

Malthusians attack Vatican over Cairo

by Kathleen Klenetsky

The Vatican's aggressive campaign against the draft program for the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, informally, the Cairo conference) has triggered a nasty counterattack.

The public attacks on the Vatican's position which have proliferated over the past several weeks, share several themes, all of them false: There is a grave population crisis, especially in the developing sector, which requires immediate intervention via the spread of contraceptives, sterilization, and abortion; the Vatican is acting irresponsibly toward this crisis, through its "obstructionist" and "inflexible" opposition to such measures; and the Vatican is increasingly out of step with the vast majority of Catholics on the issues of population policy, contraception, and abortion.

International Planned Parenthood Federation Secretary General Halfdan Mahler signalled that neo-malthusian operations against the Vatican were going into high gear, with a statement in the June 30 *Earth Times*. Mahler expressed "sadness and frustration that the Vatican opposes the Cairo draft program. . . . No religious group," he thundered, "should monopolize morality or ethics. People know what is best for themselves. . . . A majority of Catholics in many countries disregard the Vatican's strictures on 'artificial' contraception."

'Dissident' Catholics denounce pope

Right on cue, several groups of dissident Catholics launched high-profile efforts aimed at derailing the Vatican's anti-Cairo effort.

Catholics Speak Out (CSO), a project of the Maryland-based Quixote Center, is soliciting signatures from Catholics in the United States, Ibero-America, and Europe for an ad which it plans to publish in the *New York Times* shortly before the Cairo conference opens this September. Titled "An Open Letter to Pope John Paul II," it slams the Vatican and defends the neo-malthusian lie that the world is overpopulated: "The number of people born into our human family is straining the earth's limited resources, a growing crisis which calls us . . . to make effective family planning methods available worldwide. In spite of this crisis, Vatican policy opposes one of the most effective means of voluntary family planning: contraception. . . . Because . . . such opposition severely worsens our global crisis of population and resources and because the majority of good Catholics . . . have rejected it,

we say to you simply: On the issue of contraception, you are wrong."

Collaborating with CSO is Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC), which is rumored to receive funds from the Planned Parenthood-affiliated Alan Guttmacher Institute, and whose president, Frances Kissling, has proposed depriving the Vatican of its official status at the United Nations. CFFC has held three press conferences since the beginning of July to defend Cairo and denounce the Vatican. In Rome on July 11, Kissling accused the Vatican of "viciousness" in its comments on Cairo, and declared that "the Vatican cannot be allowed to set policy for the whole world."

She strongly endorsed the Cairo program as "one of the more progressive, balanced, and ethical documents on family planning that we have seen in a long time. The Vatican is acting as an obstacle to this document."

At CFFC's other press conferences, spokesman Daniel Maguire levelled the absurd charge that concern for "power—not embryos or fetuses," is the engine driving the Vatican's position on Cairo, while Kissling has claimed, equally absurdly, that the Catholic Church fears it will lose money it now receives from U.S. government aid agencies for relief services if a greater proportion of U.S. foreign aid were to go to "family planning" (as it would under the Cairo program).

Another flank against the Vatican was opened at a press conference at U.N. headquarters on July 19, where Nafis Sadik, secretary general of the Cairo conference, was presented with a report produced by an "interfaith consultation" which took place in Belgium in May.

Sponsored by the Chicago-based Park Ridge Center and financed by the Ford Foundation and the Pew Global Stewardship Initiative—both funders of pro-Cairo, pro-population-control efforts—the consultation was attended by theologians from Protestant, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Buddhist, and other religions.

According to Park Ridge Center's Larry Greenfield, the report not only blasts the Vatican for opposing the the Cairo agenda; it also asserts that religions must play a role in implementing the Cairo depopulation program. The report insists that the "principle" of freedom *from* religion must be affirmed, and criticizes any religion which "interferes" with national policymaking on population-related issues. The report states that "there is a population crisis, which has to be addressed by a multifaceted approach" including universal access to contraception, extensive sex education, and global legalization of abortion, Greenfield said.

Dr. Jose Barzellato, head of population programs for the Ford Foundation, told a journalist that the report is "a very important" flank in the campaign to keep the Vatican from undermining Cairo, especially since it was signed by several Catholic theologians. Pressure by Roman Catholics who disagree with the pope on contraception and abortion is the best weapon against the Vatican's "inflexible position" on Cairo, he said.