

# AGENT OF INFLUENCE

By C. Joseph Doyle

*C. Joseph Doyle is the Massachusetts-based Operations Director of the Catholic League. This article, reprinted here with permission, appeared in the January 1994 issue of The **Catholic World Report**.*

Frances Kissling and her Catholics for Free Choice have been in the news again, though not for the usual reasons. Kissling's specialty is deceptive advertising.

Frances Kissling markets her organization as a legitimate voice of Catholic dissent, a theologically respectable and authentically Catholic alternative to the teachings of the pope and the American hierarchy on issues of public morality.

In the media she has been elevated to the status of counter-magisterium, hailed by the *Washington Post* as the "Cardinal of Choice;" she has become one of the most frequently quoted news sources on the Catholic Church and abortion. During Pope John Paul II's August 1993 pilgrimage to the World Youth Day Congress in Denver, Colorado (where 400,000 enthusiastic young Catholics gathered to hear the pope), Kissling dutifully performed the role assigned to her in the media's production of "Days of Dissent."

"This is not a Church, this is not a pope we should be treating with reverence," she intoned to the *Boston Globe*, adding that the pope was "fixated on genital issues." In another interview, she referred to the Holy Father as being "lost in the pelvic zone."

## ON THE DEFENSIVE

After more than a decade of attacking the leadership of the Church, Kissling has lately been engaged in a new and

unfamiliar exercise, defending her own credibility and that of her organization. The experience has not been profitable for her.

It began last August 21st on the "Jeanine Graf Show" on WRKO Radio in Boston. In a debate with this author, Kissling – pressed about how many members her organization has – revealed that "Catholics for Free Choice" was a misnomer, blurting out: "We're not a membership organization. We have no membership." The voice of dissent, it turned out, was not a mass movement, but a spokesperson with a fax machine. Kissling also admitted a fact exposed some years ago, that her organization's contributors included Hugh Hefner's Playboy Foundation. The attention these admissions received in the Catholic press was magnified on September 18th, when the president of the Massachusetts State Senate, William M. Bulger, delivered a speech on anti-Catholicism to the Catholic Lawyers Guild in Boston, and cited Kissling as one of the prime offenders. Referring to Catholics for Free Choice as a "fraudulent front," Bulger discussed both Kissling's funding and her lack of membership in a speech that gained attention in both the Catholic and secular media.

In yet another blow to Kissling's Catholic pretensions, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement on November 4, 1993, denying that CFFC was Catholic. "Many people," the statement read, "may be led to believe that it is an authentic Catholic organization. It is not. It has no affiliation, formal or otherwise, with the Catholic Church."

The bishops went on to point out that CFFC is associated with the pro-abortion lobby in Washington and shares an address and funding sources with the National Abortion Federation, the trade association of the abortion industry. Citing CFFC's support for "the violent destruction of innocent unborn human beings....for all nine months of pregnancy and for any reason," the bishops insisted that CFFC "has rejected unity with the Church," and holds positions that "deliberately contradict

essential teachings of the Catholic Faith.” They concluded that “Catholics for Free Choice merits no recognition or support as a Catholic organization.”

## **COUNTER-ATTACK THROUGH THE MEDIA**

The bishops’ forthright rebuke of Kissling produced inevitable media retaliation in the form of an op-ed piece by inveterate Catholic-basher Anna Quindlen, in the *New York Times*. More revealing, however, is the response of Kissling herself to both Senate President Bulger and the bishops.

In an October 17, 1993, op-ed column in the *Boston Globe*, Kissling reiterated that CFFC was not a membership organization, but went on to divulge that it has an annual budget of \$1.5 million, mostly from foundation sources, and boasts offices in Washington, Mexico City, and Uruguay, a 12-member Board of Directors (including dissident theologian Daniel Maguire), 64 spokesmen in 39 states, and a staff of 20.

Using the tactics of a defense lawyer, Kissling sought to evade Bulger’s charge that CFFC had received funding from the contraception industry by asserting that she never accepted donations from contraceptive companies. What Kissling omitted mentioning, however, was the extensive financial support CFFC had received over the years from the Sonnen Foundation. Established on the profits of Erko contraceptive foam, the Sonnen Foundation has contributed over \$800,000 to CFFC in the last decade and is described by feminist author Marian Faux, in her book *Crusaders*, as one of the two major sources of funding for Kissling.

Sonnen was founded by population-control ideologue Joseph Sonnen. It helped pay for the litigation that led to *Roe v. Wade* and partially funded a 1979 newspaper ad that blamed the Church’s teaching on contraception for the problems of world hunger. After its denunciation by the Catholic League, a Sonnen director responded by calling the teachings of the

Church “detrimental to the world,” and warning that the state may force the Church to abandon its teachings, just as Mormons were forced to abandon polygamy. Sonnen has also supported litigation aimed at denying tax-exempt status to the Catholic church.

Kissling also denied receiving financing from Planned Parenthood, again omitting mention of a long relationship of support and cooperation from that organization. CFFC’s first office was in Planned Parenthood’s headquarters in New York City. Kissling’s first major media exposure, her October 1984 *New York Times* ad supporting Catholic dissent on abortion, was designed by and placed through Planned Parenthood’s ad agency, free of charge. According to Norman Goluskind, president of the agency Smith/ Greenland, the ad “was a favor to Planned Parenthood.”

## **A FAILED MEMBERSHIP**

Even Kissling’s assertions that her organization does not have a membership betray signs of inconsistency. The paucity of membership for Catholics for Free Choice appears to be more a matter of result than intention. CFFC has distributed membership forms with a \$15.00 check-off for “annual dues.” In the early 1980’s, Kissling claimed CFFC had 5,000 members nationwide. In 1983, however, it was reported that only 3 percent of CFFC’s annual income of \$221,900 came from membership dues. At \$15.00 per person, this would have given CFFC not 5,000 but less than 450 members nationwide, or .00076 percent of America’s 59 million Roman Catholics, or about 1 per 100,000.

A series of grants were made to CFFC by the Gund Foundation in the period 1983-1985 to help build “a national membership organization dedicated to preserving reproductive freedom and upholding separation of church and state.” Claiming “we’re not a membership organization,” has become Kissling’s way of evading embarrassing questions about her organization’s

failure to attract more than token support in the Catholic community.

In response to her repudiation by the American bishops, Kissling Issued a statement asserting that CFFC's board, staff, volunteers, and individual donors are Catholic – a theme she emphasizes continually but unconvincingly. In 1990, she maintained that her constituency "is Roman Catholic and it is growing as more and more Catholics learn of our existence." Besides the glaring inaccuracy in her boast about growing numbers, everything about Kissling's organization – its origins and history, its positions and rhetoric, its alliances and sources of funding, and even the religious status of its leader – point not only to the absence of Catholic belief and loyalty, but to an aggressive agenda of virulent and bigoted anti-Catholicism, conducted on behalf of the enemies of the Church in the abortion industry.

## **WHO PAYS THE BILLS?**

CFFC, despite its failure to attract grass-roots Catholic support, has witnessed a ten-fold increase in its funding in the last decade. It derives most of its financing from foundation grants. Its roster of supporters comprises a virtual index of major financial sources for the population control movement. Besides the Sunnen Foundation, six-figure contributors to CFFC have included such pro-abortion and pro-contraception philanthropies as the Brush Foundation (established by a eugenics enthusiast and friend of Margaret Sanger), the Gund Foundation, the Packard Foundation, the General Service Foundation, the Educational Foundation of America, the Public Welfare Foundation, the John Merck Fund, the Scherman Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation, which just donated \$375,000 to CFFC to finance its pro-abortion activities in Latin America. The largest single contributor has been the Ford Foundation, which has funnelled over one million dollars into CFFC's coffers to support such euphemistically described activities as "family planning in

developing countries," "reproductive rights in Latin America," and "public education on issues of reproductive choice."

For an organization that pretends to be Catholic, CFFC accepts funding for purposes that are not only at variance with the teaching of the Church, but are quite overtly anti-Catholic. One 1988 grant from the General Service Foundation for \$28,000 was provided to "counter efforts by the Roman Catholic Church to limit legal access to reproductive health care." Another 1988 grant to CFFC, this one from the Coshocton Foundation for \$50,000, was donated for the straightforward purpose of "advocacy of abortion rights. A \$25,000 grant in 1987 from the Gund Foundation was for "advocacy efforts supporting Catholic dissent on the Issue of abortion."

#### **MAJOR FUNDING SOURCES - 1982-1992**

The Ford Foundation .....	\$1,105,000
The Sunnen Foundation .....	867,000
The MacArthur Foundation .....	375,000
The Packard Foundation.....	375,000
The Educational Foundation of America .....	362,000
The George Gund Foundation .....	278,000
The General Service Foundation .....	232,000
The John Merck Fund .....	133,000
The Public Welfare Foundation.....	130,000
The Scherman Foundation .....	125,000
The North Shore Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program .....	105,000
Leland Fikes Foundation.....	80,000
Prospect Hill Foundation .....	77,500
Wallace Foundation .....	75,000
Robert Sterling Clark Foundation.....	72,000
Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation .....	60,000
Coshocton Foundation .....	50,000
Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation .....	40,000
Nathan Cummings Foundation .....	39,500
Ruth Mott Fund .....	24,600
The Playboy Foundation .....	20,000
The CS Fund.....	10,000
<b>TOTAL: .....</b>	<b>\$4,635,600</b>

*Sources: Foundation Grants Index, National Catholic Register*

*Partial listing.*

In 1985, CFFC received a \$25,000 grant from the Clark Foundation for a program to "educate American Catholics about the wide diversity of opinion that exists within the Church on the issue of reproductive freedom, and to provide Catholic citizens with a rational alternative to Church

doctrine." A 1991 grant for \$47,000 from the same foundation was for the "research, production, and dissemination of material on the role of the Catholic Church in shaping public policy on family planning services and the availability of contraception."

Much of the funding to CFFC is directed towards fostering defection from Catholic teaching in the last frontier (besides Ireland) of the population controllers: Latin America. U.S. Hispanics are also targeted for penetration. In the last eight years, grants totaling over one million dollars have been given to CFFC for Hispanic and Latin American activities. The salaries of Frances Kissling and her cohorts are paid by institutions at enmity with the Church, whose interest – political, ideological, and economic – would be served by the defeat of Catholicism.

## **A CHECKERED HISTORY**

Of Polish ancestry, Frances Kissling, 51, grew up in Flushing, New York, where her mother moved following her divorce from Kissling's father, Thomas Romanski, and her second marriage to a wealthy Protestant, Charles Kissling. After two years at St. John's University, Frances Kissling entered a convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph as a postulant. Six months later she departed, from both the convent and the faith. According to Marian Faux: "She never returned to the Sunday Mass, and never fully returned to the Church."

Kissling describes herself during this period as a "typical person of the sixties. I was single...I protested the war, and I was sexually active." She added, "I saw and see nothing wrong with sexual activity outside of marriage...I don't see it as a profoundly sacred event that requires vows of eternal commitment." Kissling entered in to a nine-year cohabitation with one Carl Chanin, described as a "Jewish hippie accountant." A practitioner of contraception from the time she first became sexually active, Kissling later underwent

sterilization.

In 1970, Kissling became one of the first abortion clinic operators in the country, managing two clinics, one in Pelham, New York, the other in Manhattan. According to Kissling, the Pelham clinic averaged 250 abortions per week.

Through a referral from Planned Parenthood, Kissling received funding in 1973 to promote abortion overseas. She established and operated illegal abortion clinics in two Catholic Countries where abortion was still outlawed Mexico and Italy. In Mexico, she arranged for the training of abortionists and illegally smuggled suction equipment, used in abortion, into that country. In Italy, she offered money and assistance to a group of leftist and Communist women to set up an abortion clinic, proclaiming, "I have no problem helping women get illegal abortions." She went on to establish the first legal abortion clinic in Catholic Austria.

In 1976, Kissling founded and became the first President of the National Abortion Federation, a trade association established to advance the financial and professional interests of abortionists. In 1979, Kissling joined Catholics for Free Choice, and became its executive director in 1982.

## **IS KISSLING A CATHOLIC?**

Except when she is touting Catholic credentials for public relations purposes, Kissling's views and rhetoric demonstrate a venomous hostility towards the authority of the Church, a radical rejection of the doctrines of the faith, and a conscious refusal to participate in the sacramental life of a Catholic. Moreover, her alleged Catholic identity appears to be a matter of tactical convenience to advance a revolutionary purpose.

When she joined CFFC, she told her colleagues, "I no longer considered myself a Catholic," She later claimed: "...if I wanted to be Catholic, if I willed it to be, I could be a



Catholic.”

In *The Inside Stories*, edited by feminist Annie Lally Milhaven, Kissling is quoted as saying “When I say I came back to the Church, I never came back on the old terms....I came back to the Church as a social change agent; I came back to woman-church.” Continuing, Kissling asserts, “I am not talking about coming back to Sunday Mass, confession, and all these things, that are memories of my childhood.”

Kissling openly proclaims the need for revolution in the Church, in which women’s ordination will be the key. Her attitude towards the hierarchy is one of unconcealed contempt. “They don’t deserve our respect....I would like to see women reach the point where they understood that every bishop in this country should be so embarrassed that he is afraid to show his face in public.”

Kissling believes that the hierarchy of the Church is not divinely ordained, is corrupt, and should be treated “without dignity.” According to Kissling, “Jesus Christ didn’t come here and say, ‘You gotta have a pope, you gotta have cardinals, you gotta have bishops, you gotta have priests.’ ...This system is man-made, and really modeled upon a European feudal system.”

She approvingly notes in a 1986 *Washington Post* interview that the secular media “no longer treats 300 men in dresses as representatives of the Catholic Church.” The representatives of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, the curial congregation responsible for the disciplining of the dissident nuns who signed Kissling’s 1984 pro-abortion ad in the *New York Times*, should not “be allowed to show their faces in the United States of America.”

Beneath the rhetoric of pluralism and choice, Kissling’s views on abortion are clear. She supports “unimpeded access to abortion at all stages of pregnancy.” As for her own

spirituality, Kissling tells Marian Faux, "I still don't pray. I don't say the rosary, there are no crucifixes in my house."

Kissling's self-proclaimed status as a Catholic does not bear scrutiny. Canon 1398 of the Code of Canon Law states that "A person who procures a successful abortion incurs an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication." As the founder and operator of multiple (and illegal) abortion clinics, Kissling procured possibly thousands of abortions. Canon 1364 proclaims the same penalty for apostates, schismatics, and heretics. Canon 751 defines apostacy as "the total repudiation of the Christian faith;" defines schism as "refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or communion with the members of the Church subject to him;" and defines heresy as the "obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith."

Kissling's abandonment of her faith made her an apostate years before her procuring of abortions made her an excommunicate. Her refusal of submission and communion with the pope and the bishops places her in schism, while her rejection of the divine institution of the papacy, the episcopate, and the priesthood – even apart from her denial of objective moral norms – places her in heresy. In purely political terms, Frances Kissling is an anti-Catholic revolutionary paid by the enemies of the Church, to attack it from within.

## **A FRONT, NOT AN ORGANIZATION**

Frances Kissling describes Catholics for Free Choice as "one of the most viable threats to the Catholic Church today." CFFC was founded in 1970 and became an affiliate in 1973 of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights. Much of its early funding came from the Unitarian Church. Its first president was Father Joseph O'Rourke, a priest expelled from the Society of Jesus in 1974 and since married. During Pope John Paul II's first visit to the US in 1979, CFFC sponsored an ad in the *Washington Post* contending that the passage of the Human Life

Amendment would “establish as the law of the land the religious views of a minority of Americans.”

This was followed by a 1981 press conference in the US Senate protesting the opposition of the American hierarchy to legal abortion. In 1982, CFFC was among the signers of an amicus brief in the *City of Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health* case, then before the Supreme Court. The brief argued that any restriction of abortion was based on “an opposing theological position” and therefore violated the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion.

That same year CFFC began holding briefings for members of Congress. They were initially sponsored by then-Congressman and later vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, who later wrote the introduction to CFFC’s booklet, *The Abortion Issue in the Political Process*.

According to Marian Faux, the briefings would not only include a discussion of abortion by dissident theologian Daniel Maguire, a ex-priest, but practical advice from a media consultant and a pollster, the latter predictably reassuring legislators that a majority of Catholics were pro-choice. In another Senate press conference in 1983, CFFC argued that Catholic social justice principles required Catholic legislators to support public funding of Medicaid abortions. In a second publication, *Abortion: A Guide to making Ethical Choices*, written in 1983 by Marjorie Reiley Maguire and Daniel Maguire, CFFC asserted that the morality of abortion was subjective.

CFFC gained national attention during the 1984 presidential election, which was marked by the controversy between Cardinal John O’Connor and candidate Ferraro. On October 7, 1984, CFFC sponsored, under the title of *The Catholic Committee on Pluralism and Abortion*,” a full-page ad in the *New York Times*, signed by 97 persons, including a number of feminist nuns and dissident theologian. The ad proclaimed that a diversity of

opinion existed among Catholics on abortion; that few Catholics reject abortion in all circumstances; that abortion could be “a moral choice;” and that restricting abortion would both curtail religious freedom and discriminate against poor women. This was followed in 1985 by a second ad entitled a “Declaration of Solidarity” which claimed that the 97 signers of the first ad were being persecuted by the Church.

In 1987, CFFC worked with Planned Parenthood and the National Organization of Women to protest the Pope’s visit to the US, calling the Vatican “a major violator of women’s rights in the world.” In 1990, CFFC began distributing “action kits” urging supporters to wear CFFC stickers to Mass, protest “anti-choice” homilies through financial boycotts, and counter-demonstrate on Pro-Life Sunday. It also asked supporters to report any parish activity that might violate IRS regulations on political action by churches.

Among the more grotesque publications circulated by CFFC is its 1992 “Liturgy of Affirmation,” a New Age ritual for a woman having an abortion. Prayers are recited to “Mother and Father God,” while the aborting woman is anointed with oil, blessed, embraced, affirmed, and encouraged to sprinkle flower petals.

## **THE MEDIA DARLINGS**

Perhaps the best example of CFFC’s relationship with the media came in August 1992, with the decision of the Knights of Columbus to erect monuments to the unborn slaughtered in abortion. Frances Kissling responded by charging the Knights with polarizing and politicizing the abortion debate and “turning women into pawns.” To the media, a tiny, extremist fringe group of a few hundred disaffected ex-Catholics with a radical agenda, was posited as the equal of the Knights of Columbus, America’s largest Catholic organization with 1.5 million members.

CFFC has not been without its critics. Richard Doerflinger of the Pro-Life Secretariat of the US Catholic Conference has described Kissling's ideology as "a mixture of lies, innuendo, and misinformation." In 1985, he wrote a groundbreaking article exposing Kissling in *America* magazine, that was subsequently republished by the Catholic League.

Responding to CFFC incursions into Latin America, the Peruvian Episcopal Commission on the Family has called their use of the name Catholic "a deceitful strategy" by those who "reject and even mock" the teaching of the Church. Catholic League President William Donohue recently characterized CFFC as "an explicitly anti-Catholic force with a not-so-hidden agenda," when CFFC, ostensibly an abortion-rights organization, took to the New York airwaves trumpeting sex-abuse charges against Cardinal Bernardin.

Catholics for Free Choice repudiates fundamental Catholic beliefs, receives virtually all of its funding from non-Catholic sources opposed to the Church; enjoys only marginal support in the Catholic community; and is headed not by a Catholic, but by an ex-Catholic, perpetrating a fraud, for an anti-Catholic objective. CFFC is an anti-Catholic front group financed or supported by such adversaries of the Catholic Church as the contraception industry, the Ford Foundation, the Unitarian Church, Planned Parenthood, and Playboy. Its sole purpose is to attack the Church and discredit and misrepresent Church teachings. A well-funded letterhead, CFFC exploits the name Catholic to sow dissension and confusion among Catholics on behalf of their enemies.

**\*\*\*Statement regarding Catholics for Free Choice issued by the  
National Conference of Catholic Bishops\*\*\***

During Pope John Paul II's recent visit to this country, programs about dissent in the Catholic Church often included a spokesperson for a group calling itself "Catholics for Free Choice" (CFFC). Both before and since World Youth Day, because

of CFFC's presuming to speak for American Catholics, and because of the attention the media have paid to the group, many people, including Catholics, may be led to believe that it is an authentic Catholic organization. It is not. It has no affiliation, formal or otherwise, with the Catholic Church.

In fact, Catholics for Free Choice is associated with the pro-abortion lobby in Washington, DC. It attracts public attention by its denunciations of basic principles of Catholic morality and teaching – denunciations given enhanced visibility by media outlets that portray CFFC as a reputable voice of Catholic dissent.

CFFC can in no way speak for the Catholic Church and its 59 million members in the United States. Most of CFFC's funding is from secular foundations supporting legal abortion in this country and abroad. It shares an address and funding sources with the National Abortion Federation, a trade association which seeks to advance the financial and professional interests of abortionists.

Therefore, it is important to educate the public, especially Catholics, about CFFC's insistence on claiming a Catholic label. This group has rejected unity with the Church on important issues of longstanding and unchanging Church teaching. In fact there is no room for dissent by a Catholic from the Church's moral teaching that direct abortion is a grave wrong.

Our Catholic position embraces the truth regarding the sacredness of every human life, before as well as after birth. CFFC endorses the violent destruction of innocent unborn human beings and regularly issues legal briefs and other publications endorsing legalized abortion for all nine months of pregnancy and for any reason. Most Americans do not support its extreme agenda.

Because of its opposition to the human rights of some of the

most defenseless members of the human race, and because its purposes and activities deliberately contradict essential teachings of the Catholic faith, we state once again that Catholics for Free Choice merits no recognition or support as a Catholic organization.