

What to Expect At the Beijing Conference

By Dale O'Leary

The following is an excerpt from Dale O'Leary's monograph, "Gender: The Deconstruction of Women." Dale is a frequent commentator on international issues. It is especially timely given the commencement of the Fourth World Conference on Women on September 4; it extends to September 15 and is being held in Beijing, China.

At the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting at the UN in March, many of the delegates as well as members of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), met to discuss the issues that will be voted on in Beijing. The conference was heavily staffed by "gender feminists," a term that Professor Christina Hoff Summer has coined to describe radical feminists.

Dale O'Leary's analysis of the role of gender feminists is an invaluable guide to understanding the workings of the Beijing Conference. We are reprinting those portions of her work that are of direct interest to the readership of the Catholic League.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health are the very heart of the Gender Feminist agenda as the following quote from the Council of Europe meeting in preparation for Beijing made clear.

The right to free choice in matters of reproduction and lifestyle was considered [by the participants at the meeting] fundamental for women. The enjoyment of sexual and reproductive rights is a prerequisite for women to have genuine self-determination.

"Free choice in reproduction" is code for abortion on demand;

“lifestyle,” a code word for homosexuality, lesbianism, and all other forms of non-marital sexuality. The Council of Europe participants want this “self-determination” extended to adolescents, unmarried women, and lesbians.

The voices of young women should be heard since sexual life is not solely attached to married life. This leads to the point of the right to be different whether in terms of lifestyle – the choice to live in a family or to live alone, with or without children – or sexual preferences. The reproductive rights of lesbian women should be recognized.

This recognition of the rights of lesbian women would include the right of lesbian couples to conceive children through artificial insemination and the right of lesbians to legally adopt their partners’ children.

In demanding sexual and reproductive rights, the Gender Feminists are demanding legal and social sanction for behaviors which legal codes, religious teachings, and cultural norms throughout history and around the world have condemned. The Gender Feminists insist that the condemnation of these behaviors was the result of men’s desire to control women:

It is overwhelmingly men who control the process of interpreting and defining the relevant religious, cultural, or traditional practices, and as a consequence these norms are defined in patriarchal ways which limit women’s human rights, especially in asserting control over women’s sexuality and in confining women in roles that reinforce and perpetuate their subordination.

Societies condemn sexual relations outside marriage, particularly sexual relations with adolescent girls, because these behaviors result in the conception of children outside of marriage. The social norms are sustained by experience of the social costs of such behaviors and not by men’s desire to control women. Indeed, it is the mothers who are often the

most concerned about the enforcement of these norms because they want to protect their daughters from sexual exploitation and their potential grandchildren from the tragedy of fatherlessness.

Every child has a biological father and mother. No matter the circumstances of their birth, children feel a need to establish a relationship with their biological parents. The power of blood ties is not an invention but a reality, as the experience of many adopted children verifies. When tragedy prevents a child from growing up in a home where his biological mother and father are present, people can react heroically by providing the child with as near a normal a family life as possible, but there is no denying that a tragedy has occurred. To purposefully or carelessly make a tragedy by conceiving a child outside a stable marriage constitutes the most devastating form of child abuse. Women do not have the right to abuse children.

Every human being has a right to life which, according to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, article 25, includes "the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family." The Gender Feminists want this right restated as an absolute 'right to health,' and they insist that this be extended to a right to sexual and reproductive health as an amendment to the Beijing document.

Health naturally includes health of all organs including the sex organs and reproductive organs, but the Gender Feminists have manipulated the UN into defining reproductive health to include abortion. Thus, the right to life would include the right to health, which would include abortion and death to unborn human beings.

Gender Feminists attempt further to confuse the issue by linking sexual and reproductive rights with sexual and reproductive health. The term sexual and reproductive rights as used by Gender Feminists refers to the right to engage in

various behaviors. Health does not include the right to engage in behaviors some of which are unhealthy, others of which are dangerous to society and particularly to children. Neither women nor men can be said to have absolute sexual and reproductive rights. Human beings do have the right to marry and form a family. On the other hand, government and society have a duty to discourage behaviors which endanger the health and safety of citizens and particularly behaviors which put children at risk. To claim abortion as a reproductive right denies the prior and primary right of the unborn human being to life.

A booklet prepared for a series of workshops held during the Cairo Conference on Population entitled "Sexual and Reproductive Rights And Health as Human Rights: Concepts and Strategies; An Introduction for Activists," by Rhonda Copelan of International Women's Human Rights Law Clinic at

CUNY and Berta Esperanza Hernandez of International Women's Human Rights Project of the Center for Law and Public Policy, St. John's University (NY), spelled out how the Gender Feminists intend to use the concept of human rights to push for abortion and lesbianism.

The strategy outlined in the booklet is very simple: Push the evolution of human rights protected by the UN to include "sexual and reproductive rights and health" and use the mechanism of the UN to enforce these rights worldwide. In effect, they hope to create new "rights" which are based not on natural law and common consensus, but rooted in radical ideologies, and to use these rights to overthrow traditional cultures and religious values, as the following quotes demonstrate:

Women have put the issue of acknowledging reproductive and sexual rights and health as human rights within the framework of economic and social justice and international solidarity...

By insisting that our basic needs in the areas of reproductive and sexual health are human rights...

Having abortion and sexual rights for lesbians and adolescents declared fundamental human rights would give the Gender Feminists a powerful weapon to enforce their agenda, as the authors state:

Human rights constitute limitations on the sovereignty of states; they constitute principles to which states, donors, providers, intergovernmental organizations and ultimately, the private economic sector must be held accountable.

Human rights do not depend on whether a state has acknowledged them, for example, by ratifying a particular treaty. Widely endorsed human rights norms are relevant regardless of whether a state has ratified a particular treaty.

Sexual and reproductive rights are broadly defined in the booklet:

...sexual and reproductive rights means respect for women's bodily integrity and decision-making as well as their right to express their sexuality with pleasure and without fear of abuse, disease or discrimination. It requires access to voluntary, quality reproductive and sexual health information, education and services.

"Bodily integrity and decision-making" are code words for abortion, as is reproductive health services. The authors recognize that there is opposition to their agenda, which they claim is opposition to elemental human rights.

This demand for elemental human rights is being met with opposition by religious fundamentalists of all kinds, with the Vatican playing the leading role in organizing religious opposition to reproductive rights and health including even family planning services.

The Gender Feminists claim that religion, tradition, and cultural practices are being used to oppose women's human rights; in fact it is the Gender Feminists themselves who are weakening support for real human rights by trying to manipulate the concept of human rights to serve their ideological agenda.

Archbishop Renato Martino, delegate of the Holy See to the UN, in a November 1994 statement unequivocally restated the Catholic commitment to inalienable human rights for all persons and expressed concern over the misuse of the concept of human rights:

Currently, there is a tendency to believe that society itself has formulated what is known as human rights. However, human rights are such precisely because they are inherent to the dignity of the human person. A society may acknowledge or violate human rights, but it cannot manipulate the existence of human rights, since these rights precede even the state.

Gender Feminists have used other strategies besides sexual and reproductive rights and health to push abortion and lesbian rights into the text of UN documents. Pro-life and pro-family activists at the UN have been diligent in informing delegates about the true intentions behind the introduction of terms like "safe motherhood" (which would include the decriminalization of abortion), "diversity" (which would include acceptance of lesbianism) and "other unions" (which would protect homosexual relationships).

Pro-life, pro-family activists maintain constant vigilance since no sooner is one term exposed and discredited than another surfaces.

While the Gender Feminists insist that abortion-on-demand is essential to women's self-determination, women who have had abortions talk about having no choice or being forced by

others. There is nothing pro-woman about abortion. It always represents a failure: a failure of society to provide for the needs of women and their children; a failure of men to accept their responsibilities; or a failure of women to recognize their ability to cope with a crisis. The authentic women's perspective recognizes human rights are truly inalienable and indivisible and extend to every human being, even those still nestled in their mothers' wombs.

Freedom of Religion Under Attack

Gender Feminists view religion as a major cause of the oppression of women. Gender Feminists among UN NGOs have demonized "fundamentalists" as the enemy of the aspirations of women. A video, promoting the NGO forum of the Beijing Conference made by independent producer Judith Lasch, attacked Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, stating among other things:

Nothing has done more to constrict women than religious beliefs and teachings.

According to Ms. Lasch, the video was shown at the UN to key people including Gertrude Mongella, chair of the Conference, and "Everybody loves it."

The Women's Global Strategies meeting report contained numerous references to fundamentalists and to the necessity of countering their supposed attacks on women's rights. The NGO lobbying document contained the following recommendation for an addition to paragraph 93:

All forms of fundamentalism, be they political, religious or cultural, exclude women from internationally accepted norms of human rights and make women targets of extreme violence. It is the concern of the international committee that these practices be eliminated.

It was made clear throughout the PrepCom that the term

fundamentalists included "Catholic Evangelical, and Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Jews, and Muslims" and referred to any person who refuses to alter the teachings of their religion to conform with the Gender Feminist's agenda. Pro-life Evangelical Christian NGOs were repeatedly accused of being lackeys of the Holy See. Catholics were accused of being fundamentalists.

One of the most publicized and well attended NGO sponsored events during the PrepCom for Beijing was a panel discussion entitled "Counter-Attack: Women Stand Up to Fundamentalism." To no one's surprise, Frances Kissling, the head of Catholics for a Free Choice, attacked the Catholic Church. Rev. Meg Riley, Director of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Office of Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay Concerns, whose work involves helping "local groups across the US deconstruct the conservative right's propaganda on civil rights issues," attacked the Religious Right. She accused Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family of wanting to control women. Indira Kajosevic, a woman from the former Yugoslavia, seemed more concerned about the pro-life, pro-family statements made by her country's religious leaders than the mass rape of her country-women.

The report from the Council of Europe meeting to prepare for Beijing, contained numerous attacks on religion, including the following:

The rise of all forms of religious fundamentalism was seen as posing a particular threat to the enjoyment by women of their human rights and to the full participation of women in decision-making at all levels of society.

– women themselves must be empowered and provided with the opportunity to determine what their cultures, religions, and customary backgrounds mean for themselves.

...governments, religious institutions, and all sectors of

society should recognize the legitimate claims of women to have a significant role in the definition and interpretation of religious, cultural, and customary norms and should take active steps to encourage women's involvement in these processes.

...the Council of Europe should initiate comparative studies into the influences that different cultures, religions and traditions play in enhancing and impeding the full realization of women's human rights within the member States of the Council of Europe.

In order to understand the threat these statements pose to freedom of religion it is necessary to understand the Gender Feminist view of religion as something people have made up and that the major religions were made up by men to oppress women.

Women should have and do have the right to participate fully in the religion of their choice. Women trained and believing in their faith can and have made important contributions; however this is not what the Gender Feminists have in mind. Gender Feminist theologians want the right to remake religion so that it conforms to the Gender Feminist agenda. These women "theologians" are not in any real sense "believers" in the religions they demand the right to rewrite nor even in a real God.

For examples, feminist theologian Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza denied the central teaching of the Christian faith – the possibility of revelation:

Biblical texts are not verbally inspired nor doctrinal principles but historical formulations... Similarly, feminist theory insists that all texts are products of an androcentric patriarchal cultural and history.

Gender Feminists want the Christian God "re-imaged" the Christian God as Sophia-female wisdom. Gender Feminist

theologian Mary E. Hunt of WATER (Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual) who is active in the movement to re-image God contributed to the PrepCom for Beijing. Along with Frances Kissling, she sponsored a "Catholic Feminist" report attacking the Catholic church. Mary Hunt's theology could hardly be considered Christian, let alone Catholic, as this quote from her newsletter demonstrates:

I believe that life, pleasure and justice are to be valued equally, that the God of creation is at the same time the Goddess of pleasure and the spirit of justice.

In the same article she quoted with approval the accusation that Christianity is the cause of child abuse which was made by feminist theologians Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn's:

Christianity is an abusive theology that glorifies suffering. Is it any wonder that there is much abuse in modern society when the dominant image of theology of the culture is 'divine child abuse'- God the Father demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son? If Christianity is to be liberating for the oppressed, it must itself be liberated from this theology.

No religion is obliged to grant non-believers the right to define the tenets of its faith. Religious leaders are not supposed to make up religion; their duty is to hand on what they have received.

Gender Feminists accuse "patriarchal" religious leaders of imaging God in male terms to keep women oppressed, control their sexuality, and deny their rights.

Women who are faithful Catholic, Evangelical and Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Jews, and Muslims defend their religious traditions as the best protection of women's rights and dignity. In particular, they support their religions' teachings on marriage, family, sexuality, and respect for

human life.

Women believers support freedom of religion as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for all persons including those inaccurately labeled as “fundamentalists:”

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance (Article 18, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.)

The use of the UN by Gender Feminists as a platform from which to lobby against freedom of religion is a violation of the spirit of the UN and should be condemned as such.