides non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other elements of civil society with an opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved since 1994 — what has worked, what obstacles have been encountered and where to go from here.

An international forum — The *Hague Forum* (HF) — will be convened at the Netherlands Congress Centre (NCC) in The Hague from 8-12 February 1999.

Immediately before The Hague Forum, an NGO Forum and a Youth Forum will take place at the Netherlands Congress Center in The Hague. A Parliamentarians’ meeting will also be held in The Hague. The dates for the NGO Forum and the Youth Fora are 6-7 February 1999.

The Cairo Plus Five process will not end in The Hague, but will continue at the 32nd Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD). The CPD session is the preparatory meeting to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) that will convene in June 1999 to review implementation of the ICPD *Programme of Action*.

NGO Forum Secretariat

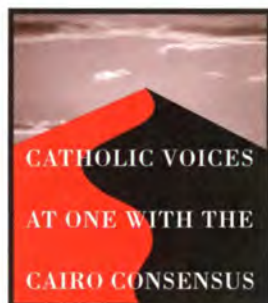
For registration forms and extensive information about the NGO Forum, concurrent Youth Forum, and related activities

Go to: <http://www.ngoforum.org>

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

For information on the Hague Forum and other U.N. activities related to ICPD + 5

Go to: <http://www.unfpa.org/ICPD/ICPD.HTM>



Catholic Voices

Catholic Voices, an initiative of Catholics for a Free Choice, is an international forum on issues of population and development. The forum provides a space for progressive Catholic leaders to reflect, research, and participate in national and international discourse on women's human rights, sexuality, and reproductive health. With special attention to the values and ethics of the Catholic tradition, Catholic Voices supports public policies and agreements on these issues that promote social justice, respect human dignity, and honor the rights of individual conscience.

Begun in 1998, Catholics Voices is in formation. Membership is in the initial stages; to date, seventeen Catholic leaders, theologians, and activists from twelve countries have formed a leadership circle. In December, 1998, Catholic Voices issued its first declaration, "Catholic Voices: Reflections from the Paseo de la Reforma," from Mexico City. The declaration examines the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development through a Catholic lens.

Following are brief biographies of the leadership members of Catholic Voices. Each can be contacted through Catholics for a Free Choice in Washington, DC, at (country code 01) 202/986-6093, or email, cffc@igc.apc.org.



Sheila Briggs
United States

Sheila Briggs is Associate Professor in the School of Religion at the University of Southern California. Her feminist theology research interests are early

Christianity, nineteenth and twentieth century theology, and modern liberation movements. She has been a consultant to the Lily Foundation project "What's Left" on the Roman Catholic left in America. Prof. Briggs is a member of the steering committee of the Feminist Theology and Theory Group of the American Academy of Religion.



Dina Cormick
South Africa

Born in Nkana, Zambia, Dina Cormick is an artist, feminist, and political activist. She earned a Masters degree in Feminist Theological Ethics from the University of South Africa in 1993. An active participant in the reform movement in the Catholic church, Ms. Cormick is a member of the international steering committee of Women's Ordination Worldwide, a co-founder of Women's Ordination South Africa, and a member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.



Elfriede Harth
France

Elfriede Harth is a leader in the Roman Catholic church reform movement. She is spokesperson for the International Movement We Are Church, member of the steering committee of Women's Ordination Worldwide, and member of Maria von Magdala, an association working for women's equal rights in the Catholic church. Ms. Harth is currently working on her doctoral dissertation on women, Catholicism, and fertility from the Ecoles des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

Teresia Hinga
Kenya

Teresia Mbari Hinga is Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. She has written extensively on issues surrounding women and religion in Africa. Book chapters have included "Christianity and Female Puberty Rites in Africa: The Agikuyu Case," "Between Colonization and Inculturation: Feminist Theologies in Africa," and "Gikuyu Theology of Land and Environmental Justice." Under a research grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, Dr. Hinga produced a research report, *The Role of Religious Networks in the Provision of Education to Women in Africa*.



Joanna Manning
Canada

Joanna Manning is an acclaimed teacher and writer; in the 1990s she won the Canadian Church Press award for theological reflection.

Her book, *Is the Pope Catholic?* will be published by Malcolm Lester Books in March 1999. An activist for justice, peace, and women's equality, Ms. Manning started the Rigoberta Menchu Centre for Justice, Peace, and Creation, and founded the Coalition of Concerned Canadian Catholics. She has a Masters in Theology from Regis College, University of Toronto.

Philomena Mwaura
Kenya

Philomena N. Mwaura is a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya. She has a Masters degree in Religious Studies from the University of Nairobi and is currently a Ph.D. candidate. She has taught courses on the church in Africa, women in religion and culture, and development of Christian doctrine.

Mrs. Mwaura is deeply involved in the ongoing constitutional review process through the Kenya Women Political Caucus. She has organized and facilitated workshops and conferences for the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.



Anthony Padovano
United States

A well known theologian, author, activist, and commentator on Catholic church issues, Anthony Padovano holds an S.T.D. from the

Gregorian University in Rome and a Ph.D. from Fordham University. He was president of CORPUS, National Association for Married Priesthood from 1988 to 1998. He is vice-president of the International Federation of Married Catholic Priests, which has members in thirty countries. Dr. Padovano is Professor of American Literature and Religious Studies at Ramapo College of New Jersey. He has been a summer visiting professor at twenty-four American universities and has lectured throughout the Americas and in Asia, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.



Rosemary Radford Ruether
United States

One of the world's leading Catholic feminist theologians, Rosemary Radford Ruether teaches courses on the relationship

of Christian theology and social justice issues at Garrett Theological Seminary and Northwestern University. The author or editor of twenty-five books, among them, *Contemporary Catholicism: Crises and Challenges* (1987) and *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, she has also contributed to eighty-five book symposia. She writes regularly for the *National Catholic Reporter*, *Christianity and Crisis*, and the Religion News Service. Dr. Ruether is a frequent lecturer at conferences and universities; she has lectured throughout the Americas and Europe, as well as Israel, Egypt, Japan, Korea, India, the Philippines and South Africa.



Valerie Stroud
United Kingdom

Valerie Stroud has served as a catechist and has been employed in parish administration and pastoral care. She served for several years as

Secretary to the Deanery Pastoral Council, a worker for the Diocesan Liturgy Commission and is currently a member of the Diocesan Christian Unity

Commission. Mrs. Stroud represented her diocese at the 1996 Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland Assembly. A commissioned Eucharistic Minister, Mrs. Stroud now works full time in the reform/renewal movement in the Catholic church. She is the UK liaison for the International Movement We Are Church.



Isaac Wüst
The Netherlands

Isaac Wüst works full time in the renewal/reform movement in the Catholic church. He became a priest in 1956 in Amsterdam, where he was born. He studied Latin American political and social sciences at the Catholic University of Louvain, and subsequently lived and worked in Latin America for many years. Mr. Wüst was executive secretary of the education department of CELAM, the Latin American bishops' conference, for five years before leaving the priesthood. In the mid-1970s, he worked as an advisor to a UN project that introduced new methods for health education, mother and child care, and family planning in remote areas. During the next decade, he was involved in many development and education projects throughout Colombia. Since returning to The Netherlands in 1986, Mr. Wüst has worked at the service of parishes in Amstelveen and Amsterdam.

**REPRESENTATIVES OF CATHOLICS FOR A FREE CHOICE
AND CATHOLICS FOR THE RIGHT TO DECIDE IN THE
LEADERSHIP CIRCLE OF CATHOLIC VOICES:**

Marta Alanís
Argentina

Marta Alanís is coordinator of *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir* (Catholics for the Right to Decide) in Córdoba, Argentina. Since 1989, Ms. Alanís has worked as a teacher in the Archdiocesan Charities of Córdoba. She has worked in human rights communities in Bolivia, France, and Nicaragua, focusing particularly on indigenous women's literacy. Committed to both liberation and feminist theologies, Ms. Alanís has studied with liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and feminist theologian Ivone Gebara.

Paloma Alfonso
Spain

Angeles Paloma Alfonso Aguirre earned her degree

in philosophy and letters from the Universidad Central de Barcelona. She has been involved for several years in a collective, *Mujeres y Teología* (Women and Theology), and in 1997 joined with four other women to form the group *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir* (Catholics for the Right to Decide) in Spain. Both groups collaborate on projects with *Somos Iglesia de España* (We Are Church in Spain). For the past two decades, Ms. Alfonso has taught children and adults, and currently works in a literacy program with women *gitanas* (gypsies) in Madrid.



Frances Kissling
United States

Writer, advocate, and policy analyst, Frances Kissling has been President of Catholics for a Free Choice since 1982. An internationally recognized non-governmental organization, CFFC works to advance reproductive health, women's rights and the strengthening of civil society through research, education, and policy analysis. Ms. Kissling is a highly regarded speaker and thinker on issues of religion, reproductive health, women's rights, and population policy. Ms. Kissling's views on reproductive health issues combine a deep respect for the spiritual aspect of life-giving with a passionate commitment to the moral agency of women. Ms. Kissling has briefed parliamentarians and development professionals in a number of countries, including Brazil, the United Kingdom, Mexico, the Philippines, Germany, Ireland, Poland, and throughout the United States. A leading voice promoting international public policy that advances women's health and rights, Ms. Kissling was a prominent participant in the United Nations conferences on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and on Women (Beijing, 1995).

Teresa Lanza Monje
Bolivia

Teresa Lanza is coordinator of *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir* (Catholics for the Right to Decide) in Brazil. A lawyer, Ms. Lanza graduated from the Universidad Mayor de San Andres in La Paz, where she conducted research for her thesis on sexual and reproductive rights and the problem of abortion in Bolivia. She is a founder

of *Género Y Teología* (Gender and Theology), an ecumenical collective of pastors and theologians. She has written several opinion columns on women's rights for major daily newspapers. Currently, Ms. Lanza is involved in providing information to legislators, opinion leaders, health providers, and the news media on the positions of CDD.



María Consuelo Mejía
Mexico

An anthropologist, feminist, and Catholic activist, María Consuelo Mejía directs *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir* (Catholics for the Right to Decide) in Mexico. Ms. Mejía was named to Mexico's country delegation to the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and participated in the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. Born in Bogotá, Colombia, she became a naturalized Mexican citizen in 1984. She received her Masters degree in Latin American Studies from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in 1986. Since 1990, she has worked as a researcher in the Interdisciplinary Humanities Research Center and as a consultant for the University Program on Gender Studies at UNAM.



Marysa Navarro-Aranguren
United States

Marysa Navarro is Charles Collis Professor of History and Chair of the Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies Program of Dartmouth College, where she has taught for thirty years. She is an academic and also an activist. She has been a member of the board of directors of the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Global Fund for Women and Catholics for a Free Choice, which she presently chairs.



Maria José Rosado Nunes
Brazil

Maria José Nunes is coordinator of *Católicas pelo Direito de Decidir* (Catholics for the Right to Decide) in Brazil. She is a graduate Professor in Religious Studies at the Pontifical Catholic University in São Paulo and at the Methodist University of São Paulo. Ms. Nunes is a director and past vice-president of the Institute for Religious Studies in Rio de Janeiro. With a grant from the MacArthur Foundation, she managed a research project on the Catholic position on abortion. Ms. Nunes is an award winning author and frequent contributor to national and international magazines.

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