

Catholic Doctrine and Reproductive Health

WHY THE CHURCH CAN'T CHANGE

by: Stephen D. Mumford DrPH

The anti-abortion movement in the United States was created in response to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, which legalized abortion. However, it really owes its origin to a group of men in Rome 103 years earlier. This was 1870, the year of Vatican Council I, a conclave of great importance in recent church history. Why is this so?

Hans Küng, the renowned Swiss Catholic theologian, best summed up the problem accounting for its creation when he said, "It is not possible to solve the problem of contraception until we solve the problem of infallibility."¹ In his book, *How the Pope Became Infallible*, Catholic historian Bernhard Hasler describes in great detail what Küng meant: For more than a millennium, the Vatican had possessed temporal power that ensured its survival. With the loss of the Papal States in 1870, it appeared all but certain that a strong papacy would simply disappear. The Vatican urgently needed a new source of power.

A group of conservative and influential leaders, including Pope Pius IX, came up with a brilliant idea for a new source: an infallible pope. What is infallibility? According to Catholic dogma, when the pope formulates a doctrine, he is simply transmitting this dogma on God's behalf. Therefore, the teaching cannot possibly be in error.

Roman Catholics could be certain that the teachings of the pope and of God were one and the same, and, if strictly followed, one's entrance into heaven was guaranteed. Communicants found this concept very attractive and were eager to behave in any manner required of them. Such an arrangement placed enormous control over individuals into the hands of the Vatican, extending across national borders and even to the other side of the world. It could no longer control the laity by means of its governance, as it had in the Papal States which would later become Italy. But the Holy See could exercise control directly by adopting a policy of psychological coercion founded on a new doctrine—that of papal infallibility.

Protection at all Costs

Papal infallibility was a brilliant concept—and it worked for a century. But at its introduction in 1870, the Catholic intelligentsia recognized that, at some point in the future, this principle would lead to the self-destruction of the institution. Times were certain to change and in unpredictable ways, but the Church would be locked on an inexorable course—teachings that could not be changed without destroying the principle of infallibility itself. These distinguished scholars foresaw that one day, encumbered by its unchangeable teachings, the Church would find itself down a blind alley from which there would be no escape and faced with inevitable self-destruction as a result of a grave loss of credibility. The blind alley turned out to be the issue of birth control—contraception and abortion.

Since the 1968 adoption of the papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, there has been a hemorrhage in the Church's credibility. *Humanae Vitae* ruled out any change of the Church's position on birth control for all time.

The proponents of papal infallibility could not imagine the population explosion of the last half of this century. Just as critics had predicted, institutional self-destruction is now well underway. But, as it stands now, the Church cannot change its position on birth control without undermining all of its dogma. The following are only three among scores of findings to indicate how the Vatican is destroying itself:

1. In 1965 there were 42,000 young men in American seminaries studying for the priesthood. Today there are fewer than 6,000, even though the number of Catholics in this country has nearly doubled.

2. The average age of nuns in the United States is 65 years. Only 3% are under age 40, while 35% are older than 70.

3. One-half of all American priests quit the priesthood before reaching retirement age. Self-destruction as a result of loss of credibility is underway but progressing slowly. The pope remains hopeful that he can turn this around. He is convinced that, if he changes the Church's position on birth control and destroys the principle of infallibility, self-destruction will be very swift. We know that this matter was the focus of his attention for several years in the 1960s.

The Threats of Legalized Birth Control and Abortion

In 1964, Pope Paul VI created the Papal Commission on Population and Birth Control. It was a two-part commission and met from 1964 to 1966. One part consisted of 64 lay persons, the other, of 15 clerics, including the future Pope John Paul II, then a Polish cardinal. Pope Paul gave the Commission only one mission—to determine how the Church could change its position on birth control without undermining papal authority. After two years of study, the Commission concluded that it was not possible to make this change without undermining papal authority, but that the Church should make the change anyway because it was the right thing to do! The lay members voted 60 to 4 for change, and the clerics, 9 to 6 for change.² Pope Paul did not act immediately. A minority report was prepared, co-authored by the man who is now Pope John Paul II. In this report he stated:

If it should be declared that contraception is not evil in itself, then we should have to concede frankly that the Holy Spirit had been on the side of the Protestant churches in 1930 (when the encyclical *Casti Connubii* was promulgated), in 1951 (Pius XII's address to the midwives), and in 1958 (the address delivered before the Society of Hematologists in the year the pope died). It should likewise have to be admitted that for a half century the Spirit failed to protect Pius XI, Pius XII, and a large part of the Catholic hierarchy from a very serious error.

This would mean that the leaders of the Church, acting with extreme imprudence, had condemned thousands of innocent human acts, forbidding, under pain of eternal damnation, a practice which would now be sanctioned. The fact can neither be denied nor ignored that these same acts would now be declared licit on the grounds of principles cited by the Protestants, which popes and bishops have either condemned or at least not approved.³

In this and other texts, the pope took the position that a change on the birth control issue would destroy the principle of papal infallibility, and that infallibility was the fundamental principle of the Church upon which all else rests. A change on birth control would immediately raise questions about other possible errors popes have made in matters of divorce, homosexuality, confession, parochial schooling, etc. that are fundamental to Roman Catholicism. The security and survival of the papacy itself is on the line. The Church insists on being the sole arbiter of what is moral. Civil law legalizes contraception and abortion. Governments are thereby challenging the prerogative of the pope to be the ultimate authority on matters of morality. Most Americans look to democratic process to determine morality. In the simplest analysis, the Church cannot coexist with such an arrangement, which in its view, threatens its very survival as a world political power. For this reason, the Vatican was forced to interfere in the democratic process in the United States by lobbying for the passage of numerous anti-abortion laws designed to protect its interests. There is a plethora of documentation to support these findings, relating mainly to Vatican and U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops' sources, some of which I will discuss later. Only legal abortion and legal family planning threaten the Church. It has shown very little interest in illegal abortion. For example, in Latin America, where abortion is illegal, abortion rates are two or three times as high as those seen in the United States. However, abortion is essentially ignored by the bishops there.

Political Action

Even before the work of the Papal Commission on Popical Action Even before the work of the Papal Commission on Population and Birth Control was completed in 1966, it was widely recognized in the Vatican that the Church faced a grave problem regarding birth control, including abortion. Vatican Council II, which ended in 1966, set the stage for the bishops to address this problem. One of the outcomes of this Council was the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Part two of the Constitution was titled, "Some Problems of Special Urgency." In his book, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, published by the Princeton University Press in 1991, T.A. Byrnes observes, "This list of problems to which the Church was to turn its attention reads like a blueprint of the American hierarchy's political agenda in the 1970s and 1980s."⁴ The first was abortion:

God, the Lord of life, has conferred on men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life—a ministry which must be fulfilled in a manner which is worthy of man. Therefore, from the moment of conception life must be guarded with the greatest of care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes.⁵

The Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church, another Vatican Council II document, created the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), which was organized according to universal church law. It was created to serve as a political instrument of the Vatican.⁶ During a meeting of the American hierarchy in November 1966, the bishops formally established the NCCB as their official collective body and

established the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) as their administrative arm and secretariat.⁷

From the very beginning, there has been a common and correct perception that the Catholic hierarchy was primarily an anti-abortion political lobby. Byrnes summarizes his study of the history of Catholic bishops in American politics by saying:

Before I end, I want to address one final matter, namely the unique position that abortion occupies on the Catholic hierarchy's public policy agenda. Abortion is not simply one issue among many for the bishops. It is rather the bedrock, non-negotiable starting point from which the rest of their agenda has developed. The bishops' positions on other issues have led to political action and political controversy but abortion, throughout the period I have examined, has been a consistently central feature of the Catholic hierarchy's participation in American politics.⁸

On January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion for Americans. According to Bishop James McHugh, "within twenty-four hours" of the court's action, the bishops knew they would need to mount a political campaign in favor of a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion.⁹

The Vatican wasted no time in responding. In 1974, the stage was further set to create a political machine to end legal abortion in the United States when Rome issued a document titled, Vatican Declaration on Abortion, which states:

A Christian can never conform to a law which is in itself immoral, and such is the case of a law which would admit in principle the licitness of abortion. Nor can a Christian take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of such a law, or vote for it. Moreover, he may not collaborate in its application.¹⁰

This statement is an unequivocal rejection of the legitimacy of our democratically elected government to pass laws legalizing abortion. The papacy had placed its authority on the line, pitting itself against the U.S. government. If the Vatican were to avoid the looming destruction of papal authority, it must minimize the number of abortions legally performed and ultimately succeed in reversing the effects of *Roe v. Wade*. The 1974 Vatican Declaration on Abortion follows the instructions set forth by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical on the Chief Duties of Christian Citizens:

If the laws of the state are manifestly at variance with the divine law, containing enactments hurtful to the Church or conveying injunctions adverse to the duty imposed by religion, or if they violate in the person of the Supreme Pontiff the authority of Jesus Christ, then truly, to resist becomes a positive duty, to obey, a crime.¹¹

The current abortion law in the United States is unquestionably "hurtful to the Church." Minimizing the number of abortions done in the United States is obviously helpful to the Church.

The Bishops' Pastoral Plan for Pro-life Activities

On November 20, 1975, at its annual meeting, the American Catholic bishops issued the Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities, a frank and superbly detailed blueprint of the bishops' strategy for infiltrating and manipulating the American democratic process at national, state and local levels. It maps out the creation of a national political machine controlled by the Vatican through the bishops. The plan is directed toward creating a highly sophisticated, meticulously organized, and well-financed local, state, and national political machine. The plan candidly states that the Church will undertake activities to elect officials from local to national levels who will adhere to Vatican-ordained positions; that it will seek to influence policy in ways that will eliminate the threat to the Church; and that it will encourage the Executive Branch to deal "administratively" with matters that are unfavorable to the Church.

The Plan, in part, reads:

The abortion decisions of the United States Supreme Court (January 22, 1973) violate the moral order, and have disrupted the legal process which previously attempted to safeguard the rights of unborn children. A comprehensive pro-life legislative program must therefore include the following elements:

- a) Passage of a constitutional amendment providing protection for the unborn child to the maximum degree possible.
- b) Passage of federal and state laws and adoption of administrative policies that will restrict the practice of abortion as much as possible.

According to the Pastoral Plan, there is to be in each state a State Coordinating Committee, functioning under the State Conference or its equivalent, which will include bishops' representatives from each diocese in the state and will function to monitor political trends in the state. Diocesan Pro-Life Committees are to coordinate groups and activities within the diocese, particularly efforts to effect passage of a constitutional amendment to protect the unborn child. The diocesan committee is to rely for the information and direction on the Bishops' Pro-Life Office and on the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment.

Noting that well-planned and coordinated political action at national, state, and local levels would be required, the pamphlet states that the activity is not simply the responsibility of Catholics and should not be limited to Catholic groups or agencies. This instruction was a clarion call by the bishops for the creation of the New Right movement.

Indeed, during the period 1976–1980, all of the organizations that became known as the "New Right Movement" were created, with one exception: The Christian Coalition was created later to replace the Moral Majority, which had fallen into public disrepute. Catholics were key players in the creation of all these organizations and influential in their leadership. This assessment of the creation of this movement and the influence in it of the bishops is well documented.^{12,13,14}

In 1980, Federal Judge John Dooling ruled on *McRae v. HEW*, a challenge to the Hyde Amendment, which prevented Medicaid payment for abortion. The judge had spent a year studying the anti-abortion movement in great detail, including the bishops'

Pastoral Plan. His findings showed that the anti-abortion movement was essentially Roman Catholic with a little non-Catholic window dressing.¹⁵

In a 328-page ruling, Dooling, a practicing Catholic, makes short work of the anti-abortionists' pretensions to be a spontaneous grass-roots movement that owes its political victories to sheer moral appeal. He confirms that the right-to-life's main source of energy, organization, and direction has been the Catholic Church, and he describes in detail how the movement works to achieve its goals.

The Protestant face carefully put on the movement, first by the Moral Majority and then by the Christian Coalition, was called for in the Pastoral Plan. Richard A. Viguerie, a Catholic, is the man most responsible for the development and success of the New Right. He was also involved in the original discussions that led to the creation of the Moral Majority and, as its fundraiser, can be credited with its financial success. Paul Weyrich, a Catholic, claims credit for originating the idea for the group and the name itself. In their search for an attractive front man for the organization, they chose Jerry Falwell.¹⁶

Much effort went into avoiding public disclosure of the role of the Catholic Church in the creation of the Moral Majority. Maxine Negri, in "A Well-Planned Conspiracy," exposed involvement of the Catholic hierarchy in the Moral Majority.¹⁷ The Christian Coalition replaced the Moral Majority with the bishops still in full control. The evidence supporting this statement is compelling.¹⁸ For example, Maureen Roselli, executive director of the Catholic Alliance, a branch of the Christian Coalition, claims that the Coalition has 250,000 Catholic members.¹⁹ Catholic Georgetown University political science professor Mary Bendyna told the Religious News Service that she was surprised to find, even before the creation of the Catholic Alliance, that all five staffers in the Christian Coalition's Washington, D.C., office were Catholic.²⁰

Claims of autonomy by the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition should not be taken seriously. What is described here is exactly the organization contemplated in the Pastoral Plan.

What are some of the bishops' successes on the three branches of our federal government? The February 24, 1992, issue of Time magazine showed that, with the election of anti-abortion Ronald Reagan in 1980, the views of the Vatican gained substantial influence within the administrative branch of the U.S. government in the area of population and family planning policy.²¹ Presidents Reagan and later Bush were arguably the most pro-Vatican presidents in American history.

This article was written by Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Carl Bernstein. He described what he referred to as the "Catholic Team":

The key Administration players were all devout Roman Catholics—CIA chief William Casey, [Richard] Allen [Reagan's first National Security Advisor], [William] Clark [Reagan's second National Security Advisor], [Alexander] Haig [Secretary of State], [Vernon] Walters [Ambassador at Large] and William Wilson, Reagan's first ambassador to the Vatican. They regarded the U.S.-Vatican relationship as a holy alliance: the moral force of the Pope and the teachings of their church combined with their notion of American Democracy.

In a section of his article headed “The U.S. and the Vatican on Birth Control,” Bernstein includes two more revealing paragraphs:

In response to concerns of the Vatican, the Reagan Administration agreed to alter its foreign aid program to comply with the church’s teachings on birth control. According to William Wilson, the President’s first ambassador to the Vatican, the State Department reluctantly agreed to an outright ban on the use of any U.S. aid funds by either countries or international health organizations for the promotion of abortions. As a result of this position, announced at the World Conference on Population in Mexico City in 1984, the U.S. withdrew funding from, among others, two of the world’s largest family planning organizations: the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.

“American policy was changed as a result of the Vatican’s not agreeing with our policy,” Wilson writes. “American aid programs around the world did not meet the criteria the Vatican had for family planning. AID [the Agency for International Development] sent various people from the Department of State to Rome, and I’d accompany them to meet the president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, and in long discussions they finally got the message. . . .”

However, the bishops may have had even greater success in targeting the judicial branch. In the 12 years of the Reagan and Bush administrations, these two presidents appointed five Supreme Court Justices and 70% of all sitting judges in the federal court system. All were anti-abortion, another goal of the Plan.

The legislative branch has been more difficult for the bishops, although they did achieve sufficient influence in Congress to the extent that pro-choice Congressmen could not override a presidential veto of family planning bills. As long as the anti-family planning interests controlled the White House, as they did during the Reagan and Bush years, this was sufficient for the bishops’ purposes.

One of the more profound accomplishments of this Plan is the capture of the Republican Party by the Vatican. This accomplishment was vital to the bishops’ legislative agenda described in the Plan. In a July 28, 1994, Los Angeles Times wire service story, Jack Nelson describes the maneuvers of the Religious Right so that this takeover is all but an accomplished fact.

On September 11, 1995, Bill Moyers gives his assessment of the influence of the Religious Right in remarks titled Echoes of the Crusades: The Radical Religious Right’s Holy War on American Freedom: “They control the Republican party, the House of Representatives and the Senate. . . .”²²

Outgoing Republican National Committee Chairman Richard Bond told the members of that committee on January 29, 1993, that it was time for the Republican Party to abandon the papal position on abortion. Bond said that the party should not be governed by “zealotry masquerading as principle.”²³

But who is the Religious Right? The Spring 1994 issue of Conscience, the journal of Catholics for a Free Choice, exploded the myth that the Religious Right is a Protestant movement. It was designed, created, and controlled by Catholics in response to the Pastoral Plan. These Catholics recruited opportunistic Protestants to give the appearance that Protestants were the instigators. The leadership is Catholic but the followers are

often Protestant. The National Catholic Reporter predicted that the Bishops' Pastoral Plan would lead to the creation of a new political party, an American Catholic Party.²⁴ But instead, the Vatican simply chose to seize control of the Republican Party.

The outcomes of the Plan have been truly remarkable. And they have implications for all Americans.

The Vatican's Bold Behavior

In April 1992, in a rare public admission of this threat, Cardinal John O'Connor of New York acknowledged:

The fact is that attacks on the Catholic Church's stance on abortion—unless they are rebutted—effectively erode Church authority on all matters, indeed on the authority of God himself.²⁵

The Vatican claims the right to protect itself against “harmful laws”—even when democratically legislated. The central difficulty here, of course, is that what the Vatican considers “harmful” to itself and its authority often is exactly what patriotic American lay Catholic and non-Catholic men and women thoughtfully consider beneficial to them often is exactly what patriotic American lay Catholic and non-Catholic men and women thoughtfully consider beneficial to themselves and their families. In a letter to American bishops from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—the most powerful Vatican office—Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger reminded the bishops that “The Church has the responsibility to protect herself from the application of harmful laws.”²⁶ Obviously, if an institution has the “responsibility,” it also claims the “right.” The Vatican exercises its “right” to protect itself from the application of harmful laws in the autocratic way it defines harmful.

In 1995, Pope John Paul II issued his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (Gospel of Life). It frankly attacks the principles of liberal democracy and questions the legitimacy of the American government. He instructs Catholics to defy civil laws he deems illegitimate, and to impose papal teachings on all Americans through political commitment, even if it means that they must sacrifice their lives to do so. *Evangelium Vitae* is quite lengthy and contains 105 sections. The following passages, referenced by their section numbers, illustrate the pope's message:

Laws which authorize and promote abortion and euthanasia are therefore radically opposed not only to the good of the individual but also to the common good; as such they are completely lacking in authentic juridical validity [#72].

Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection [#73].

It is precisely from obedience to God—to whom alone is due that for which _is acknowledgment of His absolute sovereignty—that the strength and the courage to resist unjust human laws are born. It is the strength and the courage of those prepared even to be imprisoned and the courage to resist unjust human laws are born. It is the strength and the courage of those prepared even to be imprisoned or put to the sword, in the certainty that this is what makes for the endurance and faith of the saints [#73].

Christians . . . are called upon under grave obligation to conscience not to cooperate formally in practices which, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God's law. Indeed, from the moral standpoint, it is never licit to cooperate formally in evil. . . . This cooperation can never be justified either by invoking respect for the freedom of others or by appealing to the fact that civil law permits it or requires it [#74].

To refuse to take part in committing an injustice is not only a moral duty; it is also a basic human right [#74].

Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality. Fundamentally, democracy is a "system" and as such is a means and not an end. Its "moral" value is not automatic but depends on conformity to the moral law [#70].

In her National Catholic Reporter article, "Defending Life Even Unto Death," Professor Janine Langan, of the University of Toronto assesses *Evangelium Vitae*: "John Paul leaves no room for ghetto Catholicism. Excusing our silence about matters of truth because 'we should not push on other people our Christian God,' as one of my students put it last year, is not acceptable." Professor Langan does not acknowledge that this encyclical is extremist in nature but she describes it forthrightly: "In a situation as grave as the present one, Christians are bound to come into conflict. . . . *Evangelium Vitae* is thus a challenge to defend life even at the cost of martyrdom." Langan quotes the pope, "Life finds its center, its meaning and its fulfillment when it is given up [#51]." In her view, and the pope's, martyrdom is admirable: "Martyrdom is the one witness to the truth about man which every one can hear. No society, however dark, can stifle it."²⁷

This chilling view of martyrdom held by the pope and Professor Langan is not shared by most Americans. When fanatical Muslim extremists resort to it, martyrdom is almost universally condemned as religious extremism. Why should it be admirable behavior when exercised by Catholics?

Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, who spoke on October 3, 1995, on "Culture of Life, Culture of Death in the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*," makes it clear that the Church is at war with democratic America with its civil laws:

The Pope invites us with courage to the boycott of unjust laws which suppress the imperative of natural law carved into consciences by the Creator. And legislators, politicians, physicians, and scientists have the duty of conscience to be the defenders of life in the war against this culture of death.²⁸

This is an aggressive call to Catholics to impose papal law on all Americans through legislation.

On December 21, 1998, the American Catholic bishops brought this all even closer when they issued their statement, *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*. As to the role of the Church in the political process, the bishops state: ". . . at all times and in all places, the Church should have the true freedom to teach the faith, to proclaim its teaching about society, to carry out its task among men without hindrance, and to pass moral judgment even in matters relating to politics. . . ."[#18]. In other words, no one should offer resistance as the Church goes about passing laws demanded by the pope, such as parental consent laws.

The bishops have concluded that it is their job to pass civil laws that will protect the Catholic faithful from abortions that they would otherwise procure.

Conclusion

Vatican assertions, proclamations, declarations, and decrees serve, above all, to exemplify its intense desperation on the matter of legal abortion and family planning. Its very survival depends on halting all legal family planning and abortion which are causing a hemorrhage in the credibility of this religious institution. In my opinion, this remarkable dilemma is entirely responsible for the Vatican's behavior. The Church, faced with disaster, is behaving like a wounded animal.

Americans do not benefit from any law now being used to restrict abortion. On the other hand, as others have documented, because of innovations such as parental notification laws, young women are irreparably harmed. Some will die. Some will commit suicide rather than tell their parents. Many will suffer adverse consequences from which they will never recover. The question is: should this human sacrifice of young American women who are not even Catholic be permitted so that men in Rome will be able to "infuse democracy with the right values" in order to try to save a Church which finds itself down a blind alley just as predicted by the Church intelligentsia in 1870?

The political machine created by the Pastoral Plan has had far-reaching consequences for all Americans. The impeachment of President Clinton, the most pro-choice president in history, would not have been possible without the successful implementation of this plan in the House of Representatives. He has defied the pope, strongly supporting access to abortion. All 13 House prosecutors were anti-abortion Republicans and are led by the most rabid abortion foe in the House, Roman Catholic Henry Hyde. According to the October 1, 1998, issue of the New York Times, Hyde and the lawyer he chose to lead the Republican impeachment team, David Schippers, another Catholic and father of 10, were both knighted by the pope three years ago for their outstanding service to the Catholic Church.²⁹ Each of these 13 men most certainly benefitted from the existence of the political machine created by the Pastoral Plan. There are many other such examples and they are negatively affecting us all. fi

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