

# The Politics of Population Control

September marks the month of the International Conference on Population and Development, otherwise known as the Cairo Conference. Regrettably, events leading up to the Conference have already exposed a virulent strain of anti-Catholicism (see the June *Catalyst*), and it is therefore unlikely that the Cairo proceedings will close without additional incidents of Catholic-bashing. This is particularly unfortunate given that the trigger issue – the Vatican's opposition to abortion as a means of curbing population growth – would not be an issue at all were it not for a misguided approach to the problem of world population growth.

Although the Conference's title indicates that population concerns cannot be separated from the subject of economic development, in reality most of the attention will focus on the former issue. That's too bad because it is highly unlikely that population growth can be effectively curtailed without addressing economic development.

In general, there is an inverse relationship between economic development and population growth, meaning that the wealthier the nation, the lower is its expected rate of population growth. It doesn't always happen that way (per capita income declined recently in Latin America and so did the birth rate), but overall it is clear that the underdeveloped nations have fertility rates that are approximately five times larger than the developed nations. It is also true that within nations the birth rate among the poor far exceeds the birth rate among the rich. In short, throughout the world the pattern is the same: those who can least afford to have children have the most while those who can best afford to have children have the least.

The reasons for this anomaly are largely psycho-cultural. The poor tend to have short horizons, that is they tend to be present-oriented. This live-for-today attitude reflects the sense of resignation that many of the poor have. For those who live in abject poverty, today was a mirror image of yesterday and, more important, tomorrow will be no different than today. On the other hand, the wealthy (and that certainly includes the middle class in the developed nations) tend not to live for today but for tomorrow, that is, they are future oriented. Family planning comes as naturally to them as financial planning.

To the extent that population growth is considered a problem, solutions to the problem that do not address economic development are bound to fail. Unfortunately, many of those in the developed nations who are pushing the hardest for population control have little or no interest in tackling the problem from anything other than a "stop the birth rate" type of approach.

It is simply fascinating to observe the overlay between those who favor contraception and abortion as a means of curtailing population growth and those who favor economic policies that make for poverty and increasing rates of population growth. There is by now conclusive evidence that market economies engender economic growth while state socialist models deliver nothing but poverty. It is bizarre beyond reason, then, that those who worry the most about increasing rates of population growth should also sponsor the very economic programs that create the problem they hope to alleviate. What is even more perverse, however, is that the same people want to solve the problem by killing innocent unborn children.

Logic would argue that the underdeveloped nations, almost all of which practice some variant of socialism, should be encouraged to adopt a market economy. Where markets flourish so does economic development, and it, in turn, abets a decrease in fertility rates. Therefore, the way to stem

population growth in places like China, India and Africa is not via contraception and abortion, but through the free market place.

But ideology often triumphs over the truth. Those who are most exercised about population growth are pro-abortion for the same reason they favor pro-socialist prescriptions for the economy: what drives them is control, the ability to engineer the outcomes of private individuals for collectivist ends, ends which are, of course, determined by them. They not only want to put a cap on the population, they would like to determine what the mosaic should look like. Furthermore, it is their insatiable appetite for power that explains their fondness for socialism and distrust for capitalism.

China is a splendid example. From 1949 to 1976, Mao Zedong ruled China with a fierce totalitarian grip. With socialism came unprecedented poverty and a sharp increase in population growth. Only now, long after Mao's death, is the economy rebounding, and this is due entirely to the development of a quasi-market model. Population control enthusiasts, however, dislike this development and prefer a socialist model.

What meets their approval, however, is the common practice of having government agents track the menstrual cycles of women. This tracking is done so that if a woman who is not authorized to have a baby misses her period, government agents can order her – and physically coerce her if necessary – to have an abortion. Control is what matters, and nothing else. All this from those who fancy themselves as “pro-choice.”

Population control fetishists not only promote abortion and socialism, they vigorously condemn anyone who obstructs their quest for power. And that explains why anti-Catholicism is so prevalent among their ranks.

According to Duquesne University professor Charles Rubin, author of the brilliant new book, *The Green Crusade*, “anti-

Catholic sentiment has played a role among influential thinkers in the population debate.” Rubin knows of what he speaks: *The Green Crusade* is the most informed account of the ideological roots of the environmental movement.

If there is one person that the population control crowd can’t stomach, it is Pope John Paul II. The Pope is not only unalterably opposed to abortion, he is unalterably opposed to the socialist model. Indeed, the Pontiff was a major player in the war against the evil empires that were built on socialist blocks. It is not surprising, then, that anti-Catholic statements tend to appear whenever the elites tackle the issue of population control. With Pope John Paul II at the helm, the Catholic Church provides a formidable adversary to those who want to make the world safe for abortionists and socialists.

There are many people, of course, who are genuinely concerned about the population issue and aren’t the slightest bit anti-Catholic. But when the focus turns to the elites, namely to those organizers who proudly carry the pro-abortion and pro-statist banners, something less innocent appears. It is not an exaggeration to say that abortion is, for some elites, the single most important right a woman can have. Indeed, they’d rather yield the franchise before ever giving up the right to legally summon an abortionist. Given their fixation, they cannot resist taking aim at the Catholic Church.

In recent years, every attempt has been made by the save-the-planet gang to discredit not only the teachings of the Catholic Church on population matters, but to question its right to even address such issues. What is demanded from this crew is ideological purity, and that is why they loathe the Catholic Church: it is refreshingly obstinate in its convictions. Ironically, accusations of dogmatism are hurled against the Catholic Church by the very people who specialize in smear attacks against those who quarrel with their secular theology.

The Vatican is right to charge its critics with cultural imperialism. It is amazing to listen to Western male and female Caucasians – all of whom swear allegiance to the god of multiculturalism – lecture their non-white brothers and sisters from around the world about the benefits of saline injections. The same people who profess to hate the imposition of Western values on the Third World have no qualms about indoctrinating women of color with their Planned Parenthood ideas. If the elites valued the rights of unborn African children the way they value the fate of the African elephant, much of the real problem would be resolved.

Catholics can be proud of the Vatican's position on population control. Nowhere in its documents is there any language which sacrifices innocent human life for utilitarian ends. In an age when relativism is rampant, the Catholic Church is still prepared to say that some things are intrinsically evil. That may not be fashionable, but it remains as true today as it was when it was proclaimed in Scripture.