

CONSCIENCE

THE NEWSJOURNAL OF CATHOLIC OPINION

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Population Matters

Why Population Growth
Is So Hard to Talk about—
And Why We Should
Talk about It Anyway

LAURIE MAZUR

The Return of the Mad Malthusian Scaremongers

Western Hysteria
Doesn't Look at the Facts

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Population, the Finite World
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ROBERT ENGELMAN

ALSO: Talking About ... Population with

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Catholics for Choice shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being and respect and affirm the capacity of women and men to make moral decisions about their lives.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

IT'S NO SECRET THAT THE 1994 CAIRO CONFERENCE ON POPULATION and development marked a significant change in how many people discussed the topic of population. The prism through which we looked at the issue moved from being about numbers and instead focused on women's health and rights. Policymakers largely stopped talking about population control and instead concentrated on ensuring that family planning services were available like never before.

It's been more than 15 years since that conference and there are many new faces leading contemporary discussions on the topic. A lot has changed—most notably society's priorities and the emphasis we place on certain social problems. The debate about population is now enmeshed with concerns about the environment, development and consumption. In addition, many look at the issue and see very different things. For example, some express concern about the possibility of declining populations in some developed countries while others are concerned about increasing population levels in developing countries. Wherever you look, one sees new tensions with some even making the argument that population is a security issue.

As is the case in other controversial issues, many would prefer that we just didn't talk about them. But as our regular readers know, we believe in talking about tough questions because they matter. So, this issue of *Conscience* includes a number of articles that examine the debate from different perspectives. What is being said? What is not being said? Why do some people say what they say? We are firm believers in the importance of ideas and are more than happy to demand that people justify why they have taken up certain positions.

Noted author Laurie Mazur sets the scene with a wide-ranging discussion about why population is so hard to talk about and why we should talk about it anyway. Next up, advocates and polemicists Robert Engelman and Brendan O'Neill present very different perspectives on what the real issues are. Finally, we asked several of the world's leading experts to join us to reflect on what has changed, why it has changed and where the discussion might go. Martha Campbell, Betsy Hartmann, Anju Malhotra, Sarah Onyango and Malcolm Potts were put through their paces by moderator Claire Fox. We believe that just as we can all learn from listening to those with whom we agree, so too can listening to those with whom we disagree teach us all: advocates, donors and policymakers alike.

We also travel to the Philippines, from where Rina Jimenez David reports on the battle over family planning. And we continue our series on Living a Catholic Life with articles on abortion by Vanna Moore and transsexualism by Hilary Howes. Our next issue is already in the works. Please consider subscribing so as to not miss an issue.



DAVID J. NOLAN
Editor

Do you know somebody who should be reading Conscience? Send us their name and address and we will mail them a sample copy, with an offer to subscribe.

“In the years after Cairo, population issues essentially fell off the international agenda. Now that is beginning to change.”

— LAURIE MAZUR, p12

Conscience offers in-depth, cutting-edge coverage of vital contemporary issues, including reproductive rights, sexuality and gender, feminism, the religious right, church and state issues and US politics. Our readership includes national and international opinion leaders and policymakers, members of the press and leaders in the fields of theology, ethics and women's studies.

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Reading the Pope's Commentary

"SEX, LIES AND CATHOLICS" is a truly memorable issue. I found it challenging and very rewarding. My sincere thanks to all those who contributed to it.

I have one question. In the excellent article by Daniel C. Maguire, "Hierarchy, Sex and Power," he praises former Cardinal Ratzinger in what he calls "his younger and saner period" for his wise commentary on the Second Vatican Council. My question is, would he have said the same thing, and indeed did he ever say it, concerning any other Vatican event or decision? In other words, and I hope I am not too pessimistic here, was the then-cardinal's expressed belief in the importance of the individual conscience the result of his personal disagreement with some of the conclusions of that Council?

Given his lifelong rigidity, this somehow seems more likely to me than Daniel Maguire's more hopeful reading. Naturally, I hope he is right and I am wrong, but as the Scotsman said "I hae me doots."

BERNICE DUBOIS
Paris, France

In Defense of the Standard Days Method

I STRONGLY DISAGREE WITH your article, "Prayer: The

Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

Only Chance of Preventing a Pregnancy with CycleBeads." There needs to be a wide variety of family planning methods available in order to give women true choice. Many women do not want to take a hormonal contraceptive, cannot afford another method, or may have other reasons for preferring this approach.

It is absurd that the author calls the method unhealthy. She has clearly not done any research about this method and objects to it solely because it is a fertility awareness method that uses beads.

CycleBeads are a scientifically tested and effective method of family planning. We who believe in the importance of women having control over their own fertility should be open to all methods that give women that control, even if we personally would not choose that method, or don't like what it looks like.

GINA DUCLAYAN
New York, NY

The author works at the Population Council, one of CycleBeads' international partners.

AS A LONG-TIME CONTRIBUTOR to Catholics for Choice, I am very disappointed by the article entitled "Prayer" about the Standard Days Method (SDM) of natural family planning. The title suggests that there is no scientific basis or

reliability to the method, which is inaccurate.

Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health developed this periodic abstinence method based on studies of thousands of women's menstrual cycles and the viability of sperm. Randomized control trials have demonstrated SDM to be effective at actual usage rates that are higher than condoms and just slightly lower than the pill. The method is recognized by the World Health Organization as an effective method and included with other effective methods in WHO's guidelines for family planning.

Equally important, SDM expands choice for women, many of whom wish to regulate their fertility but do not want to use other methods due to religious or health concerns. It brings new cadres to the practice of family planning and some later switch to other methods.

CycleBeads are a tool that helps women track their cycle and encourages couples to communicate about when to abstain—or use a barrier method. This decision by the couple is part of the overall method.

There are indeed narrow and rigid prohibitions by the church that limit reproductive choice. These should be targeted, not SDM, which increases options for women and their partners. It puzzles me that an organization which promotes choice should attempt to undermine this one.

TOM MERRICK
Washington, DC

The Bishops' Sexual Problems

EXCELLENT ARTICLE. PAGE 14, paragraph 4, "It's difficult to give a definitive answer to why the Catholic hierarchy is so sex-obsessed."

Carl Gustav Jung explained it, to my satisfaction: "The un-lived parts of life avenge themselves."

The outstanding journalism in *Conscience* keeps getting better and better.

MARGARET MANSFIELD
Two Rivers, Wis.

Sister McBride

SISTER MARGARET McBride's choice to help save the life of a 27-year-old woman was, to me, heroic. (The woman was 11 weeks pregnant with her fifth pregnancy and her life was threatened by the continued pregnancy as a result of pulmonary hypertension.)

The story brought back memories of my own fifth pregnancy with my youngest daughter. I had four children already—all five were born healthy and beautiful. I had never had an abortion but would have had if I ever got pregnant again. I was bleeding internally from a hematoma and ruptured varicose veins in the birth canal after her birth.

Lying in my hospital room in agony, I was clutching the curtains in my bed, knowing I was dying. I shouted out loud—to my roommates' horror—"God dammit I can't die, I have five children." My roommate summoned help and the resident MD managed to staunch the bleeding and save my life. Meanwhile, I decided Pope

Paul VI could have all the children he wanted. I quit. (I had also hemorrhaged after my fourth child was born.)

I decided to use the pill for a while. I later had a tubal ligation at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital where my youngest was born.

As I pointed out in my testimony to Senator Birch Bayh's committee on abortion reform in 1974, male theologians and popes had, for 2000 years, allowed men to kill real human beings in self-defense based on the Principle of Double Effect. The Double Effect occurs when an action, that is, killing another human being, has a double effect: namely saving one's own life.

Saving one's life being a good effect, the killing of another a bad effect. This principle has been used to justify war with its mass killings or for individual killings. Popes have led men to war and even killed other human beings themselves.

Despite pontificating over 2000 years on birth control and abortion, popes only talked with other males, cardinals, bishops and male theologians who knew as little about the subject as they did. They never spoke to real women, whom they considered the second sex without the same human rights as men.

Popes have never understood the nature of human

sexuality, male or female. Similarly, Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 aimed to protect the reputed infallibility of popes rather than to listen to the married people of the church. In fact, the pope himself overrode the Vatican II Birth Control Commission which supported the use of birth control.

Sister Margaret was dead right and her bishop was dead wrong. I made a similar decision 46 years ago to save my own life rather than leave my children motherless.

DR. JANE FURLONG-
CAHILL, PHD
Hixson, Tenn.

The author is a former board member of Catholics for Choice

Last Chance for Benedict xvi to Purge the Clergy-Child Sex Abuse Scandal

BESIDES IRELAND AND Germany, Pope Benedict xvi should purge any clergy-child sex abuse cover-ups in Europe, South America and around the world by directing each diocese to report all claims of child abuse and their disposition to the Vatican; to be candidly reported; and to make certain they are not occurring now; or going unpunished; to protect the children and to restore the church's impeccable good name.

JOHN TOMASIN ESQ.
West New York, NJ

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The Church and Abortion

Activists Fight Mexican States' Abortion Bans

PROCHOICE ACTIVISTS ARE seeking to add to a Mexico City law allowing women to receive abortions during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, as 17 state legislatures pass measures against abortion. Mexico's Supreme Court recently required all states to distribute emergency contraception and provide abortion access for rape victims. The decision affirms women's rights to health and life by enabling rape victims to avoid forced pregnancies, Human Rights Watch said. Abortion rights advocates have long denounced the states' restrictions. The Catholic

hierarchy in Mexico, however, is supportive of the bans. It also has a powerful influence over some Mexican politicians.

In Jalisco, a woman who induces abortion can face four to 12 months in jail—as long as she can prove she doesn't have a bad reputation, became pregnant through an illegitimate union, hid her pregnancy and had the abortion within the first five months of pregnancy. The sentencing guidelines could result in a two-year prison sentence if a woman had an abortion and a "bad reputation."

The approved measures throughout Mexico could force women to seek out

illegal and dangerous means to end a pregnancy. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that nearly 34,000 women received abortions in Mexico City after first-trimester abortions were legalized there in 2007.

Spanish Abortion Reform Law Goes into Effect

DESPITE THE ROMAN Catholic hierarchy and conservative opposition, Spain has passed legislation making abortions more accessible. Spanish bishops announced they would not sanction King Juan Carlos for signing the law.

The law, which removed all restrictions on abortion up to the 14th week of pregnancy and extended legal abortion to the 22nd week if the woman's life is in danger or the fetus is malformed, was hotly debated and protested before it was passed in parliament.

Some conservative activists argued that when Juan Carlos, who is Catholic, signed the law he automatically excommunicated himself. They cited canon law 915, which states that those who "persist in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to Holy Communion." However, the bishops said that while those in politics who supported the law put themselves "outside the church" and should not receive communion, they suggested that no penalty was imposed on the king.

In 2009, around 115,000 abortions were performed in Spain, mostly because "the woman's mental health was at risk," the health ministry reported. The new law went into effect on July 5.

Nicaragua Shuts Down Debate on Therapeutic Abortion

NICARAGUA HAS ACCEPTED dozens of human rights recommendations from the United Nations Human Rights Council, but refuses to discuss lifting its ban on therapeutic abortion. Human rights groups, medical associations and other countries have urged the Nicaraguan government to at least allow abortion when a pregnant woman's life is in danger or in cases of incest or rape. However, the country's interior minister, Isabel Morales, claimed that the majority of Nicaraguans believe a fetus "is a human being with a right to live."

Abortion was banned in 2006, after more than 100 years of legal medical abortions. Now, women face



© REUTERS/DANIEL AGUILAR

Protestors in Mexico oppose restrictions on abortion.

from four to eight years in prison if they have an abortion. President Daniel Ortega and his party, the Sandinista National Liberation Front, have banned all abortions. Women's rights groups have decried the ban while the Catholic hierarchy supported the ban.

Academy for Life President Criticized for Response to Excommunication

ARCHBISHOP RINO

Fisichella, the former president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, spoke out against the excommunication of a 9-year-old rape victim's family and doctors who helped provide her with an abortion. Other members of the academy denounced him for "not understand[ing] what absolute respect for innocent human lives entails."

The controversy is the result of a Brazilian archbishop's response to a 9-year-old girl who had an abortion after she was repeatedly raped by her stepfather. Archbishop Jose Cardoso Sobrinho declared the excommunication of the girl's mother and the doctors involved, calling the abortion "a crime in the eyes of the church."

Fisichella argued that Sobrinho's actions lacked compassion. He said the girl, "should have been defended, hugged and held tenderly to help her feel that we were all on her side." Five members of the Pontifical Academy for Life, however, disagreed with Fisichella's statements, decrying Fisichella's opinion during a meeting at the Vatican. They waged a back-and-forth with Fisichella in

the media, criticizing his leadership, while Fisichella said the critiques were "personal attacks...motivated by spite." Within weeks, Fisichella was appointed to be the first president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.

Increased Support for Abortion in Ireland

A POLL RECENTLY CONDUCTED in Ireland shows strong support for allowing women's access to abortion in that country. The Irish Family Planning Association announced that the YouGov

poll's results reflect a "significant shift in public attitudes," with more than three-quarters of respondents supporting a woman's right to an abortion in the case of a health risk, rape, abuse or incest. Forty-four out of 47 European countries

Another Catholic View of Abortion

In May, Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Catholics for the Right to Decide/cdd Mexico) launched a national campaign titled "Another Catholic View of Abortion" in collaboration with more than 100 state-level civil society organizations. Its aim was to inform Catholics in nine states that there was no single position on abortion that had existed throughout Catholic history. Using messages such as "the Church does not condemn abortion in many cases," on billboards and in radio ads, the campaign sought to educate Catholics about the church's traditions and teachings as well as its internal laws (canon law), which acknowledge that under many different circumstances women who have abortions are not automatically excommunicated, despite what bishops and many prominent conservative commentators argue.

The campaign generated much positive reaction, including public support from opinion leaders and civil society organizations. Remarkably, members of the Catholic hierarchy expressed mixed views, further demonstrating that there is no single position on abortion within the church. While some bishops have recognized that canon law does provide exceptions to the penalty of automatic excommunication for abortion, many others refuse to acknowledge that this is the case.

In a context in which women who decide to end a pregnancy are condemned and criminalized—especially after constitutional reforms to protect life from the moment of conception were passed with the support of the Catholic hierarchy in 17 states—the campaign has been effective in disseminating comprehensive information on the diversity of opinions about abortion within the Catholic church, while also promoting freedom of conscience and the right to decide. More information about the campaign is available at www.catolicasmexico.org.

provide for abortions to protect women's health, but abortion is legal in Ireland only when there is "real and substantial risk" to the pregnant woman's life. That hasn't limited women from trying to obtain abortions. Since 1980, at least 138,000 women have traveled from Ireland to Great Britain for abortion services. More still have traveled to other countries to obtain an abortion, the IFPA reported.

The YouGov survey also showed 87 percent of respondents believe termination of pregnancy should be allowed if the pregnancy seriously endangers a woman's life, and 62 percent believe termination of pregnancy should be allowed if the fetus shows a profound abnormality.

New Kenyan Constitution Legalizes Abortion

FOLLOWING INTENSE DEBATE in Kenya, a new constitution that legalizes abortion in limited circumstances was ratified in a referendum. The final tally was 67 percent in favor and 30 percent against. For months, politicians and church leaders had fought over, among other things, the abortion provision. Previously, abortion was banned unless three doctors certified that a pregnancy put a woman's life in immediate danger. The language in the new constitution permits abortion in such circumstances and states that "Every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, which includes the right to health care services, including reproductive health care."

Supporters of the abortion provision argued that permitting it would decrease maternal mortality, as hundreds of women die every year as a result of illegal, unsafe abortions. Women who have complications from an unsafe abortion often are unwilling to seek medical help. Removing the stigma and risk of jail would, they argued, help save lives. An earlier draft of the constitution included language that allowed abortion under any circumstance. However, President Mwai Kibaki, who is Catholic, told church leaders that parliament would not pass a constitution with that language.

Some conservative and faith-based groups, with support from American anti-choice groups resisted the final draft, claiming it could open the doors to unrestricted abortions. However, when the vote came, the Kenyan public voted overwhelmingly on August 4 to pass the new language.

The Church and the Sex Abuse Crisis

Sex Scandal Shows Rifts in Vatican

THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY is embroiled in a bitter fight over how to handle the sex abuse crisis.

Vatican officials say there's no reason Pope Benedict XVI should "take personal responsibility" for the ongoing child sexual abuse scandal within the church. Rev. Federico

Lombardi, official Vatican spokesman, has defended the pope's management of sexual abuse cases. In fact, Vatican officials seem to be laying much of the blame on Pope John Paul II, who they say blocked then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger from disciplining Cardinal Hans Hermann Groër, former archbishop of Vienna, for molesting young monks. Ratzinger was also involved, according to the *New York Times*, in the decision not to defrock Rev. Lawrence C. Murphy who molested 200 deaf boys in Wisconsin. (Internal memos show that local bishops and Ratzinger discussed whether or not the priest should be dismissed, but their concern over the potential damage to the church's reputation overrode any actions they might have taken.) Experts say the legacy of the late Pope John Paul II could come under the same scrutiny Benedict faces.

Benedict has been criticized for mismanaging other cases of accused pedophiles in the clergy, including a 1980 case in Munich, when a priest was assigned to minister to children despite a history of molesting parish children. However, the Italian bishops' conference said Benedict had a "determined and enlightened attitude" in holding priests accountable.

"This is not some multinational company where the chief executive is expected to take responsibility," Lombardi said. "The pope is not personally directing the actions of priests around the world. He is their spiritual leader, and he is one who has acted very clearly to confront

this problem." However, the Vatican has been keen to blame others. For example, it recently released a statement criticizing Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos for supporting a French bishop who covered up a priest's history of sexually abusing children, a problem it says Pope Benedict XVI resolved.

A letter written by Castrillon Hoyos, recently made public, praises Bishop Pierre Pican, who spent three months in prison for failing to report Fr. Rene Bissey's abuse of 11 boys between 1989 and 1996. He told Pican, "I rejoice to have a colleague in the episcopate who...preferred prison rather than denouncing one of his sons, a priest." At the time, Castrillon Hoyos was serving as prefect of the Congregation for Clergy. He stepped down in 2006, and left his post as head of the "Ecclesia Dei" Commission in 2009.

Other members of the hierarchy are speaking out against those who do not help abuse victims. Austria's cardinal, and Pope Benedict XVI's confidante, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, has attacked the former Vatican secretary of state and other members of the hierarchy for blocking an investigation into an accused abusive priest, and further harming victims by calling their accusations "petty gossip."

Schönborn said Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the former Vatican secretary of state, blocked an investigation of sex abuse claims against Cardinal Groër. Accusations against Groër began in 1995, when former seminary students

alleged he had abused them, beginning in the 1970s. He stepped down from his position and died in 2003, but never admitted guilt.

Legionaries Admits Founder Abused Boys for Years

THE LEGIONARIES OF CHRIST has publicly acknowledged that its founder, Rev. Marcial Maciel Degollado, was responsible for “many grave acts” before his death in 2008. He has been accused of molesting at least two dozen boys over several decades. The order’s acknowledgement is pivotal, reported the *New York Times*, because Maciel was a friend of Pope John Paul II, and accusations against him were verified by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict xvi. The order made the announcement before the Vatican recommended an investigation of Maciel’s history.

For years, the Vatican ignored allegations against the popular Mexican priest. However, Ratzinger reopened an investigation against him in 2004. The results of that investigation weren’t made public, but in 2006 the Vatican ordered Maciel to live in seclusion. He was never defrocked.

The Legionaries’ statement asked for forgiveness from Maciel’s accusers. However, victims say they find little comfort from the order. Elio Masferrer, the head of the Latin American Association for the Study of Religions, said victims were not properly acknowledged. The Legionaries “think of the sexually abused as if they were people



Marcial Maciel receives a blessing from Pope John Paul II in 2004. Maciel molested dozens of boys before his death in 2008.

in the wrong place at the wrong time,” he explained.

European Abuse Cases Herald “Dark and Bitter Day” for Hierarchy

THE SEXUAL ABUSE SCANDAL in Europe has spread.

Following the resignation of Bishop Roger Vangheluwe of Bruges, who admitted sexually abusing a young boy, police detained members of the Belgian bishops conference as they met with the Vatican ambassador and carried out searches in three locations. The police removed files and computers, and drilled into the tombs of two cardinals in search of evidence.

Archabbot Bruno Becker of Salzburg resigned in March after admitting he molested an 11-year-old boy about 40 years ago while questioning him about being abused by two monks at Sankt Peter’s

Abbey. Prior Korbinian Birnbacher from Sankt Peter, said, “This is a dark and bitter day for the church and for our monastery.” The arch-abbot’s resignation comes on the heels of more accusations of clerical abuse at a boarding school in Mehrerau Abbey, also in Austria.

In Germany there are ongoing investigations into alleged sexual abuse in 18 of the country’s 27 dioceses, including some cases in a church choir run by Fr. Georg Ratzinger (brother of Pope Benedict xvi).

The Dutch hierarchy has ordered an independent investigation into the sexual abuse of children by priests in the Netherlands, where more than 200 cases have been reported. While church officials have offered an apology to victims, it did not come from the Vatican, which angered many of the abused.

Bishops in Switzerland have apologized for sexual abuse committed by priests, saying they underestimated the crisis. The Swiss bishops conference said it was “ashamed” and some members of the hierarchy urged victims to consider pressing criminal charges against the accused. An estimated 60 abuse cases involving priests are being investigated by police.

The Church and Condoms

World Health Organization Challenges Hierarchy

THE WORLD HEALTH Organization has criticized the Catholic hierarchy’s position against the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS. Although the WHO didn’t specifically name members

© REUTERS/TONY GENTILE

of the hierarchy in its statement, it specifically contradicted bishops' recent statements that condoms are faulty and do not stop the spread of HIV or AIDS.

Dr. Massimo Ghidinelli, the WHO's Western Pacific regional adviser on HIV and AIDS, said the organization's statement was intended "to clarify some of these regularly returning questions and doubts about the effectiveness of condoms." The WHO statement was issued just a few days after Archbishop Ramon Arguelles of Lipa in the Philippines made public his proposal to label all packages of condoms with the phrase—"CONDOMS MAY FAIL TO PROTECT YOU FROM AIDS."

Filipino bishops, in response to the country's health department distributing free condoms on St. Valentine's Day this year, claimed condoms have a high failure rate, and "moreover, by creating a false sense of security ... contribute to the

further spread of AIDS." More than 80 percent of Filipinos identify as Catholic. The country has a growing population of people living with HIV and AIDS.

Department of Health Secretary Esperanza I. Cabral said the condoms were distributed as a way to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS. She added that couples "should have complete access to information concerning reproductive health."

The Church and Healthcare

Diocese Ends Sponsorship of Hospital over Family Planning

THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF Baker, Ore., has ended its sponsorship of St. Charles Medical Center in Bend, Ore. Bishop Robert Vasa announced the separation when local religious leaders discovered the hospital was not complying with the

"Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services" (ERDS) of the hierarchy, in part because doctors at the hospital offered tubal ligations.

The hospital was founded 92 years ago by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tipton, Ind., but became a community nonprofit organization in the 1970s. However, it maintained its relationship with the Catholic community and continued voluntarily to follow the ERDS. While reviewing an audit of the hospital's compliance with the ERDS in 2007, Vasa said the hospital and hierarchy had "a number of discussions" and ultimately decided, "that distance is now too great to sustain a formal sponsorship relationship."

James A. Diegel, president and CEO of the hospital's parent company, Cascade Healthcare Community, said the hospital had to remain true to its values of comprehensive healthcare and compassion. He added that

an ethics directive will be designed for the hospital soon. The hospital will keep its name, as well as the cross positioned at the top of the building.

Rome School Installs Condom Machine, Outrages Vatican

VATICAN OFFICIALS HAVE expressed outrage in response to vending machines that dispense condoms, recently installed in Keplero High School in Rome. Cardinal Agostino Vallini, the vicar general of Rome, said the machines trivialize sex and that they "cannot be approved by Rome's ecclesiastical community or by Christian families who are seriously concerned with the education of their children."

However, school officials—and students—support the move, calling it a measure of prevention and education. Headmaster Antonio Panaccione said the machines were at first met with hesitation, but discussion helped parents and teachers come to support installing the machines.

Students told several news outlets they were glad the machines were installed, as "more [protection] is better than less," and that schools and families are the best places to learn about protecting their health.

The school's measure is not a new concept in Europe. About 96 percent of high schools in France have condom vending machines, and schools in Belgium, Britain, Germany and the Netherlands do as well.

Come Again?

The Exorcist

"Harry Potter and these Twilight vampires glamorize the power of evil and this has led to many, many cases of possession among young people."

Rev. Thomas J. Euteneuer, the president of the ultraconservative antichoice organization Human Life International, has added a new title to his résumé: exorcist. He sat down with Deal Hudson, director of InsideCatholic.com, to talk about movies and demons.

Euteneuer acknowledged that he faced stiff competition in his new job, asserting that "the darkest demon is smarter than I am" and admitting that one wily demon offered to help him with his Latin if Euteneuer allowed the demon to stay in the poor soul he was possessing.

According to the "rules" for exorcism, which are only available in Latin at this time, some of the key criteria for priests who are allowed to carry them out are circumspection, prudence and discretion. No journalists are allowed to attend an exorcism and the results may not be announced. Given Fr. Euteneuer's proclivity for seeking out media attention at every opportunity—his only rivals on this front are Fr. Frank Pavone of Priests for Life and Bill Donohue of Bill Donohue Inc. (or the Catholic League as it is more generally known)—perhaps he should have taken up that demon's offer to help him with his Latin? At the time of writing, some demons had taken over the InsideCatholic.com web site, and we couldn't reach Deal for comment.



Sacred Heart school officials told a lesbian couple their children were no longer welcome at the Catholic elementary school.

The Church and Gay Rights

Children of Lesbian Couple Denied Enrollment in Catholic School

THE CHILDREN OF TWO Boulder, Colo., women have been denied next year's enrollment at the Catholic school they currently attend. The women, asked not to be named in an interview with the *National Catholic Reporter*, said they were shocked when their daughters' principal told them the Sacred Heart of Jesus elementary school was "not a good fit" for their daughters, and that they should enroll somewhere else. The pastor of the parish, Father William Breslin, said the family was still welcome to attend Mass, and the girls could attend religious education classes, but they could not attend the elementary school.

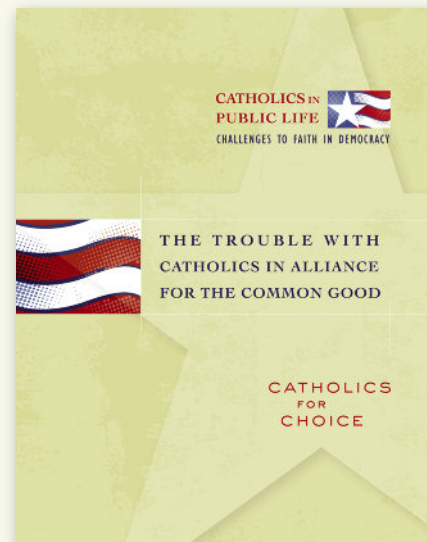
The couple said they did not know what caused the change. They said they both attended Catholic schools growing up, and had family

members who taught in Catholic schools. The family attends Mass every Sunday, and the children have been baptized and raised Catholic. The couple added that they were not seeking attention, and did not conduct interviews with any other media. They just wanted to know why their children were being singled out.

So did the Sacred Heart community. A teacher notified local media of what happened. Parents and teachers both came up to the family in the parking lot, pledging support and sharing that they "live in disagreement with the doctrine of the church." Other parents are divorced and remarried or use birth control, but have not been asked to leave the school. The family said that most importantly, they wanted the community to know, "We will continue to raise our children with strong Catholic values and hold faith that through our actions, we are doing our part to create a more loving, inclusive world." ■

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Population Matters

WHY POPULATION GROWTH IS SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT
AND WHY WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT IT ANYWAY

By Laurie Mazur

POPULATION IS AN ISSUE THAT inspires passionate and polarized debate. On one side are those who believe that unchecked population growth is the greatest problem facing humanity; on the other, a surprisingly diverse group (which has included Marxists, conservative economists, feminists and the religious right) argues that population growth is a complete non-issue.

The truth lies somewhere in the middle, but the public debate on population inevitably veers toward the extremes. Newcomers to the debate are often mystified by its vehemence: combatants hurl accusations of racism, misogyny, baby-killing, cultural imperialism—even genocide. So why, exactly, is it so difficult to have a civil conversation about population growth?

The first answer will be familiar to *Conscience* readers. Like abortion, population growth is inextricably linked to the most value-laden aspects of human existence: sexuality, gender and procreation. Our values and beliefs in these areas are deeply held, inscribed by culture and religion. Debates about these issues are not mere cerebral exercises; we engage them heart and soul, and the outcome seems to determine who we are as human beings.

LAURIE ANN MAZUR is a consultant and author. She is the editor of both “A Pivotal Moment: Population, Justice and the Environmental Challenge” and “Beyond the Numbers: A Reader on Population, Consumption, and the Environment.”

The second answer is more complex. To fully understand the passion generated by this issue, it is crucial to understand the history of ideas about population growth, and the real-world consequences of those ideas—beginning with one man who casts a very long shadow over the debate.

MALTHUS AND THE PARTY CRASHERS

The modern discourse on population began with Thomas Robert Malthus, the British cleric who penned “An Essay on the Principle of Population” in 1798. Malthus’ central argument was that “The power of population is...superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man.” Agriculture, he argued, could only increase production at a plodding arithmetic pace, while human numbers grow geometrically. As a result, population will inevitably outrun food production, until famine, war or other disaster brings those numbers into balance.

But it was Malthus’ stance on poverty and the poor that has made him such a polarizing figure—then and now. Malthus thought poverty grew from human numbers, rather than from inequality and exploitation. While he acknowledged and decried the unequal distribution of wealth, he thought it less important than the “superior” power of population growth. In this way, he placed the onus for poverty squarely on the shoulders of the “overbreeding” poor. And he could be staggeringly unsympathetic to the plight of the impoverished; consider this infamous passage

from the 1803 version of his *Essay*, which was excised from later editions:

A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he had a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claims of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him.... If [the] guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour.... The order and harmony of the feast is disturbed, the plenty that before reigned is changed into scarcity; and the happiness of the guests is destroyed by the spectacle of misery and dependence in every part of the hall....

In this view, the poor are unruly party crashers, spoiling the fun for the better-off. His solution was not to set a few more places at the table, or even throw a few bread crusts to the unwanted guests. No, instead of questioning a political system that produced a few affluent landholders and a throng of desperate peasants, Malthus advocated repeal of England's Poor Laws, a system that provided meager assistance to the indigent, which he thought merely encouraged the poor to procreate.

Not surprisingly, advocates for social justice—notably Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—vigorously denounced Malthus, calling the *Essay* “the crudest, most barbarous theory that ever existed,” and Malthus a “professional sycophant of the landed aristocracy.” These critics (as well as economists from the political right) held that better policies would enable productivity to keep pace with population growth. Marx and his followers also believed that capitalist production depleted the Earth, much as it exploited workers.

FROM EUGENICS TO ENVIRONMENTALISM

And so, the battle lines were drawn. With some variation, these positions have held for 200 years: Malthus' intellectual

progeny still blame human numbers for poverty, resource depletion and a host of social problems; many of Marx's inheritors think population issues are, at best, a distraction from dealing with core issues of inequality and, at worst, a plot against the poor. In this binary discourse, one can care about social justice, or about population—not both.

In the early 20th century, the eugenics movement took Malthusian thinking a



Thomas Malthus

step farther. While Malthus blamed the poor for their lack of “moral restraint” in childbearing, eugenicists argued that the poor's moral deficiencies were innate. They classified several groups of people as “degenerate” or “unfit”—the poor, homosexuals, the mentally and physically disabled. Whole racial and ethnic groups were deemed inferior—Jews, the Roma and African-Americans. Eugenicists sought to manage human evolution by encouraging “more [children] from the fit, less from the unfit,” first through sterilization of these “undesirable” populations, and later, under the Nazis, through mass murder. In the early decades of this century, there was considerable overlap among proponents of population control, eugenics and family planning. Birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger endorsed all three—an association that haunts the

organization she founded, Planned Parenthood, to this day.

Revulsion over the Nazi genocide discredited eugenics (though implicitly eugenic policies live on), but Malthusian thinking has proved hardier. In the 1960s, echoes of Malthus could be heard in Paul Ehrlich's “The Population Bomb.” Ehrlich famously declared that, because of population growth, “the battle to feed all humanity is over.” He warned that hundreds of millions of people would starve to death in the 1970s, and recommended “triage” in foreign aid programs. (India, considered a lost cause, didn't make the cut.)

Ehrlich wrote as Americans were becoming aware of environmental problems such as pesticide contamination and air and water pollution. It was also a time of unprecedented demographic change: world population growth peaked at 2.1 percent per year between 1965 and 1970—a rate never seen before or since. The nascent environmental movement identified population growth as the root cause of environmental problems; as Ehrlich often said, “Whatever your cause, it's a lost cause without population control.”

And many environmentalists wholeheartedly embraced the Malthusian worldview. In an influential 1974 article, the environmentalist Garrett Hardin envisioned the world's nations as a fleet of lifeboats in a churning sea. The wealthy nations' ships were amply provisioned; the poor nations' teeming boats were quickly swamped. If the wealthy plucked refugees from the sea, he argued, they too would go under. Like Malthus before him, Hardin thought poverty was a function of human numbers, and the poor's only hope was to become less numerous. To hasten that end, wealthy nations were advised to resist their charitable impulses and let nature take its awful course. Hardin argued against aid to victims of the Ethiopian famine, which he believed would only encourage disastrous population growth. And citing limits to our nation's “carrying capacity,” he opposed immigration—a view that is echoed by some environmentalists today.

"THE POPULATION BOMB" AND ITS FALLOUT

The US government did not heed Hardin's cold-hearted injunctions to let the poor starve. But it did embrace the cause of population control, for reasons that were not entirely altruistic. A bipartisan chorus of elites, including business leaders and the national security establishment, feared that rapid population growth would fuel social unrest and disrupt US access to critical resources. This view was exemplified by the "Kissinger Report," a confidential 1974 National Security Study Memorandum, which stated:

...the U.S. economy will require large and increasing amounts of minerals from abroad, especially from less developed countries. That fact gives the U.S. enhanced interest in the political, economic, and social stability of the supplying countries. Wherever a lessening of population pressures through reduced birth rates can increase the prospects for such stability, population policy becomes relevant to resource supplies and to the economic interests of the United States.

Such concerns prompted the US government to launch family planning programs in developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s. On the whole, those programs have had significant benefits for women, children and families; they brought contraception to millions and revolutionized reproductive behavior. But, in the crisis atmosphere provoked by fears of the "population bomb," too often programs trampled human rights and health in pursuit of lower birthrates. For example, during India's "emergency period" in the 1970s, thousands were corralled into makeshift camps and sterilized against their will, and hundreds died of botched operations.

And there were seemingly more benign policies of incentives and disincentives, which sometimes had the effect of punishing the poorest and most vulnerable. In India, children were expelled from school if their parents refused to

be sterilized. Other policies forced the poor to make a Hobbesian choice between fertility and survival. In Bangladesh in the 1980s, for example, flood victims who refused sterilization were denied emergency food aid. More typically, family planning clinics that measured their success in "births averted" and "contraceptive acceptors" treated their clients as means to those ends. Clients were often steered toward long-acting contracep-

WHO DECIDES?

Resistance was brewing in other quarters as well. In the 1970s, a resurgent feminist movement rejected population control as an assault on women's rights and health. Many feminists believe that reproductive autonomy is a cornerstone of women's self-determination. As Margaret Sanger said, "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body." Accordingly, beginning in the 1920s, femi-



Motorcycles are stuck in traffic in Taipei.

tives and sterilization, with little concern for their individual needs and desires.

Such abuses provoked a powerful backlash. Many in the developing countries came to see donor-funded population programs as a means of preserving the inequitable global regime of haves and have-nots. Population programs were also accused of "cultural imperialism"—exporting Western values along with birth control devices. These concerns came to a head at a 1974 UN-sponsored population conference in Bucharest, where the newly-formed Group of 77 non-aligned nations rejected population control and called for a New International Economic Order, declaring that "development is the best contraceptive."

nists made common cause with Malthusians to launch the family planning movement. But they were always uneasy bedfellows. Many feminists, especially in the global South, came to realize that numbers-driven population programs simply replaced one form of patriarchal control of women's bodies with another.

In response, feminist reformers took over the family planning movement from within, moving it from a myopic focus on contraception to a broader commitment to women's health and rights. They argued that family planning programs should be designed to meet the reproductive health needs of women, full stop. They showed that when women have more control over their lives—including

their reproductive destinies—they have healthier, smaller families. This has immediate benefits for women and children, and those benefits reverberate outward to communities, nations and the world.

This new paradigm was endorsed by the international community at the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. At that meeting, the world's nations agreed to place women's rights and health—rather than human numbers—at the center of population policy. Rather than focusing narrowly on “births averted,” the Cairo agreement sought to give women the means and the power to make their own decisions about childbearing—through access to comprehensive reproductive health services, as well as education, empowerment and sustainable development.

connection more than quadrupled between 2005 and 2008. In the wake of September 11, there also has been a resurgence of interest in the intersection of population growth and national security.

Some in the reproductive health field welcome the revived interest in population issues, believing it could mobilize new funding for the Cairo agenda. Others worry that the reemergence of the “p” word will undo the progress made in Cairo, or that concern about climate change and security will create a crisis atmosphere, and demographic concerns will again trump women's rights and health.

Here, then, is the question: should advocates for reproductive rights and health embrace population issues, with their thicket of sensitivities, odious associations and checkered past? Can concern

the extinction of nearly a third of the Earth's species. The wealthiest people and nations, whose carbon emissions have largely caused the problem, may be able to cushion themselves from its worst impacts. But the poorest people in the poorest countries—especially women and children—lack the resources to cope with successive waves of drought, flood and famine. Tragically, those who have done the least to cause the problem of climate change will bear the greatest burden.

While climate change is beginning to get the attention—if not the action—it deserves, few are aware that human activities are threatening the planet's life-support systems in more direct ways. Nearly two-thirds of the planet's ecosystems, including freshwater supplies and fisheries, are being used in ways that simply cannot be sustained. The last

Should advocates for reproductive rights and health embrace population issues, with their thicket of sensitivities, odious associations and checkered past?

In many places, the Cairo agreement spurred a sea change in population policy. But its agenda remains tragically unfinished—largely because the world's nations have failed to muster the necessary resources. As growth rates fell and the “population bomb” was defused, policymakers moved on to other urgent priorities. And, ironically, the very success of the Cairo conference invigorated a backlash from the right; conservative groups have launched sophisticated attacks on the Cairo agenda around the globe. As a result, funding for reproductive health (except HIV/AIDS) has fallen sharply over the last 15 years.

RETURN OF THE “P” WORD

In the years after Cairo, population issues essentially fell off the international agenda. Now that is beginning to change: population issues are coming up again, in the context of climate change and other urgent environmental issues. In the US, media coverage of the population-environment

about population growth be deployed to advance reproductive rights and health, gender equity and social justice?

As a left-leaning feminist who has worked on population and reproductive health issues for two decades, you can be sure I have asked myself these questions more than once. My answers: We should, and it can.

A PIVOTAL MOMENT

We *should* pay attention to population growth because we are living in a pivotal moment—for human beings and the planet that sustains us.

The environmental crises we face today are beyond anything Malthus could have imagined. Our emissions of heat-trapping gases—from burning fossil fuels, agriculture, deforestation and other human activities—are altering the very temperature and chemistry of our planet. The impact of climate change will be profound: widespread famine in Africa and elsewhere, more violent storms and

century has seen staggering improvements in human well-being, although those improvements have been very unequally distributed—fully half of humanity still lives in abject poverty on less than \$2 per day. But as we have transformed natural systems to meet human needs, we have shredded the complex web of plants, animals and biological processes that make the planet habitable.

Is this the long-predicted moment of Malthusian reckoning? That is not certain. But it is clear that this is a defining moment in our relationship with the Earth, the moment when we must learn to live within nature's bounds or risk irreparable damage to the systems that support all life.

At the same time, we are living in a pivotal moment for world population. Right now, the largest generation of young people in human history is coming of age. Nearly half the world's population—some 3 billion people—is under the age of 25. Although fertility rates have



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High rise residential buildings are seen behind a slum in Mumbai, India has Asia's third-largest economy. It is home to a quarter of the world's 20 most densely populated cities.

come down everywhere, the sheer size of the current cohort of young people (an echo of the great population boom of the 20th century) ensures the momentum for continued growth well into the future. But the choices those young people make about childbearing, which will depend upon the choices available to them, will determine whether human numbers grow from the current 6.9 billion to anywhere between 8 billion and 11 billion by the middle of the century.

The relationship between population dynamics and environmental quality is not straightforward, as I will explain. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence that it will be easier to meet the challenges of the 21st century with a world population of 8 billion, rather than 11 billion.

BEYOND MALTHUS VS. MARX

Today, we have a much more sophisticated understanding of these issues than

ever before. We have learned that population growth is not the scourge imagined by Malthus and Ehrlich, but it does serve as a multiplier of harmful patterns of production and consumption. Population dynamics can have a significant impact on the natural environment, but that impact is neither linear nor uniform, and it is shaped by a wide range of mediating factors—including technology, consumption patterns, economic policies and political choices.

Most critically, the environmental impact of any given population is shaped by wealth. It is the affluent, slow-growing populations of the industrialized North that bear the lion's share of responsibility for climate change and other environmental problems. Americans, for example, comprise just 5 percent of the world's population but consume 25 percent of its energy. Human numbers are growing most rapidly in the devel-

oping countries of the global South, where per-capita environmental impact is relatively low.

To put population issues in perspective, we need to first step out of the binary debate begun by Malthus and Marx. Then we can see that each side gets some things right. Marx and his inheritors correctly observe that poverty, inequality and environmental degradation are not simply byproducts of population growth, but result from the systemic pursuit of profits and accumulation. And they are right to suggest that more equitable distribution of resources would extend the “carrying capacity” of the planet.

Malthus, on the other hand, was spectacularly wrong about a lot of things, including the potential for increasing agricultural output. But the fundamental Malthusian premise—that nothing can grow forever on a finite planet—has proved prescient. There are limits to

what the planet's support systems will bear, and those limits may be near.

If we hear the truths embedded in this polarized debate, if we take seriously the twin imperatives of sustainability and social justice, several priorities emerge. First, we must address inequality by fostering sustainable human and economic development in the global South. That is likely to entail greater resource use in developing countries. But, since the planet cannot sustain 7 billion people living as we do in the US—much less a future population of 8 or 11 billion—it is crucial that we reduce resource consumption in the affluent countries, and find ways to meet human needs at less environmental cost.

say world population reaches 9 billion, the UN's medium projection, by 2050.

Even in this fantastically rosy scenario, global carbon dioxide emissions would rise to 45 billion tons of CO₂ per year—a 50 percent increase over our current, ruinous level. In this scenario, the difference between a world population of 8 billion and one of 11 billion would be about 15 billion tons of CO₂ per year—half our current emissions and quite possibly the margin between a manageable climate crisis and catastrophe.

In an equitable world, *population matters*. In fact, the only scenario in which population doesn't matter (much) is one where the current inequitable divide between rich and poor remains fixed for

can attain economic security in their own right, they do not need to bear a large number of children to do so.

And Malthus' followers were wrong about the need for coercive population control. In the last 50 years, we have learned that the best way to slow population growth is by making sure that all people have the means and the power to make their own decisions about childbearing. That means universal access to family planning and other reproductive health services. It also means educating girls and promoting women's rights. And it means ensuring that the young men and women of the largest generation have real choices and opportunities in life.

In other words, all the means to slow

In an equitable world, *population matters*.

Is it all about consumption, then? Do human numbers, per se, really matter for the global environment? In fact, in a sustainable and equitable world, population dynamics are more important, not less. Consider climate change. Today, human beings collectively emit almost 30 billion tons of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide each year. That aggregate figure masks vast disparities in per capita emissions: Americans emit more carbon dioxide per capita than anyone on Earth—about 20 tons per person, per year. Europeans emit about half that, and most sub-Saharan Africans come in at a ton or less. Of course, the atmosphere is indifferent to these disparities; what matters for the climate is the overall number, not the per capita figures.

But let us imagine a more equitable world, in which Americans are able to cut our emissions by three quarters, and Europeans cut theirs in half. While we are at it, let's conjure a massive redistribution of wealth and technology, which enables everyone on Earth to converge at an emissions level of 5 tons per person, per year—about the level of Mexico today. And let's

all time, where the rich continue to prosper and the poor—as in Malthus' feast—are barred from the table.

DON'T FEAR THE "P" WORD

If we agree that slowing population growth is a desirable end, what are the means to achieve it? Many refuse to admit the former because they fear the latter. And with good reason: Malthusian "solutions" to unsustainable population growth—turning a blind eye to starvation and misery, coercive "population control"—are abhorrent.

But history has proven that Malthusian solutions are not just immoral, they are unnecessary. Malthus and his followers believed that aid to poor people (or countries) would merely encourage out-of-control population growth and greater immiseration. In fact, the opposite is true. Where aid spurs economic development and greater affluence, birth rates plummet. Especially effective are investments in child health and women's rights: where parents are confident their children will survive, they have fewer children and invest more in each child; where women

population growth are important ends in themselves. And therein lies the hope that we can finally put the long-running battles over population behind us.

The history of population ideology and policy is important and instructive. And, to paraphrase Faulkner, that history is not even past. Today, a new conversation about population growth is stirring. The Malthusians are speaking up: their voice can be heard in calls for a "carbon tax" on families with more than two children, and in proposals for a global "one child" policy. Garrett Hardin's lifeboat is sailing again, as anti-immigrant groups use environmental arguments to promote their nativist agenda.

Fellow progressives and feminists, don't fear the "p" word. We need to participate in the conversation about population growth, and bring to it our voices, our values, our lived experience. Let's explore the issue with nuance and honesty. And let's work to parlay the new interest in human numbers into renewed commitment to the Cairo agenda—and to reproductive health, rights and justice for all. ■



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A new housing development area is seen with the Melbourne skyline in the distance.

The Return of the Mad Malthusian Scaremongers

By Brendan O'Neill

SUDDENLY, SEEMINGLY OUT of the blue, Malthusianism has become fashionable again. The old links between Malthusian thinking and anti-poor people hysteria, racism and the eugenics movement have been glossed over, and now everyone from trendy feminists to green-leaning activists and from edgy

newspaper columnists to respectable politicians is happy to spout the gospel according to Malthus. You can hardly open a newspaper or switch on the radio these days without hearing someone arguing that the world is jam-packed with Too Many People and “something will have to be done about it.”

There are many problems with the return of Malthusianism, with this rearing, once again, of the ugly head of population scaremongering. Firstly, it

is based on hysteria rather than facts, and it is as wrongheaded as Thomas Malthus himself was when he claimed in the 1790s that food production wouldn't be able to keep pace with poor people's rampant breeding and therefore tens of thousands of people would starve to death. Secondly, it reveals today's glaring lack of social and political imagination, where our inability to envision new ways of organizing society leads us to see everything as finite and babies as little more

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than the users of scarce resources. And thirdly, it interferes with women's reproductive choices, morally pressuring and blackmailing them to limit the number of children they have in the name of "saving the planet."

Malthusians have always been wrong about pretty much everything, and they still are today. The predictions of the original population scaremonger—the weird, underclass-fearing Reverend Thomas Malthus (1766–1834)—proved to be wildly inaccurate. In his "An Essay on the Principle of Population," which remains the bible of many of today's population panickers, the crazy reverend claimed that if people (especially poor people) didn't stop procreating, then "premature death would visit mankind." The demand for food would outstrip

in the 19th century and there still are occasional famines today. Yet these are caused, not by women's baby-making decisions, but by the failure of human society to spread the benefits of industrialization and modernity to the whole world, not just the Western world. In short, poverty and hunger are social and political problems, and therefore are susceptible to social and political solutions, rather than being some kind of punishment from Gaia dished out to speedily-breeding womankind.

Following in the footsteps of their population idol, contemporary Malthusians are as wrong as Malthus was. In 1971, when there were 3.6 billion people on the planet, the American demographer Paul Ehrlich argued in his book "The Population Bomb" that as a result of over-

of China's womb-policing one-child policy, on the basis that "as a result we already have 300 million to 400 million fewer people on the planet." We could do with something similar in Britain, she said, where "one British child pollutes more than 30 children in sub-Saharan Africa do." Other apparently liberal commentators have fretted about the "swelling billions" and asked "Are there just too many people in the world?" On a recent episode of the upmarket BBC Radio 3 discussion program "Nightwaves," Dr. Sue Blackmore, a psychologist, said: "For the planet's sake, I hope we have bird flu or some other thing that will reduce the population, because otherwise we're doomed." And nobody batted an eyelid, demonstrating just how mainstream anti-human fantasies have become.

Malthusians make the schoolboy scientific error of imagining that population is the only variable, the only thing that grows and grows, while everything else—including society, progress and discovery—stays roughly the same.

mankind's ability to supply it, he said, leading to "food shortages, epidemics, pestilence and plagues," which would "sweep off tens of thousands" of people.

Wrong. In fact, in the mid-19th century, shortly after Malthus's essays were published, mankind started to devise ingenious new ways of producing and distributing food. Malthus's problem was that, possessed of a downbeat, pessimistic, anti-human outlook, he couldn't foresee something like the Industrial Revolution, which utterly transformed how humanity makes things and transports them around countries and around the world. Humanity put its mind to the "food problem" and came up with some sweeping solutions, leading to a situation where, today, the planet can hold 6.7 billion people—a number that Malthus could only have dreamt (or rather had nightmares) about; in his day, there were a mere 980 million people on Earth. Of course there were famines

population "hundreds of millions of people will starve to death," leaving Asia and Africa in particular as "wastelands." Thankfully, this scenario remained a mere nightmare in Ehrlich's caliginous brain and never came to pass. A few years ago, Britain's fearmongering Optimum Population Trust, which sinisterly claims that the Earth's carrying capacity is only 2 billion people, warned that "for the whole planet to avoid the fate of Rwanda, Malthusian thinking needs rehabilitation." Yet population levels continue to rise, and lo and behold, no "new Rwandas" have emerged.

Alarmingly, so-called "progressives" have recently joined the old, white-haired Malthusian brigade in spreading fear about human numbers. In the PC language of environmentalism, liberals and left-wingers are now also spouting neo-Malthusian nonsense. So last year in the British left-leaning *Guardian* newspaper, a feminist—a feminist!—sang the praises

History itself proves Malthus and his contemporary radical, middle-class disciples wrong. In China, for example, there are now more people than there were on the entire planet in the era of Malthus, and yet their lot is better than it was for most of the unfortunate souls alive in the 1790s. In 1949, the population of China was 540 million and average life expectancy was 36.5 years; today the population of China is 1.3 billion and average life expectancy is 73.4 years. Around 235 million Chinese have been lifted out of poverty in the past 15 years alone. All in the most populous nation on Earth, where there are more "mouths to feed" (as Malthusians insultingly refer to human beings) than there were across the entire globe in the period of Malthus's food-shortage panicmongering.

Also, it is often the most densely populated parts of the world where life is good, and the least densely populated parts where life remains hard. So things are

quite nice for the majority of people who live in Manhattan, a tiny island with 1.7 million people crammed on to it. Yet in Africa—much of which, despite what the overpopulation propagandists claim, is sparsely populated—there remain serious social and health problems. Africa contains 11 of the world's 20 least densely populated nations (and only one of the 20 most densely populated), and it is often in the least populated nations that there is widespread poverty and malnutrition. It is not human numbers or overcrowding or “too many black babies” that cause their problems—it is lack of development and progress. To blame women's reproductive habits for social problems is a disgrace.

The reason why Malthusians—both the old anti-underclass brigade and the new eco-speaking crowd—are always wrong is because they have such a narrow, misanthropic outlook on life, and fail to appreciate the fact that mankind frequently remakes society for the better. They make the schoolboy scientific error of imagining that population is the only variable, the only thing that grows and grows, while everything else—including society, progress and discovery—stays roughly the same. That is why Malthus was wrong: he thought an overpopulated planet would run out of food because he could not foresee how industrialization would massively transform society and have an historic impact on how we produce and transport food and many other things. Population is not the only variable. Mankind's vision and growth and his ability to rethink and tackle problems are also variables. Which is why, flying in the face of 200-plus years of mad Malthusian scaremongering, we have managed to create a world that can fairly successfully carry billions of human beings.

Fundamentally, Malthusian thought represents the triumph of pessimism over experimentation and vision. The popularity of Malthusian thinking today springs from a dearth of serious social programs for taking risks to improve the whole of humanity's lot. In essence, people's inability to imagine new ways of organ-

izing society or new ways of delivering affluence and plenty to humankind leads them to view all problems as a consequence of there being limited, finite resources and too many human beings vacuuming them up. In truth, however, the real problem today is the limits that have been imposed on human thinking and ambition, the sustainability-obsessed strait-jacket we have all been forced in to. Once we wriggle free from this, who knows how far we might increase the “carrying

“female empowerment” and “educating poor women.” I fully support the right of women in the developing world, and everywhere else, to have access to contraception and safe and legal abortion services as and when they need them—but it is disingenuous in the extreme for Malthusians to present their programs as a way of giving women choice. When you promote population control on the basis that “too many people” will propel the planet towards “doom,” on the grounds



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capacity” of the Earth and how much we might improve the lives of everyone on the planet, including those so-called “swelling billions” in the developing world.

But perhaps the worst aspect of neo-Malthusianism is its exploitation of the language of “women's choice” and “women's rights” to promote its population-control agenda, especially in the developing world. Understandably mortified about the fact that Malthusianism sprung from a fear and loathing of poor people, and later became bound up with racist ideology and the eugenics movement in the early 20th century, today's Malthusians have learnt to be PC.

Population-control lobbyists and NGOs frequently promote their agenda in the developing world under the guise of

that every new baby is a “resource depletor” who will leave a disgusting and destructive “eco-footprint,” you are not giving women choice; you are giving them an ultimatum: “Stop breeding or the planet gets it.” You are using moral blackmail and fearmongering to coerce them into making “the right choice.”

It's time we flagged up the choice element of being prochoice—which means we should support a woman's right to have no children, to have two children or to have ten children. It should be nobody's business but her own and her family's, and prochoice activists should be at the forefront of challenging the new Malthusian movement which poses as being pro-empowerment but is really about scaring women into childlessness. ■

ROUNDTABLE

Talking about...Population

THERE ARE MANY different perspectives on population. Some see it as a problem that causes increased poverty. Others argue that population levels lead to increased environmental degradation. Another viewpoint plays down the number of people, arguing that the real determinants of poverty and environmental degradation are the level of development in any given society. Conscience asked some of the world's leading voices on the issue to share their views with us, and you.

Participants

Martha Campbell is the president, CEO and founder of Venture Strategies for Health Development, a nonprofit organization created to improve the health of low income people in resource-poor settings. She is a lecturer in the School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley. She has directed the population program of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Betsy Hartmann is the director of the Population and Development program and Professor of Development Studies at Hampshire College. Her books include "Reproductive Rights and Wrongs" and the co-edited anthology "Making Threats: Biofears and Environmental Anxieties." As a longstanding activist in the international women's health movement, Hartmann has spoken and consulted on international population, development, environment and security issues.

Anju Malhotra is the vice president of research, innovation and impact at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). She is an expert on women's empowerment, gender equality and demographic and social change. She has made extensive contributions to the field in conceptualizing and measuring women's empowerment; maximizing the potential of girls and young women; advancing reproductive health and rights; and developing rigorous but feasible and accessible approaches for monitoring and evaluating programmatic impact.

Sarah Onyango is the Africa regional director of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which implements sexual and reproductive health projects in Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan and Uganda. She has worked in reproductive health and rights programming and advocacy for several years, leading teams in both the public and NGO health sectors. Onyango also was the country representative for Ipas in Kenya.

Malcolm Potts is the first holder of the Fred H. Bixby endowed chair in Population and Family Planning in the School of Public Health, Berkeley, and as CEO of Family Health International (FHI), he launched the first large scale studies of maternal mortality, which helped start the worldwide Safe Motherhood Initiative.

Claire Fox (moderator) is the director and founder of the Institute of Ideas, a think tank that creates a public space where ideas can be contested without constraint. She is the former co-publisher of *LM* (Living Marxism) magazine and a panelist on the BBC's "The Moral Maze." She is a member of the European Cultural Parliament and sits on the Advisory Board of the Economic Policy Centre.

CF: IN 1994 AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON Population and Development in Cairo, reproductive rights advocates were successful in moving the population discussion from being one about numbers to being one about the rights of women. But the debate about numbers

has again emerged as a key factor in the discussion. In fact, the Institute of Ideas has organized a number of debates about that new paradigm in the population debate. So, to introduce today's discussion, I'm interested in whether you agree with that perspective.

BH: I do see the shift happening and I'm quite alarmed by it. I think there are several reasons for it. One, ironically, is that we have a Democratic administration in Washington, so there is an attempt to increase international family planning funding after the years of the Bush administration, and I'm all for that. But I think in the process sometimes organizations are willing to use population alarmism as a way to justify increases in international family planning assistance. And you see examples of that in population agencies in Washington, for example, saying that population growth is the main cause of climate change, et cetera. We also see the strategic use of the threat of terrorism to appeal to conservatives in Congress about this issue. Finally, I think that there is a real sense of crisis, with climate change and the economy being very real issues. In the US there's been a tendency to look for scapegoats and blaming the fertility of poor women has always been convenient in these moments of stress.

MC: I've been worried all along about this concept of blame and I feel we have to be very, very careful not to say the climate change is caused by population growth. Climate change is a very separate issue and is created mainly by people in developed countries. What we need to really look at is specific examples. This isn't

about blame but Uganda is going to triple its population size between now and 2050. I think that people there are going to be greatly disadvantaged. This is not about alarm, it's looking at some real numbers and being willing to say there is a problem here about water supplies, about whether or not there will be tension, because there are a great many young people who are not going to have jobs and a great many young men who will not have opportunities. This is not about telling people what to do. This is about letting women have options on whether and when to have a child. We're not in favor at all of telling women to have fewer children.

AM: I think that there are several reasons for the re-emergence of the population debate. I think part of what Betsy stated is true: there is real fear. There are emerging issues about climate change. There's terrorism. And there is an administration in power that is more sympathetic to population and family planning issues. As a result, all sorts of different constituencies are mobilizing.

That said, I think there's another very fundamental reason. After the Cairo agenda was conceptualized, the Bush administration came in and basically destroyed it. That left a huge hole and we are now seeing the re-emergence of population issues because there is more to it than just fertility and family planning. Between the 1950s and the 1990s, other issues were simmering on the backburner, because the fertility issue was at the forefront. Now that fertility has declined in many countries, we see the emergence of, for example, migration and for others, gender equality. It's partially politics, but there is also a

genuine intellectual hole that people are trying to fill by bringing population back on the agenda. Unfortunately, I think many are still talking only about the numbers games. And frankly, I think there is a great opportunity for the reproductive health and the population fields to be much more creative and put some new paradigms on the table.

SO: In the last couple of years we have seen stagnating use of family planning and contraceptives. Previously, we had seen a steady reduction in family sizes. However, certainly in some parts of Africa, we have also seen major issues that contribute to population growth, like increased migration towards cities and, coupled with high poverty levels and the other negative environmental effects, this gives us great concern. I believe that this leads to the reintroduction of population and development issues and we should consider whether we should be focusing on population or on the rights of women.

I think, as previously stated, we need to be creative in looking at these issues and we cannot start by blaming developing countries. Consumption levels and environmental degradation are not totally dependent just on population levels. So I think the issue is how we can resolve the global issues. We need to be creative but also mindful in looking at solutions.

CF: There has been some discussion about not playing the blame game. Betsy, are you scaremongering about how much the debate has changed?

BH: Unfortunately, I don't think I'm scaremongering because in my work I monitor the narratives that are raised in the population and climate change spheres. I'm very alarmed indeed. You see people like Paul Ehrlich, author of "The Population Bomb" saying these things. You see groups like Population Action International promoting the view that population growth is a major cause of climate change. Population Connection (which used to be Zero Population Growth) put out a mass mailing that repeated the alarmism of the 1960s

and 1970s. I'm seeing this narrative again and again. In addition, something that really distresses me is the anti-immigrant movement in the US. Some of them are masquerading as environmentalists and saying that immigration—by increasing population growth—is the cause of climate change and environmental degradation. We can see the strategic use of these discourses. And hopefully this is a fringe occurrence, but Population Action International, for example, is not a fringe institution. So I am extremely worried.

mc: As a matter of fact, I find most of the environmental organizations are fearful about talking about population at all because of the coercion issue—which was a serious concern at the time of Cairo.

is a discussion in Europe about economic development in India or China, people say, “Well, you know, the problem is that there are so many Chinese people and if they have the same lifestyles as us....” This discussion puts an enormous moral pressure on the developing world.

so: I think coercion per se is always negative and unacceptable. I think contraceptive use has increased over the years not so much because of coercion, but because of the availability of information and awareness and women appreciating that this improves their lives. I think the emphasis really needs to be on promoting the benefits of family planning for the individual woman, for the couple, for their families, and encour-

part, it's women who are interested in gaining that reproductive control and who want family planning and fertility control options that are safe and effective for them and accessible to them.

That's non-negotiable in my mind. So in that sense, I don't think governments are dictating what the agenda should be, but responding to a need. At the same time, I do think that the broader population issue deserves to be on national and international policy agendas. So going back to the fear mongering and talking about numbers only, it's a rather bad and desperate strategy on the part of the population movement. But that doesn't take away from the fact that urbanization, migration, numbers, size, the implications of population growth,

This is a great opportunity for the reproductive health and the population fields to be much more creative and put some new paradigms on the table.

There were some terrible periods when coercion was widely used, in India and China especially, but also Peru. We all know that they shouldn't have happened, but the problem is that concerns about coercing women to have children or pregnancies that they don't want were ignored. What happened is that family planning budgets dropped like a rock, not just because of AIDS, but also because nobody was supposed to talk about family planning anymore.

I don't see that there is any conflict between population and attention to some real numbers and the rights of women. I think the rights of women are very, very important. I don't see any conflict there. I think it's been driven by talk about alarmism and conflict, but there is no need for that.

The coercion issue is interesting. Generally speaking, explicit coercion is certainly unfashionable. However, while people don't admit to it, there is a kind of moral pressure. My experience of this in relation to the developing world is quite straightforward. Whenever there

aging them to use these methods as well as making the methods available. Because once there's a feeling that there is pressure from developed countries, or that their use will benefit developed countries, then it has negative social and political ramifications. Women are always the ones who suffer.

cf: Anju, the Optimum Population Trust in the UK, which has advised the government, argues for a voluntary two-child policy. While it's voluntary, that's fine, but the argument concedes that there are too many people in the world. If you create a climate where the issue is the number of people, isn't that a new, unwelcome shift of which we should be critical?

am: I think that fundamentally family planning access has to be about women personally gaining reproductive control. And at this point in time, I think it also has to be part of policy discussion by government and international agencies and donors in large part, because the demand is coming from women themselves. For the most

age structure, labor force, dependency ratios, are all legitimate issues that should be on the table for a conversation.

cf: Betsy, that sounds harmless enough. On the one hand, it's a perfectly reasonable argument. As part of the discussion about population, shouldn't we just simply note that these things are happening? Are we demonizing them by calling them Malthusians?

bh: The population field itself is very diverse and complex. So when I talk about alarmism and certain people and groups of people or agencies, I'm not talking about the whole population field. I certainly agree that women's control over their own reproduction and sexuality is essential. I also believe it's important to debate demographic issues such as age structure, declining populations, migration, et cetera. What I'm mainly concerned about, though, is that unfortunately the understanding of development often does have a Malthusian undertone. I don't want to brand all

demographers and all development people with this. Again, I think it is complex. But case studies in Tanzania and Haiti have shown that if you have a Malthusian understanding of development, of poverty, of insecurity, of instability, it can end up distorting reality and adversely affecting the delivery of family planning services.

In many countries, you have health-care providers or governments who are already prejudiced against the poor. What we see is that even on the clinical level, women are not given the full range of contraceptive choices. They are pushed to use the most effective methods to prevent pregnancy, not necessarily what is best for their own health. I do think we have to look at all levels of this. I teach population issues, I study population issues, but what I'm concerned about is this resurgence of Malthusian thought.

MP: Two things. Let's get clinical providers out of this discussion. Instead let's teach the entire community to help themselves. You mentioned Haiti. Haiti has an appalling delivery of family planning services because it's over-medicalized. What we should be doing is to teach Haitian women to give injections of Depo-Provera to those who want it. We should take the pill off the prescription in the US. It is over-medicalized.

Secondly, and this is simply a statistical fact: In some parts of the world there is a Malthusian disaster of huge proportions occurring, especially in Nigeria where a population of 140 million people is going to 290 million by 2050. There is no possible way in which the Nigerians can educate themselves, create jobs for themselves or feed themselves.

CF: But, can I ask you, Malcolm, in relation to what you said, is the driving force for you the Malthusian vision of a terrible catastrophe or is that that you're interested in giving women autonomy to control their own bodies—in which case as it happens sometimes they might or might not use contraception? Isn't there a danger that your support for contra-

ception is actually being driven to solve another problem that you perceive?

MP: It's not an either/or. It's a win-win. I'm a biologist. I understand numbers. I'm also a physician. I've offered family planning to thousands of people. I've done abortions. We respect women. We offer them the choices that they want in fertility control. That is the only strategy which we can possibly adopt.

SO: It's most important to give women choices and rights. In most developing

relevant, but that doesn't affect the individual woman. In a developing society, the problem is really at the level of the woman.

CF: You heard what Malcolm said, Sarah, when he said there really is a kind of huge problem of over-population that's going to lead to mass misery and immiseration.

SO: Issues about population explosions are so farfetched from the realities of people's lives. I don't say they are irrelevant, but in terms of mobilizing support



Claire Fox (moderator)



Martha Campbell

countries women cannot make these choices because they are not adequately informed. They're not educated enough. They're not empowered enough. Once we address issues around empowering women to make choices, they will make the right choices. They'll make the choices to have families that they can manage and that are good for their lives. The core of the problem is poverty; the core of the problem is development. In the short term, we need to help women manage their reproductive lives in a way that doesn't risk their lives. In our society, not only are women having large numbers of children, but they can lose their lives as a result of this, or end up with complications that mar their lives in the future. So I think we need to look at the small picture as well as the big picture. The bigger picture is

from people, we have to see where they themselves are affected.

CF: Martha, at the beginning you asked us not to talk about population and climate change in the same breath. But everybody is. Certainly, all the reproductive rights conferences in Europe now talk about the environment and climate change. Babies born today are counted through the CO₂ they emit and the babies that we stop being born are counted as carbon savings. This trend exists throughout the feminist movement. How do you feel about that?

MP: The only strategy which is ethically acceptable and which is achievable and practical is to empower women to control their fertility. I do feel an obligation to tell people about the Malthusian disaster

that's arising and the hell that's emerging because we need resources. We don't even have enough contraceptives in sub-Saharan Africa to meet the needs of the people who live there. That is absolutely unacceptable. I would like somebody in the World Bank to say to the heads of states in these countries, "Look, you have placed a huge number of totally unnecessary barriers between the women and the choices they need to make."

mc: Let's take an example. If you look at water supplies in all of the countries dependent on the Nile, and put that together with the fact that the populations of those countries are going to

Another thing that really worries me when we talk about the Malthusian paradigm or about Malthusian disasters, is the lack of understanding about political economy and power. Who holds power in government? What is the role of international financial institutions? What is the history of colonialism? What is the history of the postcolonial period? Which political parties are operating? Who are they supported by? Which multinational corporations are investing their resources?

I also have some concerns about Malcolm's point about making contraceptives like Depo-Provera widely available without any clinical oversight. I believe that we do need basic health over-

to bring down fertility rates is simply not there. It would be a good thing to empower women and bring down fertility rates that way, but also we need to consider what it means for women's empowerment when fertility rates come down.

When women are having fewer children we see a major shift in patriarchy in society and women's lives overall. What does that mean? My sense is that you can't have one blanket explanation for explaining why fertility rates come down and that it is the only way that women are going to be empowered. In most societies, this is an iterative process.

So I think that we are past the one-size-

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double. There will be great competition over that very limited water supply. There are environmental aspects that should be grouped together with population growth that do not have anything to do with consumption in developed countries. I think we have to be very sensitive with this, and all the way through the population debate. We have to be really, really aware of how uncomfortable people are about the subject because they assume it's about telling people what to do instead of letting them do it.

I do want to say that there is not one country that has achieved economic development or emerged from poverty while fertility is still high. We can't find one. None.

bh: I find that to be pretty problematic. I think development and fertility reduction can go hand in hand, and sometimes development precedes fertility reduction and actually sets the stage for fertility reduction, because of reduction in infant mortality, increased access to education, et cetera.

sight; not all contraceptives are appropriate for all women.

am: I think this opposition between a population perspective and women's rights and Malthusians versus a more enlightened perspective is an unnecessary part of the process. The political economy aspect of it is very important. I also think that we need to consider that individual women make choices within largely patriarchal structures. So to say that this is all just about individual women's choices is problematic.

I think what the data really show is that fertility rates have come down for a number of reasons. They've come down because of development. They've come down because family planning was available. They've come down because in some cases, governments were coercive. In other cases, they were not. They've come down in places where women were empowered. They've come down in places where women weren't empowered. So, in fact, the evidence that you need women's empowerment

fits-all debate. It's not even a developed versus developing country dichotomy, because you can't even classify developed and developing countries. Do you call China a developing country?

cf: There are some very stock philosophical approaches to this debate. Some people think that too many people will cause all sorts of problems for the planet. Others who are committed to women's equality and reproductive rights believe that the problem is not the number of people, but rather is a social problem of production and distribution of resources. I also see a kind of pessimism about the future. One has to bear in mind that the environmentalist philosophical discourse is to argue that economic development per se is problematic.

Malcolm, you're obviously pessimistic about certain areas of the world. Do you think that you could bear more people, if they were rich enough?

mp: Oh, I'm very worried about some countries, which are exactly the ones

where women have not had the access to contraceptives, the family planning choices that they deserve. We're in a very serious situation, probably because we wasted so much time.

so: There are issues that need to be addressed. But I think that looking at the population growth in Kenya as meaning that we will have some 13 million people without a job is very lopsided. They could be 13 million very productive people. One interesting issue that has emerged out of Kenya is that studies show that the current generation wants to have more children that their mothers wanted to have. We need to find out why they have made this choice. I think we need to work out this issue in a balanced manner, paying attention to development issues, population issues and issues of concern to individual women. Clearly, one of the common arguments in Africa is that population densities in many African countries are much less than those in many developed countries.

cf: Thank you, Sarah. That was very useful. I think we should now move on to a discussion about whether there is a birth dearth in developed countries. Is there a crisis of fertility?

mc: I'm not sure that that this is much of a crisis at all compared to countries with enormous populations where the resources are not available even for educating people, because populations grow much faster than educational resources. But people are very worried. Japan is obviously very worried. I'm a lot less worried about it than I am about the fact that women don't have options on whether or not to have another child.

bh: I think there are two things going on. One is immigration. Declining birth rates can have an economic impact in terms of supporting older populations, younger workforces, et cetera. And I think immigration is one way that you can deal with that. So I think a lot of the arguments around a birth dearth are actually

a fear of immigration and there's a racial and ethnic component to that debate.

But also I think it's important to look at the persistence of patriarchy, for example in a country like Italy. If women join the workforce and are then forced to assume a double burden at home, I think in some cases that can also impact how many children women have. So I think social services should exist to assist women who work, and we also need a challenge to the patriarchal structures that don't always allow women to have



Betsy Hartmann

children if they want them. We see this in countries with more flexible work hours, where men participate more in the home and raising children. Sweden has introduced better benefits for paternity leave, et cetera, and we can see that people are having two children instead of just one.

I don't think it's a major cause for alarm, but I think what's interesting to look at is why it's happening and that depends very much on the social context. If it's due to a lack of services for women or the existence of patriarchal structures we need to look at those more closely. I also think we need to be very cautious about the use of rhetoric around any birth dearth because it is often targeted at immigrants.

am: I would very much agree that there is some fear mongering around this issue, in part because of immigration. If you

think about it, when Europe was going through its population boom a couple of centuries ago, a lot of that was taken care of by emigration outside of Europe. In some sense, population momentum in many developing countries is also being taken care of in that way.

I also agree with Betsy's point, and this relates to whether it's a developed country or a developing country, whether it's a high-fertility country or a low-fertility country. The policy environments that you have for the labor force,



Anju Malhotra

education, if family planning is supplied through the health system, the level of respect that exists for women, all of these really help determine whether women are able to capitalize, not just on having the number of children they want when they want them, but all the other things that go with that.

Her point about Italy is classic. Women are having fewer children because there is no support system, and the concept of motherhood still places a heavy burden on women, as compared to Scandinavian countries where fertility rates are not that low, because the policy environment is so much more supportive of women being able to do their roles.

I think that's equally applicable to developing countries, which is why I'm saying that it's not just about giving individual women access to family planning. It's ensuring that while you're doing that,

all the other development processes that are going on are going to be supportive of women as they shift their roles. There are now huge numbers of women in sub-Saharan African who don't want large numbers of children. But you have a lot of places in South Asia, Africa and Latin America where women want fewer children. They see what the possibilities are for them with fewer children. But it's not just access to family planning, but realizing all those other possibilities that's important to them.

CF: Malcolm, I'm coming to you because I want to ask you a specific question. You made a point very early on in the discus-

tion because women can choose when to have children. The children are better off because they are loved and belong to small families and not competing at all with their siblings. They get better education. The children are more healthy. The women are more healthy. It's just a wonderful win-win situation and one of the side effects is that we also have a smaller carbon footprint.

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CF: Sarah, can I just turn to you? One of the things that I want you to consider is how aid organizations and NGOs use language that relates to women's rights, feminism and reproductive rights. Is this appropriate in all cultural settings?

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sion when you made a passionate call for the de-medicalization of family planning.

I just wondered what you thought the barriers are and whether you think that family planning is enough?

MP: I think they've got the same issues in the North as in the South. I entirely agree what was said about patriarchy in Italy and the very low birth rate. Through all our discussions, there is a final, common pathway and it's based upon a very simple set of biological premises. Human beings have sex more frequently than they need to in order to have even a large family. They have sex hundreds or even thousands of times more frequently than they need to have the children they want. So they have to have the information and the technology to separate sex from childbirth. As long as I go into any African hospital and see women suffering and dying from abortions, I am going to believe and assert in the face of everybody in this discussion that the number one policy must be

very low-resource setting. We could prevent 2 million infant deaths on this planet next year if we have all our pregnancies spaced 36 months apart.

CF: I want to take you back to that point you made about the population debate being more about the developed world, because there is a nervousness about it, or at least a sensitivity I think you said earlier. Do you think the big thing in America really is population control?

MP: We have a wonderful, practical example here in California. We have a special program that provides help for people who live below 30 percent of the poverty line. They receive free family planning from a whole variety of doctors that they can choose. A very careful evaluation of the totally volunteer program shows that it's preventing about 100,000 unintended pregnancies a year. That's a lot of carbon emissions. That's a wonderful example of a win-win situa-

SO: We are often asked why we are focusing on women's issues and gender issues. The general public interprets issues around gender, about women's rights, about reproductive rights in a particular way. In terms of communicating, we try as much as possible to be inclusive and promote the involvement of all members of society. This means bringing men to the table because any real dialogue on women's rights and reproductive rights cannot happen without the involvement of men.

CF: Betsy, do you see how this pseudo-radical rhetoric could be used to shroud a reactionary agenda on population?

BH: I have had significant experience in the international women's health movement. We see a lot of international solidarity on these issues and a really conscious attempt not to have an agenda imposed from the West but rather more working it out together. Sometimes the

language of reproductive rights is appropriated by population control interests. We have to be very cautious about that. It does depend on which group you're talking about and you can't paint this with a broad brush. There is a lot of good stuff going on.

For example, the idea of carbon footprints can be useful when you're looking at, for example, the US, as individuals here have much higher carbon usage than people in Africa. But so many of the causes of climate change are more systemic, having to do with industrial patterns, with the types of energy we use, with lack of investment in alternative energies, with no alternatives to the use of fossil fuels. So we see a pinpointing of the individual as the main problem in climate change and therefore population reduction is one of the main solutions. This is very problematic. In fact, I see it as a form of climate change denial because we're denying the kind of real solutions that we need. For example, by capping carbon emissions, green jobs, investing in alternative energy, green innovation, et cetera.

CF: Final thoughts.

AM: I have been trying to be balanced, but I do think that there are some fairly unequivocal points. Malcolm makes a very good case that sexuality and procreation have been separated, and that's a genie that's come out of the bottle and it's not going back in. The population movement and the feminist movement needs to take a strong look at that and see what it means in terms of access to safe and effective contraception on a regular basis for all women who want it.

The separation of sexuality and procreation has huge implications for gender relations overall and women's position in society. The feminist movement needs to tackle this in a positive manner, rather than just being in a defensive mode and saying, OK, well, we're not talking about population control.

On the other hand, the solutions we need to look at in dealing with climate change, economic growth, social secu-

rity, urbanization, et cetera, including numbers, age structure and other aspects of the population debate. Population has to be a part of that policy agenda.

MP: Family planning is a choice; it's not a diagnosis. Doctors diagnose things. People make choices. We have to give people the information and technologies that they need. People who over-medicalize family planning are simply being paternal. The profession to which I belong is a very paternalistic one; we like to control things.



Sarah Onyango

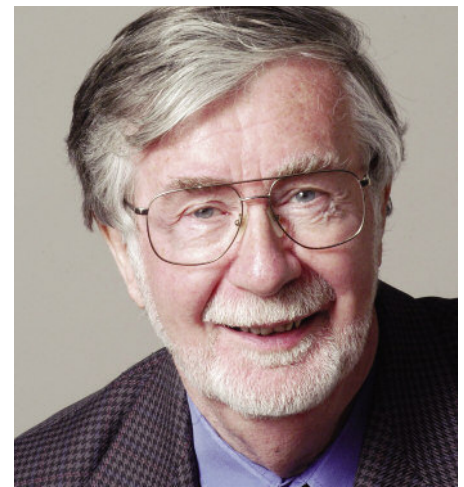
We need to get away from that control. We've got to give women choices about safe abortion. There is no country with level fertility that doesn't have access to safe abortion, including Ireland, because Irish women will go to England.

SO: I agree that we need to ensure that women are adequately informed and have access to the family planning methods of their choice. But, I think side by side with this, we need to be conscious of the environmental problems and address these in ways that have worked in other countries: greener cities, access to water, deforestation. We cannot ignore these, but we shouldn't be talking about population. We should be clear that these are issues about reproductive rights.

BH: I strongly support women and men's access to family planning and abortion

and that would be one thing that Malcolm and I agree on. I also believe we need massive investment in primary healthcare in developing countries, of which family planning is a part. And I think sometimes when we divorce healthcare and family planning, it can be very dangerous.

I'm also a little more skeptical about whether all contraceptives are safe for all women. I do believe we need to look at the side effects of certain contraceptives carefully in terms of which popula-



Malcolm Potts

tions of women they're appropriate for and which not, and for that you need a functioning healthcare system.

I do think that talking about demographic issues as part of development makes sense, but I certainly don't think the return to a Malthusian paradigm makes sense at all. I'm extremely worried about it. It's being well-funded in the US.

To end on an optimistic note, I think there's a very strong countermovement within the population field itself, within the reproductive health and rights field. There are many environmentalists who also aren't buying into this Malthusian notion of the causes and solutions for climate change. They are the mainstream and the alternative is this fringe, Malthusian, alarmist community. I think we have to be very strongly outspoken against it at the same time that we strongly defend women's and men's reproductive rights.



Spanish-language resource further explores the authentically prochoice Catholic position on abortion

Te Apoyamos (*We Support You*) features a conversation between Latin American experts about the abortion decision, playing special attention to the medical, moral, ethical, legal and religious concerns they have encountered through their work.

This new resource is a follow-up to the telenovela-style **No Estás Sola** (*You Are Not Alone*) which dramatizes and explores the experiences of Hispanic women and couples who face unintended pregnancy and consider abortion. Through a discussion between experts, **Te Apoyamos** further explores the dilemmas that may occur when women and men consider this important personal decision.

To order copies of **Te Apoyamos**, as well as **No Estás Sola**, please go to www.noestassola.org or contact Catholics for Choice at cfc@CatholicsForChoice.org or +1 (202) 986-6093. The DVDs cost \$20 each.

MC: I really appreciate Betsy's comments on patriarchy as it relates to Italy, Spain and other parts of the world. I think that educated people should not be afraid of talking about the numbers of people. Numbers of people does not mean population control. I wish we could get rid of the pejorative language of population control. It is not necessary to control anybody. It's as if the Malthusian paradigm has become a pejorative term.

There is a Malthusian fringe, but we don't want to make that sound like the mainstream of those who are concerned about the number of people. When we talk about numbers it doesn't mean coercion. It means numbers and enabling women to have control over whether and when to have a child in a reproductive rights framework is very important. We need to let women have options about their fertility, and I think we all agree on that.

CF: Just a few thoughts, if I may, from my crystal ball. I'm pessimistic in the sense that I think, see and read a great deal of pessimism about the future and I have detected a very deep strand of anti-humanism emerging. I can see a rise in panics about population that I think are less about numbers and more represent a philosophical anti-humanism, a kind of misanthropy about the future. I have been in a number of debates about population. Usually, I am accused of being religious because I think that we shouldn't be so concerned about population levels or of being a climate-change denier by the greens who tell me that if I can't see the catastrophic impact on the planet of too many people, then I'm obviously in denial.

It's interesting that you can discuss as we did today, the issue from all sides. While I'm closest in today's discussion to some of the things that Betsy said, I'm also sympathetic to a number of things others have said, particularly Sarah. Martha was really right to emphasize the need to have this discussion openly and frankly and Anju correctly made the point that in order to reach any solutions we need to be more sensible about it. ■

The Pope's Scientists

POPULATION,
THE FINITE WORLD
AND HUMAN DIGNITY

By Robert Engelman

IT SOUNDS LIKE A RIDDLE: HOW many scientists does it take to change a pope's mind about human population growth? More, apparently, than work for him. And some scientists do. In June 1994, three months before the opening of the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences surprised its Vatican patron by concluding that advances in life-saving technologies "have made it unthinkable to sustain indefinitely a birth rate that notably exceeds the level of two children per couple."

Replacement fertility (the number of children women must have on average to eventually bring about a steady-state population) is, the advisory group insisted, "the requirement to guarantee the future of humanity." Pope John Paul II immediately distanced himself from the report and made sure the news media registered his disapproval.

As good scientists, the independent-minded experts were speaking truth to

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Some have blamed increasing population levels for environmental degradation.

power, while John Paul responded with papal fallibility. On a finite planet, no tree can grow to the sky, and no species can grow infinitely. One can argue about where limits lie. (Many population growth promoters do, calculating that all of humanity could squeeze into Texas, with room for rattlesnakes to spare. They don't mention water, however.) One can debate whether, when or how it is appropriate to try to nudge birth rates down toward long-term sustainability. But math is math, and sometimes math is Malthusian. The world is physical and biological, not merely economic and technological, so human population growth will someday—and somehow—end.

A decade into the third millennium, the theoretical has emerged once again into real-world debate. With a billion human beings malnourished (equivalent to the world's population when Thomas Robert Malthus first wrote on the topic

in the late 18th century), with the global thirst for energy flattening mountains and spewing oil into oceans and with experts stumped at how to sustain 6.8 billion-plus human beings without overheating the planet, population growth is once again a public issue.

We can try to evade the discomfort of the topic by focusing on *too much consumption*, a more satisfying object of blame than *too many people*. But consumption, unequal as it is, remains more a behavioral expression of our numbers than their symmetrical opposite. Consider, for example, the fact that India is now tossing away 500,000 tons of obsolete electronic gear every year, a number projected to double in just two years. Or that the subcontinent's cook stoves send enough "black carbon"—soot, essentially—into the atmosphere to contribute significantly to the melting of the Himalayan glaciers. Or that water scarcity in eastern and

southern Africa has far more to do with growing local demand than with shifts in rainfall generated by human-induced climate change.

Granted, the small families of the industrialized countries have for decades used many times more resources per capita than the large families of most developing countries. It's a fundamental unfairness the world has yet to begin to grapple with—and no long-term climate agreement will win support from all the world's

millions of consumers in the world's wealthy countries—is for per-capita consumption to jump just after population growth rates have crested and begun moving down against the backdrop of unprecedented population size. For long-term environmental sustainability, it is essential to act on both population and consumption (not to mention technology)—not as alternatives but as components of a strategy, not in sequence but simultaneously. The dangers we face as a

always will. For many people around the world, to suggest that an excess of births is a driver of environmental degradation is to reject the value and beauty of babies, children and human life itself.

The challenge is to move away from simplistic either/or thinking and frameworks of blame in addressing population and its connections to development and environmental sustainability. New frames are emerging based on human rights, autonomy, capacity, potential and dignity. Leaving aside the occasional fringe view, no one is seriously proposing suicide, genocide or an end to childbearing or to the species. The dominant paradigm is instead based on the value of enduring human presence on the planet and the all-important need to prevent a slowing of population growth through rising death rates. ("I want as large a human population as possible," biologist and population writer Paul Ehrlich once said, "just over time.")

There is one central principle in this approach to population, and it can serve as a confidence-building test among potential allies from different backgrounds who might consider joint action on population, development and environment. Stated negatively, that principle is: no coercion in addressing births and fertility. Stated positively, it is: *intentional parenting*. Mainstream and centrist organizations working in population from a public health perspective without exception frame this in terms that few people can disagree with: What harm is done, and how much good can be gained in so many arenas, when all women everywhere are fully able to choose at each step of their reproductive lives whether and when to become pregnant?

The available statistics are less than absolutely certain but encouraging nonetheless. At least 215 million women, based on survey work in developing countries, are sexually active and do not want to become pregnant, yet are not using effective contraception. (Given high proportions of unintended pregnancies even in wealthy countries like the United States, millions of women in developed countries probably fall into this category as well, but they are not counted compa-



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Increased demands for agricultural land had led to deforestation.

nations without addressing this inequity. Yet rich countries multiply their lavish resource use with vast and still-growing populations, making their numbers an issue for them as well. And developing countries are now in the position of undermining their own and the global environment with per capita consumption levels that, while modest, are climbing rapidly at the same time that large and expanding populations multiply the impact.

Indeed, an awkward aspect of consumption is that at even the most modest levels population growth can push its consequences to ever higher plateaus, overwhelming any successes achieved by living more simply or efficiently. The common pattern—as with the computers of India, and much earlier with the hundreds of

species on a living planet are simply too great to ignore a factor as important as our numbers.

The difficulty is in assessing the urgency of action on population and what such action might look like. The 1994 disagreement between Pope John Paul II and his scientists hints at the problem. The scientists saw the imperative of reaching replacement fertility. The pope had to reject that imperative out of fear its acceptance would undermine his vision of humanity as the crown of a divine creation subject to a divine command not to interfere unnaturally with reproduction. Even leaving aside disagreements over whether contraception and abortion are sinful, this difference in worldviews has long frustrated progress on population and quite possibly

rably.) If the governments of the world could make this “unmet need” a rare thing, according to calculations by Scott Moreland and colleagues at the Futures Group in Washington, DC, it is likely that world population growth would come closer to the United Nations Population Division’s low variant projection by mid-century rather than the oft-cited medium one. The medium projection foresees 9.15 billion people on earth in 2050, based on a no-surprise scenario of continuation of current trends in birth and death rates. The low variant projection foresees 8 billion.

Or consider the estimated 75 million unintended or mistimed pregnancies that occur annually in developing countries. If this number, or the unknown higher total for the world as a whole, ever approached zero, it’s likely that world population growth rates would fall by roughly half and eventually move into modestly negative territory, leading to a world population size that could be drifting downward before the century’s midpoint. Put in other words, the pope’s scientists would get their wish: birth rates indefinitely sustainable on the finite planet.

A few caveats are needed about this likely outcome, however. One is that today’s global replacement fertility rate is, at more than 2.3 children per woman, well above the commonly understood rate of 2 or 2.1 children. Tragically, many young people die before their own reproduction, and in some large countries anti-female bias skews sex ratios toward a preponderance of males. Fortunately, the same basket of reproductive healthcare services that enable women to have wanted childbirths in safety and health, and the policies that elevate women’s status to promote intentional childbearing, should also help bring replacement fertility to its ideal level of just over two children per woman. But that means the global replacement fertility rate will be moving lower even while the world’s actual fertility rate chases it from above.

A second caveat is that population strategies based on avoiding unintended pregnancies do not directly address migration, the third demographic force after births

and deaths. From a global population perspective, this may not matter much. But from environmental and national perspectives migration matters very much—and engages yet another landscape of difficult issues around human rights and dignity.

Thirdly, and most importantly for this discussion, uncertainty remains about both the magnitude of unintended pregnancy and the best mix of strategies both for making it rare and for downshifting those

the means with which we should hasten an end to that growth through lower birth rates that result from intentional childbearing. These uncertainties are a good basis for humility, but not for inaction. As long as the common objective is the prevention of unintended pregnancy and the commitment is collective and iron-clad to reject reproductive coercion in all its manifestations, we should have safe ground on which most—even if not the pope—can stand.



Technological innovation means that computers become outdated at an increasing rate.

family size norms that yield desired above-replacement fertility in many populations. The core strategies are agreed upon: better access to client-focused voluntary family planning services, education attainment at least part way through secondary school for girls and improved economic and social status for women and girls. But which among these deserve the highest priority and policy attention remains contentious.

Figuring out how to prevent unintended pregnancies is far more vital to the future than the fruitless debate about whether population or consumption contributes more to the world’s environmental problems. The uncertainty about where environmental or other limits to population growth lie finds symmetry in our uncertainty about the urgency and

The scale of the human presence on the planet puts at risk our health, our well-being and potentially our very survival. The challenge is to face this squarely, and then envision and move resolutely forward with population strategies that do not react to fear but rather raise hope, and that do not assign blame but develop human capacities and elevate human dignity. We are in the best position in history to side with the pontifical scientists in the conviction that replacement fertility is the necessary guarantor of the human future. We now have the means and most of the information we need. We can bring replacement, wanted and actual fertility into a harmony of low numbers, based on the childbearing intentions of women and men, which can sustain us all. ■

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Diarmuid Martin, now archbishop of Dublin and primate of Ireland, lead the Vatican's delegation to the Cairo conference in 1994. He is pictured here with Pope John Paul II in 1999.

The Holy See at Cairo

WHAT THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY DID AT THE
1994 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

By Alex Marshall

THIS IS REALLY A CONFERENCE about life styles," said Monsignor Diarmuid Martin, "And when talking about life styles in the future of the society

ALEX MARSHALL has written extensively on population and development issues.

we have a lot to say." Most people who were in Cairo for the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) thought that they were discussing women's lives, not just their lifestyles. The lives of the half-million pregnant women who die every year, for example, many of whom didn't

want to be pregnant in the first place.

On the other hand, the church hierarchy certainly did say a great deal before, during and after the conference; but the church's influence is another matter.

It isn't perhaps surprising that Msgr. Martin (now, for his sins, the archbishop

of Dublin and primate of Ireland) should want to emphasize lifestyle issues. The hierarchy has historically cast itself as the great bulwark of the family against the onrushing tide of secularism and sexual license. To the hierarchy, the family means children, lots of them. The hierarchy also has rigorously opposed abortion, taking a life-begins-at-conception approach. A corollary is that the life of the “unborn child,” from a collection of a few cells to a full-term fetus, takes precedence over the life of the woman in whom it is growing, every time.

The extraordinary 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, with its total ban on artificial methods of contraception, also plays

dations and drafts of the proposed Programme of Action.

In a sense the ICPD was the end product of 20 years of debate, including two previous world conferences, innumerable smaller meetings and a great deal of work on the ground. In United Nations terms, or maybe even human ones, that isn’t long. The United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, only exists because back in 1970 no other part of the United Nations would touch population with a bargepole. It might involve family planning and that meant controversy. Back then many, even most, UN member states viewed family planning with a very dubious eye. After the word population in their minds came

Reproductive health was promptly misrepresented to mean abortion by the mainly American groups opposed to family planning and gender equality. They took the United States domestic controversy over abortion to the international stage and successive Republican presidents denied funding to UNFPA and the International Planned Parenthood Federation on the grounds that they supported abortion.

In 1992, however, with Bill Clinton as president, the United States took the lead in UN preparations for the Cairo conference. The Holy See delegation to the UN prepared for action. The Vatican and its allies, notably Opus Dei, had successfully shot down a move to

The collision between papal authority and the real world has never been clearer than at ICPD.

an important role in this story. The historian Garry Wills, who is a Catholic, believes that defense of the document now forms the intellectual bedrock on which the church is founded, so that it is simply impossible to revisit this teaching (see for example his book “Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit” and his review article “High Fidelity” in the *New York Review of Books* on Dec. 5, 2002). According to Wills, nearly all Catholics ignore the Vatican’s teachings on contraception and (to a lesser extent) on abortion.

The collision between papal authority and the real world has never been clearer than at ICPD. Of course it could be said that United Nations conferences hardly represent the real world either—but this one featured 10,000 official delegates from 179 countries (or 180 counting the Holy See—more on that later), 4,000 people from 1,500 NGOs and another 4,000 journalists. It was the culmination of two years of preparations, including five regional conferences and two full-dress preparatory committees, which produced various recommen-

the word control—a policy various (mostly Western) deep thinkers were advocating at the time. In their minds the word that came after population was explosion, something that happened only in developing countries (rather than say, Florida, where population growth in the 1970s approached 4 percent a year, much faster than any developing country).

By 1994, the whole picture had changed. Nearly every country in the world except Saudi Arabia promoted or at least permitted family planning. Thanks in good part to UNFPA’s leader, Nafis Sadik, and the growing strength of civil society, especially the women’s movement, the emphasis of international discussion had moved from demographic policy to health policy, with women at its centre. The term reproductive health came into wide use in the 1980s, to describe the package of health measures including family planning that women need to avoid unwanted pregnancy, ensure safe motherhood and protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections.

include population in discussions at the 1992 Earth Summit on environment (a decision that still reverberates) and were more than ready for the next collision.

Why does the Holy See, alone among religious organizations, enjoy observer status at the UN, with the right to participate, if not vote, in its deliberations? The Holy See has some of the attributes of a state. It occupies (a very small) territory. It sends and receives ambassadors. It even issues stamps. All that was enough to secure membership in the Universal Postal Union back in the days of the League of Nations. With that as leverage, the Holy See secured observer status when the United Nations was founded in 1945. (The full story is told in the Catholics for Choice publication, “The Catholic Church at the United Nations: Church or State?”)

The Vatican has diplomatic relations with most countries in the world and sends a papal nuncio or apostolic delegate to represent its interests. He is more than just an ambassador. In many countries he represents the will of God. The repre-

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THE HOLY SEE AT CAIRO

sentative at the UN, Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, gives the Vatican a lot more leverage there than other observers, such as, say, Palestine. In the run-up to the ICPD, this influence was used systematically to gain countries' support for the Vatican position. In one flagrant case during the UN preparatory committee, a member of a national delegation who was deeply involved in the negotiations was replaced with someone more compliant overnight, at the behest of the country's nuncio. The committee chairman, however, refused to countenance the change. Both actions were remarkable, if not unprecedented, and indicate the depth of feeling and the extent of the maneuvering that surrounded the negotiations.

Such skullduggery indicated that Msgr. Martin was serious when he talked about lifestyles. Pope John Paul II wrote to every head of state asserting that the draft document promoted an individualistic lifestyle incompatible with marriage that would condemn marriage to obsolescence. Ambassadors to the Holy See were called in and lectured on the Vatican position on abortion and contraception. Nafis Sadik as secretary-general of the ICPD conference was granted an audience at which the pope berated her for her unwillingness to steer the process in the right direction, as he saw it. At the end of the audience, the official photographer who invariably records such occasions was somehow absent. In address after address, the pope denounced the conference as a "plot to destroy the family" and "the snare of the devil" promoting a "culture of death."

Seeking alliances, the Holy See made a *démarche* (diplo-speak for a strategic move) towards predominantly Muslim nations and organizations. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (the forerunner to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) and the American Muslim Council for example issued a joint statement on abortion. The Vatican and states like Iran and Libya developed an interesting common front against abortion, contraception and ster-

ilization—interesting because Iran at the time was vigorously promoting contraception and sterilization for its own people, and because Libya, hitherto quite liberal on these issues, needed international assistance (which the Vatican has denied giving) after the Libyan government was alleged to have been involved in the bombing of an airplane over the Scottish town of Lockerbie. At the conference itself, an unofficial Arabic translation of the draft document mysteriously appeared, in which key phrases were rendered in unusual ways. "Sexual health" for example, was translated using a term implying immoral behavior.

All to no avail. In Cairo, with vocal support from "the monstrous regiment of women" (Calvinist John Knox, not His Holiness) at the parallel NGO Forum, the great progressive majority had its way. Refusing to strike their colors, the Holy See and its few allies held up the conference for five days over one paragraph referring to abortion, backing down only when language was agreed to the effect that abortion was not to be promoted as a means of family planning—which wasn't in many people's minds anyway. In the end, the Vatican reserved its position on adolescent sexual health and some other issues, but otherwise joined the consensus.

A tame end to a pitched battle—or perhaps the hierarchy was simply keeping its powder dry. In July 2010, Nafis Sadik gave the keynote address at a national conference on sexual and reproductive health in Dili, Timor Leste, a strongly Catholic country. Bishop Basilio do Nascimento stated that he supported the national program to ensure universal access to reproductive health information and services.

"I don't think their position has essentially changed," said Dr Sadik after the Dili conference. "But I'm very happy that they joined the consensus, just as they did, eventually, at ICPD." Last year, the same bishop had opposed passage of a law that permits emergency abortion to save the life of a woman. ■

Under the Influence of the Bishops

THE BATTLE OVER FAMILY PLANNING IN THE PHILIPPINES

By Rina Jimenez David

IT IS A MEASURE THAT HAS BEEN, in one form or another, on the legislative agenda since the 1980s, but has never gone further than committee level. The measure went farthest and was being deliberated on the floor of the House early this year, just before Congress went into recess in preparation for the May elections. House Bill 5043 had hurdled the committee deliberations and was in the period of interpellation (when a bill's sponsor takes questions from colleagues) but had been stalled for months by a small band of interrogators who, failing to shake the sponsors, resorted to questioning the quorum and demanding a roll call. At this point, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) even issued a call for members of Congress not to report for sessions when the "RH Bill" was tabled.

"It [the quorum issue] was a convenient tool" to delay the bill's passage, sighs Ramon San Pascual, executive director of the Philippine Legislators' Committee for Population and Development, founded in the 1980s to promote the study of population and development issues among members of both the House and

RINA JIMENEZ DAVID is a journalist and opinion columnist for the Philippine Daily Inquirer. Her book, *"Women at Large,"* was a finalist for the National Book Awards in 1994. She has been recognized for her reporting on population, development and the Catholic faith.



Pro-family planning groups organized in support of the Reproductive Health bill.

Senate. Indeed, says Rep. Edcel Lagman, the bill's principal author, the use of a quorum "was a lesson for us," because, he says, if only all of the bill's co-authors showed up at sessions, there would indeed have been a quorum.

But quorum or no quorum, it seems the RH Bill was doomed from the start. In hindsight, it appears that the leadership of the House, in the person of former Speaker Prospero Nograles, was ambivalent at best about supporting the passage of the bill. Part of that ambivalence must

be credited to Nograles's deference to the former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who had already declared it state policy to promote only "natural" family planning, a position many believed was a concession to the bishops, on whose political support she relied.

In a conversation with Speaker Nograles, recalls Lagman, "he told me that he was for the bill, but he admitted that if he got a call from Malacanang [the president's official residence] to slow down, he would not be able to resist."

Before then, irked by the opponents' delaying tactics, Lagman managed to wrangle from Nograles an agreement to hold a panel debate, forming two panels of five members each to discuss possible amendments to the bill. This would have negated the need for any more fruitless and contentious floor debates. "That never happened," he says ruefully.

San Pascual is more blunt. The Speaker, he says, "made it appear as if he were on our side, when all the while he was really on the other side." (During his unsuccessful run this year for mayor of his native Davao City, Nograles declared his intention to withdraw the city's Women's Health Code and received an award from Human Life International, one of the more strident opponents of sexual and reproductive rights worldwide.)

In October last year, just as the panel debate was being readied, sources from within Malacanang confirmed that two bishops, representing the bishops Commission on Family Life, called on the president. Shortly after, an assistant of the president called up Speaker Nograles asking him to "slow down" on the RH Bill. "After that, they were just dribbling the ball and going through the motions," says Rep. Janette Garin of the province of Iloilo, a bill co-sponsor who was outspoken in her support for it.

The "Golden Age" of reproductive health policy in the Philippines, says Dr. Junice Demeterio Melgar, executive director of women's NGO Likhaan, was during a five-year period, from 1995 to 2000, that straddled the administrations of former Presidents Fidel V. Ramos and Joseph Estrada.

Ramos, a Protestant, had appointed as Health Secretary Dr. Juan Flavio, who brought a folksy winning charm to his advocacy for family planning and reproductive health. During the midterm elections of 1995, Flavio ran for the Senate and his deputy Dr. Carmencita "Chit" Reodica eventually took over the DOH. It was Dr. Reodica, head of the Philippine delegation to the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, who crafted the

policy grounding the department's programs on "10 elements" of reproductive health, including free and informed choice in family planning, information and education for adolescents and a program on violence against women.

After Estrada's electoral victory in 1998, Dr. Alberto "Cuasi" Romualdez, a public health expert who had gained a reputation in international health circles, was appointed health secretary. And while Estrada joked about "not being around if my mother had practiced family planning," he largely left Romualdez alone to pursue his programs. But Estrada's term was cut short by a show of "People Power" in 2001, detained under house arrest on charges of plunder.

When Estrada's Vice-president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo took office, Melgar notes, there was a "swift reversal" of policies governing family planning. The first warning, she recalls, was the "surreptitious" de-listing of Postinor, a drug brand approved for use as emergency contraception by Romualdez's DOH. It was to be used by the women's units in government hospitals for survivors of domestic violence and rape.

It was around this time that women's groups held a dialogue with President Arroyo, recalls Melgar. At this meeting, the president admitted that she had relied on the birth control pill to space the births of her three children. "But I know better now," she was quoted by the media, and in what it is hoped was an attempt at humor, blamed the pill for her notoriously short temper.

In the nine years of Arroyo's term (she ran and won in 2004 in what has been revealed as a fraudulent election), she has steadily eroded the gains made in previous years. Declaring her belief in "devolution," the president ordered that responsibility for the delivery of health services, including family planning, be given to local government units, with no national funds allotted for the purchase of family planning commodities. (But she allowed an allotment of ₱50 million [about \$1 million] to the conservative Catholic

group Couples for Christ, for the promotion of natural family planning.)

In a recent study, "Facts on Barriers to Contraceptive Use in the Philippines," Likhaan and the Guttmacher Institute traced the "leveling off of modern contraceptive use" among Filipino women mainly to lack of access, especially of family planning supplies. Local governments, said the authors, "do not receive sufficient funds under the revenue-sharing scheme to fully meet" their responsibility. Increasingly, women rely on private drug stores for their family planning needs, as a result of which women in the poorest sector are having on average two more children than they wanted. The study says that if only the "unmet need" for family planning was addressed, there would be 1.6 million fewer pregnancies each year, and unintended births would be reduced by 800,000, abortions would decline by 500,000 and miscarriages would decline by 200,000.

"Bruising" is a term that supporters and authors of the RH Bill use to describe the fight to get it passed. Previous efforts had usually ended up mired in endless committee hearings, such as when one bill was referred to the budget committee and died without seeing daylight. But champions persisted in pursuing the bill, noting that instead of being at the mercy of the executive's personal and political stance, the population program needed to be "protected" by legislation.

The authorship by Congressman Lagman of a version of the RH Bill was both unexpected and heartening, says Melgar, whose group is a member of the Reproductive Health Action Network (RHAN), which lobbied vigorously for the measure.

Lagman has been a legislator since the 1980s, a lawyer whose two brothers have died as a result of leftist involvement. He was better known for advocating such "reckless" causes as debt moratorium, abolition of the death penalty and criminalization of forced disappearances. At the same time, Lagman proved himself a reliable ally of President Arroyo and the ruling party. At the time he filed the bill,

he was chair of the committee on appropriations, using this post to win the support of many grateful congressmen.

In terms of number of sponsors alone, the RH Bill had good chances of passage, with 132 legislators (out of more than 200) signing on. Last year, Lagman also informed the president that he was giving up his chairmanship of appropriations to devote his full attention to the RH Bill. “She said, ‘Edcel go ahead,’” the congressman recalls, and he left believing he had at least Arroyo’s implicit support.

Both sides of the debate marshaled their supporters to attend the public hearings on the RH Bill: nuns, priests and seminarians (in clerical garb) faced off against community women. Business groups, believing in the need for a rational population program, took out full-page advertisements in newspapers supporting the measure. Banners were hung in front of churches denouncing the “abortion bill.” Women’s groups held a march of pregnant women to focus attention on maternal health. And in the meantime, bishops summoned congressmen and congresswomen to berate them for their support of the bill.

Astonishingly, despite a few withdrawals, the sponsors held fast. But Lagman could do nothing about the lack of a quorum; by late 2009 legislators preferred spending more time in their districts, preparing for the next year’s campaign.

“Even if we failed (to pass the bill), we were able to generate public acceptance of reproductive health and rights issues, and the links between pregnancy, maternal health and women’s rights,” reflects Melgar. But the battle for the bill just proved, she adds, “how powerful the executive can be.”

Public support not just for the RH Bill but for family planning itself has long been demonstrated by public opinion surveys. The latest poll, conducted by the firm Pulse Asia last February at the height of the campaign season, revealed that 64 percent of Filipinos would vote for candidates who publicly promote modern methods of family planning. The same survey found that 75 percent think

it is “very important or important for a candidate to include family planning in his/her program of action,” while 87 percent said that it is important for the government to allocate a budget for family planning. And in Catholic Philippines, 51 percent said they do not believe that using modern methods of family planning is a sin.

The new president, known popularly as “Noynoy,” has made known his

and Estrada) and city councilor JC de los Reyes (who finished last).

Lagman, who is vying for speaker and, should he lose, would end up as minority leader, still an influential position, filed a new bill as soon as the new Congress convened. He is also optimistic of its chances of passage, citing that most co-authors won their races handily and that known supporters would also be returning to the House. But Arroyo surprised



The newly elected president, Benigno Aquino III, greets bishops in Manila.

support for an RH measure, although he was accused of “flip-flopping” on the issue when he had to clarify a previous statement and note that he wasn’t an author of the Senate version of the RH Bill. The bishops had publicly declared their disapproval of Noynoy over his stance on reproductive health (he said he believed in giving and respecting couples’ choices). Towards the end of the campaign period, the bishops even held an elaborate “laying of hands” ceremony on two of his opponents who promised not to sign an RH Bill during their term. They were Senator Manuel Villar (who finished third after Aquino

everyone early this year when she announced that she would be running for Congress and is now a representative of her native province of Pampanga. It’s anybody’s guess what she would do, given her residual influence, for or against the passage of a reproductive health measure. Also, most observers concede that Villar, who is returning to the Senate, has the numbers to re-take his post as Senate president.

So perhaps Lagman and his supporters should take to heart the admonition that when it comes to the RH Bill, they should “hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.” ■

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Living a Catholic Life

AS WE REGULARLY POINT OUT IN THESE PAGES, THE OPINIONS OF CATHOLICS on the issues that concern us are very much in line with those of non-Catholics. However, the manner in which the Catholic hierarchy interprets the church's teachings can have a significant impact on the lives of individual Catholics. Here we continue an occasional series examining how individual Catholics are working through what it means to be a Catholic today while maintaining a healthy sex life, being respectful of others, acting in good faith and in good conscience.

Going against the Ingrained

THE DECISION TO HAVE AN ABORTION CAN SAVE AN IMPORTANT FUTURE – YOURS

By Vanna Moore

ON A SUMMER DAY IN 2001, my stomach fluttered as I hovered over the open phone book on my living room floor. It wasn't the six-week-old fetus inside me that was causing the sensation. It was the mingling of fear and distress. I had damage control on my

mind, something the Yellow Pages listed as "abortion services." I had taken a few wrong turns in life lately and becoming pregnant at 18 was a road I knew I didn't want to be on. I needed a detour fast.

For the two weeks prior to that moment, my mind sifted through my dilemma. I felt my future spiraling quickly out of control. I had dropped out of high school right before I was set to graduate, I wasn't getting along with my parents and I was in an emotionally abusive relationship with the "father" in this made-

for-TV movie scenario. These things always have livable consequences for the stars in those films, but I knew I was up against reality. The two little pink lines on the home pregnancy test seemed to draw a proverbial line in the sand for me. Out of sheer necessity, I found myself pondering my future and the prospect of parenthood. There was also a thread of moral angst in that snarled knot of anxiety.

Ironically, I was smart enough at the time to know how clueless I was about life. I didn't possess the maturity,

VANNA MOORE is a pen name the writer has chosen to use, due to the personal nature of her experience. She can be reached at Vanna.Moore@hotmail.com.

stability or desire to take on what I was sure awaited me had I chosen to continue the pregnancy. I already had the opportunity to mull over the morality of abortion once when my best friend, Beth, got pregnant during our junior year of high school. We were both brought up in religious families deep in the Bible Belt. She was Pentecostal and my roots went from United Methodist to Catholic. We had both digested the same “abortion is murder” message since we were old enough to understand what it meant.

Beth ultimately buckled under the presumptuous and outdated ideology

that being pregnant scared me witless. The man in this scenario was no more grown-up than I was, and was not someone I wanted to be tied to for the next 18 years of my life. Oddly, I wanted him to have a chance to turn his life around too. I thought of the ripple effect that a baby would have on the rest of my family, especially my parents. They wouldn’t have abandoned me, but I didn’t want to be a drain on them. To me, not having a baby started to sound like the more responsible thing to do.

After all of my deliberation, my conscience was still not free and clear. My uncensored feelings on abortion, I

Did I feel like scum underneath that? Yes, especially when I was face to face with that image on the monitor during a sonogram at the abortion clinic. Sonograms are taken to measure how far along the pregnancy is before the procedure is performed. The technician told me I was at seven weeks. Wasn’t I supposed to be in awe and joy at that moment? I wasn’t and continued on.

As I lay in bed at my mom’s house still shaking the sedative, I was filled with an overwhelming sense of relief. Tomorrow was going to be a new day, a fresh start. I reflected on the course my life almost took. Choosing whether to end a poten-

My uncensored feelings on abortion, I realized, were a stark contrast from the Catholic fundamentals I learned growing up.

and her mother’s demand that she have the baby. At 17, her life suddenly revolved around food stamps, battling for a whole \$80 a month in child support, and moving around every few months as she tried to find her way. My inner voice of reason told me that I did not want or need any of that. But it wasn’t loud enough to muffle the echo of an ingrained Catholic point of view on the subject.

Many would call her the brave one and some would label me the selfish baby killer for making the appointment to rid myself of my residual flutter. I knew I could do better in life than the current status quo. I wanted to be back in the driver’s seat, in charge of my own destiny. All I had to do was check in at the abortion clinic at dawn on the following Friday with identification, a driver and a way to pay \$500 for the procedure. It was that simple.

Even at that age, my rationale was not all egocentric. My future was not the only one in the balance. I knew having an abortion would ultimately be a solitary decision, not at all changing the fact

realized, were a stark contrast from the Catholic fundamentals I learned growing up. The more I exercised the gift of being able to think for myself on this, the more I felt some tangible control over what was happening before me. I continued to weigh the pros and cons of continuing the pregnancy and giving the baby up for adoption or having an abortion. Considering the aftermath of each option showed me so much of what I didn’t want for myself. What I had was actually an opportunity to seriously explore what I did want for my future.

I felt like I was competing with this potential life inside me that was not even cognizant yet of what was unfolding. I wanted to stop the inertia of my life headed for disaster. Identifying the outcomes that I did not want helped me realize what I did want—an education, fulfilling relationships, real choices and a clean slate. What an empowering feeling. For the first time in a month, I felt a shred of self-esteem come back. I figured out enough to know what I needed to do.

tial life is an awful situation to navigate. I saw an abortion as the lesser of two evils. It’s been nearly 10 years since I defused that ordeal. Today, I can look at all I have and all I’ve accomplished with pride. I can say with confidence that it is because I made a smart decision at that pivotal moment in life that I have been able to go on to accomplish my goals. I don’t regret what I did.

Sure, I’ve wondered over the years about how the child might have turned out. But that curiosity is always cut short when I remember where that situation was going and where I am now. I have a successful writing career, I am working on my second college degree and I’ve created the family I was meant to have. Any shameful feelings that lingered cleared up as I passed into adulthood. My spirituality evolved into a state of feeling that it is okay to be true to myself, as well as my convictions. It is a beautiful culmination of comfort and clarity that many Catholics today are striving for. I feel fortunate to live in a day and age in which that is possible. ■

To Be or Not to Be

A CATHOLIC TRANSEXUAL SPEAKS

by Hilary Howes



BLESSED" BY OUR CREATOR with male genitalia and a female brain I struggled to relate to a society that saw me as male until age 40 when I transitioned to live as a woman. It was an authentic mid-life transition to integrate my mind and body that many who knew me supported and even called courageous, inspiring and ethical. But this uniquely personal act though the eyes of the 99.5 percent of people who are blessed to have their gender and sex match has been seen as a political act, a psychological disorder, a character flaw, a weakness, a perversion and a sin.

In the Catholic church, as a transsexual woman, I don't exist officially. Officially the Catholic church does not have a policy on the range of gender expression and considering its teachings on gay men, lesbian women, divorced women, women priests and women who abort I should count myself as lucky. But the popular assumption that I will be treated poorly by the institutional church hierarchy is born out in news reports of a secret docu-

ment to bishops, and the pope's own words. As Jeff Israely reports in *Time* magazine, "The Pope's Christmas Condemnation of Transsexuals" (December 23, 2008):

Without actually using the word, Benedict took a subtle swipe at those who might undergo sex-change operations or otherwise attempt to alter their God-given gender. Defend "the nature of man against its manipulation," "The Church speaks of the human being as man and woman, and asks that this order is respected." The Pope again denounced the contemporary idea that gender is a malleable definition. That path, he said, leads to a "self-emancipation of man from creation and the Creator."

Respecting the order of men and women is very important to an organization that is controlled solely by one sex. But the Creator does make transsexuals (mind/body incongruity) and inter-sexed (anatomic incongruity) people and the manipulation of medical science allows us to lead more normal lives with the 99.5 percent that have such trouble understanding this variation. Beyond anatomy, rigid gender stereotyping is important to a controlling patriarchy and so accepting any transgender expres-

sion (cross-dressers, transvestites, drag queens, drag kings, androgynous, bigendered and gender queer) is unacceptable for organizational reasons, not morality.

The problem with a secret position on transgender people is that the church hierarchy is empowered to follow the most reactionary course in their words and deeds on the subject. According to John Norton of the Catholic News Service in his January 14, 2003, article titled "Vatican says 'sex-change' operation does not change person's gender":

... the document instructs bishops never to alter the sex listed in parish baptismal records and says Catholics who have undergone "sex-change" procedures are not eligible to marry, be ordained to the priesthood or enter religious life, according to a source familiar with the text.

"The key point is that the (transsexual) surgical operation is so superficial and external that it does not change the personality. If the person was male, he remains male. If she was female, she remains female," said the source.

Those familiar with transsexuals will see the irony of truth in the "key point" except in reverse. Transitioning allows

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us to share with society the gender personality that we have been from the start. It avoids the false-selves we developed to live as others expected us to based on our external bodies. Any United States transsexual who gets a surgical procedure does so after psychological evaluation, much soul searching and living at least two years in their preferred gender. The vast majority of transsexuals never have surgery because the expense is only covered by a handful of healthcare policies. Surgery does not define one's gender for passports or many states' driver's licenses but a doctor's psychological evaluation can. Our brain's gender determines how we can best function in society and the church. Genitalia are relatively super-

Director Duncan Tucker soberly handles the sensitive subject matter with humanity and a fair degree of delicacy and humor. But the film's affirmative depiction of transsexualism is unequivocally incompatible with church teachings on human sexuality and gender identity. Furthermore, Stanley's sex-switching procedure conflicts with Catholic proscriptions against "directly intended amputations, mutilations or sterilizations" spelled out in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

It is a hateful position that can twist this AMA-approved surgical intervention for a birth incongruity into a "mutilation." Like all the church policy that flows from the precept of "Natural Law," (sex

- Priests who undergo a sex change may continue to exercise their ministry privately if it does not cause scandal. (Women priests? Sounds scandalous.)
- Surgery could be morally acceptable in certain extreme cases if a medical probability exists that it will "cure" the patient's internal turmoil. (Far from extreme, transition is the only medically approved treatment for people diagnosed as transsexual. Reassignment surgery is the final step in the process and provides for a patient's social integration and personal safety.)
- An affirmation of the validity of marriages in which one partner later transitions. (A Catholic affirmation of a same sex marriage?)

Our theology calls us to follow our consciences, accept mystery and love one another without exception. Reaching out to my marginalized extreme minority is not only possible but enriches our spiritual life.

ficial except for intimate relations.

Church leaders, perhaps empowered by the secret document or their own transphobia, have expelled a music minister, a priest, a nun, a lay counselor, a college student, a parochial school student and even a church cleaning lady. They also have torn families apart by teaching that transsexualism is a psychic disorder. Parents are counseled to suppress transgender children and to reject transitioning adult children. Transsexuals are forbidden the sacrament of marriage (to anybody), religious life and priesthood. Some bishops even wrote to the US Congress to oppose the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) that would add gender identity and sexual attraction to the protected classes in employment law. This secret position may have emboldened the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting in its review of the film "TransAmerica" to state:

exists only within heterosexual marriage (for procreation) we find that this policy follows neither nature (as science shows) nor law (as an equal protection).

It doesn't have to be this way. As readers of this magazine would know, our theology calls us to follow our consciences, accept mystery and love one another without exception. Reaching out to my marginalized extreme minority is not only possible but enriches our spiritual life. Re-constructionist Judaism, Reform Judaism and various Quaker groups openly welcome transgender worshippers in their congregations. Certain Christian denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (USA), Ecumenical Catholic Church, United Church of Christ, Metropolitan Community Church and the Unitarian Church openly accept transgender individuals.

Even the "secret Vatican document" (according to the 2003 CNS article referenced above) provides for:

I hope that Catholics would look at the body of scientific and medical evidence to develop a loving acceptance of those of us with this variation. The Intentional Eucharistic Community I belong to has. My priest has noted the unique perspective I have on gender issues that come from seeing life from both sides. He has noted how my path to my true gender has parallels in Ignatian discernment to understand God's desire for us.

I understand that my journey, though personal, touches that which is universal about gender for everyone. Perhaps your notions of father, mother, brother, sister, husband and wife get opened a little by meeting someone who has been all of those at different times in her life. Maybe you can take it from someone who has been there that looking at everything as us and them, black and white, male or female is limiting and dangerous. Ultimately, welcoming the mystery of diversity in God's plan is the healing for our church for which I most hope. ■

Overlapping of Church and State

By Rev. Barry W. Lynn

The Neo-Catholics: Implementing Christian Nationalism in America

Betty Clermont

(Clarity Press Inc., 2009, 352pp)

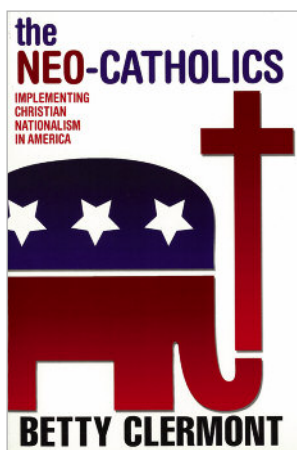
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MANY AMERICANS WERE surprised to read newspaper articles and see network television segments toward the end of 2008 about the political involvement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in two major social debates: abortion and same-sex marriage. The surprise was not that the “official” position of the Roman Catholic hierarchy is opposed to both activities. The shock was only in the bold tactics church officials were using.

Attorneys for the bishops were reportedly drafting language for US Rep. Bart Stupak to add to the original House healthcare reform bill back in November while ensconced in one of Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s outer offices. At about the same time, Catholic officials testified before the District of Columbia Council in opposition to the proposed same sex marriage bill. During the discussion, they informed the council that if the bill passed, the hierarchy might cease charitable operations

in the city, lest it have to pay for insurance benefits for the same-sex spouse of an employee.

The public has come to expect this kind of open and notorious use of lobbying power and threats by evangelical Protestants of the “Religious Right” variety, particularly as they cozier up to the George W. Bush administration. Is there something new about the overt activity by the Catholic bishops recently? The answer by Betty Clermont, the author of the new book “The Neo-Catholics,” would presumably be:



The only thing new is the amount of news coverage about it.

Clermont, a former Atlanta diocesan worker, offers a well-documented thesis that you have an explosive mixture when you mix a powerful hierarchical church with political neo-conservatism’s elitist view that the rich and powerful always know what is best. This is what she chronicles early in the work, explaining that fundamentalist theological leanings and ultra-conservative political ideology combined to create a Catholic movement which was at ease working with right-wing Protestants. This coalition virtually created Ronald Reagan and set itself up as a bulwark against the purported liberalism, relativism and moral excess of liberals in the 1960s.

The rest of the work demonstrates time and again how this alliance plays out even today. It can explain, and essentially justify, heinous abuses like the torture of “terrorists” and the cover-up of child rape, while profiteering from government programs ostensibly designed to help the poorest Americans. It is now aided by the claimed moral force of popes, Benedict XVI in particular, who adore a proximity to international political power, an interest moderated considerably in the days of popes like John XXIII and Paul VI.

The danger all of this poses to the constitutional principle of church-state separation should be obvious. Indeed, the neo-Catholics would much prefer a US government, and indeed governments throughout the world, where the lessons of Vatican II are forgotten and the only proper relationship between the church and the state is the virtual conflation of the two.

IT IS EASY FOR MOST AMERICANS TO recall the excesses of rhetoric and partisan political shenanigans of the likes of Pat Robertson, the late Jerry Falwell and Focus on the Family founder James Dobson. However, non-Catholics (of which I am one) easily may have missed the similar message and strategies of such neo-Catholic luminaries as George Weigel, the late Rev. Richard John Neuhaus and political operative Deal Hudson.

These players were instrumental in finding common ground with the Protestant Religious Right, which was then assimilated into what Clermont calls “a common religious discourse, political sympathy and sense of priorities.” This analysis is largely ignored in other works and represents the first eye-opener for even those who think they are well attuned to the machinations of right-wing dogmatists.

A second major contribution is the extraordinarily detailed descriptions of how the Catholic hierarchy, in Rome and in the United States, became deeply involved in the past three presidential

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campaigns. George W. Bush met with at least a dozen top officials, including Philadelphia's Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua and New York's Cardinal Edward Egan just weeks prior to Election Day 2000. Each meeting was followed by extensive direct campaign activity ranging from highly skewed voter guides in 283 Philadelphia-area parishes to a New York pastoral letter urging electoral support to those "who share our commitment to the fundamental rights of the unborn."

In 2004, neo-Catholics were the prime movers behind efforts by church officials in several states to announce (whether he was coming to visit or not) that Democrat John Kerry wouldn't be getting communion in their churches. Arguably, more important as a practical matter, these forces attempted to get local parishes to send the Republican National Committee copies of directories and membership lists (a tactic which even the ultra-conservative Southern Baptist Convention found repulsive).

In 2008, when Pope John Paul II had been replaced by Pope Benedict, virtually all official and neo-Catholic attention turned from even modest criticism of Republican involvement in the destruction of Iraq and the creation of increased poverty in the United States to the hot button topic of abortion. Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, for example, ordered every Mass one weekend to include the reading of a letter from him explaining how Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden needed to be "corrected" for their failure to comprehend church teaching or their role as Catholic politicians.

Occasionally, Clermont's critical fervor reaches heights that may put off some readers. For example, she laments Cardinal Justin Rigali's article in his archdiocesan newspaper the week of the Republican convention in which he compared abortion to the Holocaust and the Republican Party's defense of human life to that of Pope Pius XII. Summing it up, she notes:

Bookshelf

Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry

Diana Fritz Cates (Georgetown University Press, 2009, 288pp)

"All of us want to live happily and well." So begins Diana Fritz Cates' account on how we might all live happily and ethically. Living within our emotions can affect our moral lives, but can our moral lives affect our emotions? Cates says Thomas Aquinas described emotions as the way we gauge our relationships with people and objects. Now, Cates combines religion, ethics, morality and intellect to summarize our lives.

The Coming Population Crash and Our Planet's Surprising Future

Fred Pearce (Beacon Press, 2010, 289pp)

Fred Pearce argues that the world's population has already peaked and is headed for a steep decline in *The Coming Population Crash*, a study of how the world will change in the coming decades. Pearce, an environmental writer, says "empowerment of women" has led the world to a lower birthrate, leading to a population of more elders than young people. How will that change societies and the world as a whole? Pearce believes he has the answer to forming sustainable living in the years to come.

Einstein's God:

Conversations about Science and the Human Spirit

Krista Tippett (Penguin Books, 2010, 286pp)

Krista Tippett, host of American Public Media's "Speaking of Faith" and author of the book by the same name, is known for interviewing leading minds in the spiritual world. In *Einstein's God*, she continues that tradition, but also speaks with noted scientists, from British physicist Freeman Dyson to cardiologist, *Esquire* columnist and Oprah-darling Mehmet Oz. Rather than the typical black-and-white debate between science and religion, Tippett and her interviewees paint a picture in a hundred shades of gray, showing there is a place for both in the world.

Ethics of Procreation and the Defense of Human Life: Contraception, Artificial Fertilization, and Abortion

Martin Rhonheimer, edited by William F. Murphy Jr.

(The Catholic University of America Press, 2010, 309pp)

Swiss philosopher Martin Rhonheimer shares his thoughts on the morality of abortion, contraception, in vitro fertilization and more in this text, translated into English by William F. Murphy Jr. Weighing sexuality and responsibility, "spiritual love" and "sensual appetite," Rhonheimer makes the case for all people, women and men, to become engaged in the debate on the ethics of procreation.

Is Being Pro-Choice a Sin? Some Questions for America's Catholic Bishops from a Pro-Choice Catholic

Leonard Belter (iUniverse Inc., 2009, 154pp)

Leonard Belter examines the church hierarchy's position on many aspects of human sexuality—and its contradictions and problems—in *Is Being Pro-Choice a Sin?* Using logic and examples along the way, Belter takes on doctrine with science, gently probing the reader to question different parts of the hierarchy's stance on life. "Is an acorn a tree?" he asks. Examining that and other moral conundrums makes this book a quick but engaging read.

“Since Republicans had done as much to stop abortions as the Pope did to stop the Holocaust, at least that part of the analogy was unintentionally applicable.”

A third topic rarely covered in detail before is the strong neo-Catholic support for—and benefits received from—President Bush’s Faith-Based Initiative, his effort to give religious charities and even local churches federal dollars for their ostensibly secular programs dealing with hunger, homelessness, addiction and other social crises.

I AM PERSONALLY AWARE OF RETICENCE on the part of some Catholic Charities officials to get behind this effort. Some of this was a legitimate concern that very small operations couldn’t afford with small grants to hire skilled counselors and other professionals. Others obviously feared that any competition was likely to divert increasingly scarce social service dollars away from large and “tested” groups like their own.

Clermont points out that Catholic Charities USA currently receives about 62 percent of its annual budget from tax dollars. She also reminds readers that even University of Pennsylvania Professor John DiIulio, the first director of Bush’s faith-based office and himself a Catholic, conceded that there was no research available to prove that faith-based charities in fact deliver services or achieve results any different from similar secular providers.

In general, though, church officials were eager to help move the initiative forward. Any possible loss of revenue to smaller groups would certainly be offset by policy directives which the hierarchy hoped would help insure against pesky “violation of separation of church and state” lawsuits. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops worked hard to make sure that Bush executive orders would permit both the posting of religious icons, symbols and messages in the very rooms where “secular” services were being

provided and that religious groups would be able to hire or fire employees for those government programs based solely on religious membership or beliefs.

Their activities led to little legislation, but many executive orders (not one yet repealed by President Barack Obama) and huge payoffs to entities interested in their own financial survival and the further privatization of social services. Clermont accurately labels this mingling of government and religion as having become “embedded in the fabric of the country” at all levels.

I read this book during what Christians call Holy Week, with new daily exposés of clergy sexual abuse and the utterly failed response of the hierarchy to this monumental moral failing. Clermont, who writes for the respected group Voice of the Faithful about this issue, includes a whole chapter in this work about the sex abuse scandal and comments on it throughout the text.

At first, this may seem a bit off her core message. A close reading, however, makes it clear why this area is explored. The same neo-Catholics who worked so assiduously to explain the alleged need to defend political power in the Republican Party and even the most arcane orthodoxy in Catholic teaching are the apologists for the lack of attention paid to abuse cases. We find Neuhaus and his colleagues blaming the victims of assault, explaining any crimes as “sins” of disobedience and suggesting that the whole problem was that “homosexual predators” were allowed in the priesthood by “liberal” officials. She presents comprehensive data to refute these claims, which are sadly being reiterated by apologists again now.

“The Neo-Catholics” is a fine resource for persons interested and concerned about the unsettling union of church and state which always seems poised to enter the neighborhood—any neighborhood. She uses a dazzling array of sources, and the endnotes are an invitation to further reading in this area. ■

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An Odyssey, Not a Destination

By Martin Pendergast

God Is Back:

How the Global Revival of Faith Is Changing the World

John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge

(The Penguin Press, 2009, 405pp)

978-1-59420-213-1, Hardback: \$27.95, Paperback: \$17.00

GOD IS BACK,” THE AUTHORS declare, but others want to know where she is supposed to have been! “God is Back: How the Global Rise of

Faith is Challenging the World,” by *Economist* journalists John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, asserts that “religion is proving perfectly compatible with modernity in all its forms, high and low.” This book contrasts the difference between the role of religion in the United States of America and Europe. One of the authors is an atheist, the other a Roman

Catholic, although the book remains somewhat coy about who is which. Like Charles Taylor’s “A Secular Age,” this attempt to reconcile faith and contemporary reality seems to have become somewhat of a cult book for those who remain unconvinced by the likes of Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens.

“God is Back” is no polemic rebuttal of Dawkins’ “The God Delusion” or lesser-quality commentaries on contem-

porary atheism. Rather it is an *Economist*-style narrative of the history and development of faith in pre-Obama America and its global consequences, raising questions about whether religion and modernity can nourish each other or must remain in perpetual tension. The authors’ extraordinary breadth of research, rich in facts and statistics, nevertheless tends to focus on monotheistic religions, particularly evangelical Christianity and Islam. While characterizing the current age as one of religious pluralism, polytheistic and non-theistic religions such as Hinduism or Buddhism do not get much attention.

Strangely, given that one of the authors has a Catholic background, the book says little about the Catholic church in America. The persisting controversies amongst Catholics about prochoice reproductive health policies or same-sex unions suggest that this is an area that Micklethwait, as presumably the Catholic author, would rather not go, not least given the *Economist*’s libertarian stance on many of these issues. (Micklethwait is editor-in-chief of the magazine, and Wooldridge is its Washington bureau chief and Lexington columnist.)

It might seem impertinent for a European Catholic reviewer to dare to comment on the essentially American theme of this book. However, “God is Back” has given me an insight into how the phenomenon of *Americanism*, rejected as a heresy by a liberal-phobic, 19th century Vatican, still causes some scarlet, and even white cassocks to get ruffled. Faith in America is a matter of choice, exercised in a religious free market, rather than established by state fiat, with the latter risking both personal guilt and social alienation for those who reject the identity of belief and approved practice.

Religion in America never became the sworn enemy it was in those European countries climbing out of a *cuius regio eius religio* (whose realm, his religion) society, as they embraced liberty, reason and democratic government. The American Revolution did not share the French Revolution’s anti-religious sentiments, insisting on individual conscience, rather than state or hierarchical domination. The authors argue against the claim that secularization would sweep away the grip of sacred ritual, effectively banishing religious belief to the private realm, so that the very things supposed to destroy religion—democracy and markets, technology and reason, personal autonomy, rights and responsibilities—combine to make the faith project even stronger.

PERSUASIVE AS THE SCOPE OF THE book is, and solidly grounded as an exercise in understanding the global context of faith, it does leave me with a certain emptiness, a need for not just an emotive sense of passion, but a real driving vision. At the end of the day, “God is Back” is not doing theology in a free-choice context, but a journalistic odyssey. If doing theology is about understanding the human, personal, social and global context, then the book takes that first step adequately enough. But the next stage is that of reflection upon these realities in the light of the faith tradition, leading to



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Reports Worth Reading

Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy

The Task Force on Religion and the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy, sponsored by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2010

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs urges United States leaders to learn more about the world's religious communities in order to better work with them. American diplomacy, the study's organizers note, will succeed in the next 10 years not just because it works well with governments, but because it connects with people around the world, many of whom define themselves by their religion. Religion has become more prevalent in people's lives, the task force explains, and it will serve American leaders well to understand how powerful religious faith and globalization will be in the years to come. Understanding this will help the United States "to build the necessary bridges on the road to economic development and political stability in many troubled regions."

Reaching Five By Fifteen (Innovating, Serving the Underserved and Working in Partnership)

Marie Stopes International, 2010

In working to achieve United Nations Millennium Development Goal 5 (reducing the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters) by 2015, Marie Stopes International has released three "Reaching Five By Fifteen" booklets, each documenting a different angle of their campaign. The organization explains that the places that need the most maternal care help are the least served in the world—not just those who are physically distant from contraceptive care, but those who are also poor, displaced or young. Offering different types of long-acting and permanent methods of contraception, along with safe medical abortion, the organization argues, is the best way to reach the Five By Fifteen goal.

Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Poland

*United Nations Research Institute for
Social Development, 2009*

The Polish national government's entanglement with the Catholic hierarchy is examined in "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Poland." For decades, Polish identity has largely been tied to the Catholic church; however, in 1993, that identity was sealed in a concordat between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland. But though the majority of Poles say their Catholic faith plays a vital role in their lives, Catholics there tend to disagree with the hierarchy, especially concerning sexuality and reproductive rights. The report also highlights how the hierarchy's political pull influences law, particularly regarding women in the job market, politics and their reproductive health.

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a consistent praxis lived out in a concrete human community. Unless this is to be *theology lite* it must always be from the perspective of *the poor*—the dispossessed, the voiceless, the marginalized women, children and men of our time, as well as the emerging, bringing-to-birth groans which we hear coming from a despoiled environment.

Should we not challenge the growth of imported religious revival in China, Central and South America, Africa and Eastern Europe, from whatever faith tradition, rather than naively rejoice in it as a coming of age and finally harmonious marriage of modernity and reli-

Has the growth of religion created

a new form of faith imperialism?

gion? People of faith should begin to develop a literacy about the commonality of values at the basis of secular progress, socio-political structures and culture. Secularists must begin to recognize the fundamentalism that has seeped into their non-religious stances. When people of faith, those of no faith and those who affirm other belief systems can begin to find common cause in the face of threats to humanity and its common good, celebrating shared values which unite people of good will, then believers might be surprised to find that their God is revealing a new creation, beyond the confines of a dead religion.

Has the growth of religion, summed up in the phrase, "God is back" created a new form of faith imperialism, with free-choice pluralism as the global religious model? Whether in Haiti or Hackney, the socially deprived part of London where I live, São Paulo or Gaza, there is an assumption in some of the religious traditions currently crowding in their new adherents, that spiritual

and material wealth, personal, social and global security go together. Thus they can rejoice that they “are not like other men.”

This sense of moral superiority concomitant with exalted notions of finally being one of the “saved” through immersion into these new religious movements, or rejecting the faith traditions of one’s family and community, is often accompanied by insidious forms of prejudice and discrimination. These are not only a matter of individual judgments but part and parcel of emerging dangerous systemic structures, legitimating oppression, even unto death. We see this in the promotion not only of homophobic but murderous legislation in Uganda and other parts of Africa, but in the treatment of *kinnar*, *bijra* and *kothi* transgendered and sexual minority communities in India, and women seeking autonomy in reproductive health choices in many parts of Latin America. In these places old and new religious movements are often active accomplices in such repression.

FOR THIS REVIEWER GOD HAS NEVER been away, for my God is incarnate in all that is human and she is the enemy of apathy who

*“dances in fire, startling her spectators,
waking tongues of ecstasy where
dumbness reigned;
she weans and inspires all whose hearts
are open,
nor can she be captured, silenced or
restrained.”*

(John L. Bell)

Micklethwait and Wooldridge’s highly readable account does not pretend to be a piece of progressive political theology, but it certainly gives readers a helpful historical and contemporary background to pursue the more radical questions that still need to be asked.

More importantly, it provides a firm base from which to challenge fundamentalist faith imperialism on its own ground. ■

It’s the Behavior that Counts, Not the Numbers

By Joke van Kampen

Creating a New Consensus on Population: The Politics of Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights and Women’s Empowerment

Jyoti Shankar Singh

(Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2009 240pp), 978-1853835650, \$24.95

A Pivotal Moment: Population, Justice and the Environmental Challenge

Laurie Ann Mazur, ed.

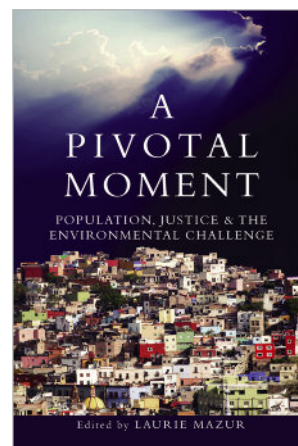
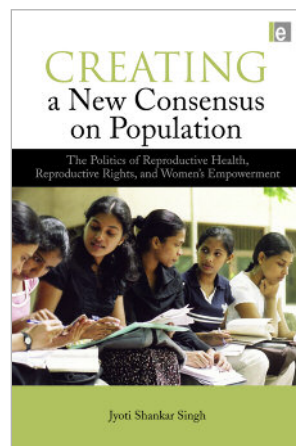
(Island Press, 2009, 432pp), 978-1597266628, \$30.00

“MY UNEASINESS STEMMED from the fact that the conference was ready to deal with everything as long as it did not relate directly to the mundane issues of population growth....”

Professor van de Kaa, a leading demographer, referring to the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (ICPD) in 1994.

Professor van de Kaa is quoted in Jyoti Shankar Singh’s “Creating a New Consensus on Population.” Singh, who was the ICPD’s executive coordinator, describes the Cairo process in great detail, including the history of the previous conferences in Bucharest and Mexico right through

to the Cairo +10 meetings a decade later. The book is a somewhat nostalgic read for everybody involved in the Cairo process and somewhat irrelevant for everybody else, although there is some value in the documentation of



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international processes for the sake of history.

Singh sees a continuum from the previous conferences to Cairo and beyond. However, he also recognizes the historic value of Cairo in representing a paradigm shift in population policies from a demographic to a human rights perspective with an emphasis

Reports Worth Reading

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Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals: Politics, Ethics, Evidence and an 'Unholy Alliance'

David Hulme, University of Manchester—Institute for Development Policy and Management, 2009

The history of reproductive health as a global goal is examined in David Hulme's "Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals." Hulme charts the rise of the movement to guarantee reproductive rights and sexual health from its roots in the feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s to its establishment as a goal at the United Nations in the 1990s. He then charts the backlash from the Holy See and its unholy alliance with Islamic conservatives, and the subsequent backtracking on the issue at the UN. Major losers in this political battle were the developing nations that need UN assistance to gain access to these rights and services. Hulme also chronicles how the Vatican's position as a nonmember state observer at the UN made it possible for the church hierarchy and its conservative allies to push reproductive health goals off the agenda. Conversely, he argues, the moral standing of religious institutions is undermined by such political maneuverings. He concludes by suggesting that the Holy See's status at the UN should be reviewed.

A State of Isolation: Access to Abortion for Women in Ireland

Human Rights Watch, 2010

In "A State of Isolation," Human Rights Watch states it cannot find a single legal abortion on record in Ireland. That doesn't mean women aren't having abortions—in fact, the report estimates that hundreds of thousands of women have traveled to the United Kingdom and other European countries to receive abortions. The cost of travel, as well as paying for the procedure abroad, is expensive, and though there are no reliable statistics on the number of women who must continue their pregnancies, the number has been described as the "desperate 30 percent." Human Rights Watch addresses these concerns with its recommendation to the Irish government to decriminalize all abortion and provide the services to help women in need.

on the rights of women—to the enthusiasm of many and the dismay of some.

This shift at Cairo on the population issue also informs Laurie Mazur, editor of "A Pivotal Moment: Population, Justice and The Environmental Challenge." Many of the 31 essays try to establish the connection between population and the environment and more specifically climate change. Not a simple task. Mazur is well aware of this difficulty and in her introduction she warns against easy answers that use the environment as an excuse to reintroduce coercive population policies.

The first part of Mazur's volume, *The Numbers*, reflects on old-school demographic numbers. It is replete with remarks like "Our planet can provide room and food for 50 percent more people than are alive now." This always reminds me of a conference on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of demography as a science where the guest of honor cheerfully announced that in its 100 years of existence demography had not produced a single accurate prediction (and had not predicted anything that actually happened). This one is a typical "heroic extrapolation" that is as useful as measuring how long it would take to walk to the moon, if there were a road.

However, whether true or false, remarks such as these are not entirely without danger. They suggest that there is a relation between food production and the amount of people that go to bed hungry every day. That connection is remote and irrelevant. Who eats and who does not is determined by power and policies, not by the capacity of the earth or the number of people who live on it. All too often, environmental hazards are analyzed as a result of population growth, scapegoating people living in poverty (who are often the ones with many children).

THE FOOD CRISIS THAT STARTED in 2007 is a case in point. It was never a food crisis in the first place; at no point was there not enough food, not globally, not regionally and

only in a very few places locally. As Walden Bello rightly describes in his essay, the crisis of food prices was caused by a combination of globalization, free trade agreements, heavy subsidies on agriculture in Europe and the US and biofuels (not primarily because so much land that used to produce food was shifted to biofuels but because it caused the price of grain to level with the price of oil).

Bello pays lip service to the population-environment connection by saying that “rising affluence and population growth may be part of the picture” but he clearly shows that it is “free market restructuring of agriculture that devastated small farmers and eroded food security.” His is some-

the sake of the environment.” The manner in which they seek to use a popular issue leads to sometimes rather flawed reasoning. In “Adapting to Climate Change,” the authors (Malea Hoepf Young, Elizabeth Malone, Elizabeth Leahy Madsen and Amy Coen) try to establish a relationship between vulnerability, resilience and the age structure of the population. The outcome is that countries with the “youngest population” are the most vulnerable and the least resilient. This is a no-brainer; countries with the youngest population are the poorest countries. The reason that the Netherlands and Bangladesh, while in the same risk category in terms of climate change, differ 100 percent in vulnerability and

Personally I think that the MDGs did represent a backlash, not only against the Cairo agenda but also against the Beijing agreement on women’s rights and the Copenhagen agreement on climate change. These documents were produced during extensive and inclusive negotiation processes that tried to do justice to the complexity of the issues, the underlying power structures and the political aspects of the problems. Forces internal to and external from the UN imposed substantial pressure to change this process. The MDGs were written by Jeffrey Sachs, endorsed by Kofi Annan and signed by heads of state in a short meeting behind closed doors. The MDGs are completely depoliticized and breathe a spirit of “We just need

“The effect that population has on the environment is swamped by the effect of the behavior of rich people who use hundreds of times more natural resources than do people in poorer countries.”

what exemplary of many essays in the book. Time after time, the writers struggle to hold population growth responsible for environmental hazards. In most cases, they fail. This is not because population growth has no impact on the environment or climate change; of course it has. It is because two other factors are considerably more important drivers: the behavior of affluent people in rich countries and the structure of an economy. In other words, the effect that population growth has on the environment is swamped by the effect of the behavior of rich people who use hundreds of times more natural resources than do people in poorer countries.

Reproductive rights activists (many of them co-architects of the Cairo document) who contributed to this book seem to say: “We know that women’s rights are an end in themselves, but if that is not enough for you, please facilitate their reproductive freedom for

resilience is that the Netherlands is rich and Bangladesh is poor, not because the differences in fertility rates or age structures of the respective populations. If we allow this type of reasoning, we should not be surprised if the successors of the people who in the 1990s were arguing that there was no population problem since the entire world population could be housed in Texas, will be stating that the bulk of environmental harm is being done by people with low fertility rates.

WHILE CAIRO PROTAGONISTS seek refuge in contemporary environmental arguments, it is clear that something went wrong after Cairo: the Millennium Development Goals. Singh argues that the fact that reproductive rights are excluded from the MDGs is merely a coincidence, an error, a systemic failure. Stephen Sinding and Carmen Barroso call it a “major blow.”

to do it” (as Sachs stated numerous times). But if that is true, why then did “we” not “just do it” many years ago?

On the very last page of the book Mazur writes: “Population and resource consumption are the yin and yang of environmental harm.” This is exactly from where my uneasiness stems, because population and resource consumption are not two equal sides of the same coin.

I’ll close on one fact in one of the few environmental areas where numbers do have an effect. An average American or Canadian produces over 18 metric tons of CO₂ emissions every year, while a sub-Saharan African produces just over one ton. If all the women of the developing world went on a baby strike tomorrow, it would likely have an impact: noise levels would be reduced and those women would sleep more. But it would do little for those who see climate and the environment as our greatest challenges. ■

"I do not agree with the notion of marriage. I do agree with and accept a man who lives with a man, and a woman who lives with a woman."

— Januario Torgal Ferreira, bishop for the Armed Forces of Portugal, on same-sex marriage.¹

"What is the problem? I am a citizen like everyone else! But people see me on the beach. Let us imagine the following situation: 'So, you were there lying down, next to a topless lady?' And then? What is the matter? Only a pervert goes to the beach and thinks about these things."

— Ferreira again, on his habit of visiting nude public beaches.²

"[There is] a real danger that the boy being raised by the same-sex couple would bring to school something obscene or pornographic, or refer to such things in conversation, as they go along with the same-sex lifestyle, which—as not being related to procreation—is inherently eroticized and pornographic."

— Michael Pakaluk, *Boston Pilot* columnist, on why he didn't want the child of a same-sex couple attending his child's school.³

"If there are many drug addicts, does that mean we should make drug use legal?"

— Josephine Imbong, legal counsel for the bishops conference in the Philippines, denouncing calls to legalize abortion.⁴

"For them, having an abortion had become something like having a cup of coffee."

— Archbishop Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, suggesting that some women have a "habit of abortion."⁵

"No one is forcing them to stay priests.... They never should have become priests."

— Cardinal Agostino Vallini, the vicar-general of Rome reacting to media reports about gay priests.⁶

"Given all the scandals the church has been involved in, what possible right can it have to be preaching about the morality of sleeveless dresses?"

— Maria, 70, marching past Swiss guards seeking to extend the Vatican's strict dress code from St. Peter's to the entire Vatican City.⁷

"Many Christians are concerned that someone who does not believe in God may not endorse the Christian traditions of respect for human life, for the sanctity of marriage and the independence of Churches, church schools and church social welfare agencies.... While there is no indication that the present Prime Minister will undermine the special privileges that churches enjoy, some wonder what the future will bring. This may well influence their votes."

— Archbishop Barry Hickey of Perth, Australia later denied that his comments about Prime Minister Julia Gillard's atheism were intended to affect the upcoming election. Her opponent, Tony Abbott, is a Catholic who had once trained for the priesthood.⁸

1,2 Jeff Mirus, "It is to Laugh..." CatholicCulture.org, July 1, 2010. 3 Michael Pakaluk, "Children in the custody of same-sex couples in parochial schools," *Boston Pilot*, June 4, 2010. 4 Pia Faustino, "Women's groups to Congress: Allow 'safe and legal abortion,'" GMA News.TV, Aug. 2, 2010. 5 "Having an abortion like having a cup of coffee," *California Catholic Daily*, Aug. 3, 2010. 6 "Church says gay priests should come out," ANSA.it, July 23, 2010. 7 "Vatican City bars scantily clad," ANSA.it, July 27, 2010. 8 Jayne Rickard, "Archbishop questions impact of Gillard's atheism," *West Australian*, July 29, 2010.

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The Bishops' Sexual Problems

By Jon O'Brien and Sara Morello



IT'S AMAZING HOW A TREMENDOUSLY powerful organization with more than a billion adherents around the world and unmatched access to money, decision makers and the media, decides to use its muscle. Look at your television sets. Read the papers. Listen to the radio. What is the Catholic hierarchy talking about? Economic injustice? World hunger? Peace in the Middle East? How about caring for orphans, the elderly or the poor? These are, after all, just a few of the social justice issues that keep untold numbers of good Catholics awake at night. But, no, the hierarchy is generally not talking about these concerns. When the Vatican and the bishops speak, it's more often than not about one thing: sex.

It's incredible. No matter where you look or what you read, see and the "rules" that surround it are what bishops talk about. In Brazil, when the family of a nine-year-old rape victim sought an abortion, the voice of compassion, of social justice, did not come from the bishops, who demanded

the continue the pregnancy. In Costa Rica, where families desperately want to have children, but need IVF to conceive, who led the charge to outlaw assisted reproductive technologies in that country? It was the bishops, trying to limit their own pro-life position. In Spain, the bishops fought hard, though unsuccessfully, against the government's legal recognition of marriage of same-sex couples. Civil rights seem to have selective application in the Vatican's worldview.

Do you need someone to make sure we don't achieve the Millennium Development Goals on reducing maternal mortality? Do you want that voice to say that providing comprehensive sexuality education is somehow a plot to undermine the relationship between parents and their children? Would you like them to condemn as immoral medical interventions that save women's lives, like family planning and safe abortion, as well? Our church is the only religion whose leaders have an official seat in the United Nations—and they'll help you. They'll do it from a place they call the "Holy See."

In the Philippines, compassionate Catholic policymakers want to help the economic plight of millions by making it possible for couples to get free family planning. But the bishops will use any threat, big or small, in their campaign against these legislators. If you say yes to birth control or condom distribution the bishops will say no to you at the Communion rail—and they'll tell your constituents to vote you out of office.

In Mexico and Kenya, the bishops don't make headlines for their corporal or spiritual works of mercy. Instead, they're working to change the constitution to ensure that women cannot get safe abortions when they need them. And, if women don't already have the message that they are second-class citizens in the institutional church, now the bishops are making sure embryos have more rights.

On his way to Cameroon, the pope outright lied about condoms, claiming that rather than providing a means to prevent the spread of HIV, they "increase the problem." Leaving social justice aside,

that breaks the ninth commandment. Was there anything else the pope had to say to the people of Africa on his first visit to the continent? The most important message was not to use a condom? Even if you're married and your spouse has HIV? This is what he's worried about?

We don't have to look so far afield, however, to get a lesson about the bishops' obsession with sex. Our office is a mile and a half from the US Capitol, where we recently witnessed another spectacle of episcopal intervention. The bishops' message during the health care debate was loud and clear. If the choice were theirs, they would sacrifice the chance to improve the healthcare of more than 30 million uninsured and underinsured Americans if they couldn't tighten restrictions on one, and only one, safe and legal medical procedure: abortion. And no, their position isn't right, or just or fair—but it is, once again, about sex. And it's also about control.

The story of the bishops' preoccupation with sex isn't new, but its startling application around the globe and their willingness to make it the sine qua non of nearly every policy debate, public proclamation or homily has reached, for many, the tipping point. It really is enough to make people ask why Catholics have such a problem with sex. And sometimes, it's enough to make one wonder the same thing.

We decided to ask Catholics what they thought about sex, about the bishops' party line and about how they reconciled, if they could, what they hear from the church's leaders with their own experiences. We also asked how we got here, to a place where there is such a chasm between bishops and the Catholics they are ordained to teach and care for. We received, as you would imagine, a range of responses, some of which are included in these pages. Others provide us still more food for thought and continued conversation.

We found a common thread in many stories. It is that Catholics try every day to reconcile their faith with the reality of their lives, including their sexual lives. They try less often to reconcile the

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