

# Southern Baptists slam Cairo agenda for 'reproduction control'

*The Southern Baptists are America's largest Protestant denomination with more than 15.4 million members in over 38,400 congregations nationwide. (President Clinton is a Southern Baptist.) Below are excerpts from "Population, Morality and the Ideology of Control, A Statement of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission for the United Nations Multi-Religious Consultation on Issues of Population and Development," followed by interviews with two of the authors.*

*The statement was elicited from them as a comment on the Draft Program prepared for the Sept. 5-13 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, at a meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. This was also attended by a representative of the largest Buddhist community in Thailand, three Roman Catholics (representing the German Bishops, the American Catholics, and the Vatican), the Shiite cleric Ayatollah Roohaney from Paris, spokesmen for the World Council of Churches, the Baha'i, the United Native Nations, and Dr. Anand Mohan, a Hindu leader based in the United States.*

. . . Southern Baptists, as Christians, hold that, despite cultural diversity and religious pluralism, moral standards on essential matters are not inventions of human imagination, will or culture. Rather, they are enduring standards of right conduct and human responsibility that apply to all members of the human family, not only because they are reasonable, but because they come from God the Creator and Moral Ruler of the Universe, Whose authority transcends all human authority. Baptist Christians are concerned about world population and development issues because God is concerned about them and will hold us accountable for the contribution we make to the world debate. . . .

The thinking of Southern Baptists on issues of population is shaped by essential doctrines of the Christian faith including the following:

1) All human life is sacred. This means that all human life is divinely created, making it a divine gift from the moment of fertilization until death.

2) All human life is made in the image of God. This means that every human life has transcendent worth, and has equal value and dignity in relation to every other human life regardless of gender, age, stage of development, physical condition, social status, or education, regardless of ability or disability, and regardless of whether it is born or unborn.

3) Homosexuality, whatever its origin, is abnormal and homosexual conduct is always an abomination in the sight of God. Under no circumstances is homosexual conduct ever morally acceptable behavior for anyone, and government should never accommodate such behavior.

4) The family is ordained by God as the basic unit of human society and is the best human environment for the nurture and development of children.

5) Although cultural practices have varied, the two-parent, heterosexual family—consisting of one man and one woman committed to each other for life—is a divinely established ideal for all people for all time. The two-parent, heterosexual family deserves priority favor and protection in every culture and society. Under no circumstances can persons of the same gender constitute a morally acceptable family.

6) Although men and women have equal dignity and worth as bearers of God's image, husbands and wives do not have the same role in marriage and the home. Husbands are the head of the home and bear a higher responsibility than wives for ensuring the success and welfare of their families. Wives are not owned by their husbands nor are they servants, but wives are under moral obligation to accept and support the leadership of their husbands as long as it remains within responsible moral boundaries.

7) Marriage involving the union of persons of the opposite gender is the only morally acceptable condition for sexual intercourse. Sexual intimacy under any other circumstance is morally unacceptable.

8) Government is a morally worthy and necessary human institution whose purpose is to secure the common welfare by rewarding those who do good and punishing those who do wrong. But the authority of human government is never absolute. Whatever its form, human government is always accountable to God for maintaining universal standards of moral conduct.

9) While a growing world population makes it essential to use wisdom in planning development and use of the world's resources, God has already determined that human history will end with the return of Jesus Christ in power and judgment, and not as the result of overcrowding and the depletion of necessary resources.

As Southern Baptist Christians, we have read the Cairo Conference's Draft Program with interest, and urge that the participants do all they can to include the recommendations and remove the concerns given below:

**Abortion.** We believe that induced abortion is a violent means for dealing with the admittedly difficult problems that can surround unplanned or problem pregnancies, and must be considered morally unacceptable behavior. However, we believe abortion may be considered in rare instances when the developing child represents a clear and present danger to the physical life of the mother. We are outraged that the Draft Program includes abortion under broad terms such as “family planning,” “reproductive services,” “safe motherhood,” “reproductive rights,” “reproductive choice,” and “fertility regulation.” We . . . urge the United Nations at Cairo to clearly repudiate the use of abortion as a method of family planning and to reaffirm the policy it set forth in 1984 to the effect that “Governments are urged to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning.”

**Viewing Children as a Threat.** We believe that children, both born and unborn, are precious, should be cherished and protected, and welcomed as a sign of hope and blessing. We believe, moreover, that it is a high moral duty of government to protect vulnerable children from harm and to foster a deep appreciation for children among the adult members of society. While these beliefs underscore our opposition to abortion, we also object to the assumption, reflected throughout the Draft Program, that having children is a burden or inconvenience that threatens well-being and economic development. We are aware that caring for children involves time and expense, and that conceiving a child that is not expected or planned often necessitates a rearrangement of priorities. Nevertheless, we do not agree that changing personal priorities to accommodate children—planned or unplanned—is a bad thing. Nor do we agree that such accommodation is necessarily contrary to developing the economic strength of families or of nations. For example, we note that the United States and other developed countries of the world achieved their economic status without reproduction control efforts.

**Procreation and Choice within Marriage.** We believe that the ability to procreate is a gift and that, when a man and woman bound in holy matrimony choose to engage in acts of procreation, it is a moral responsibility, not a right to be regulated by any human authority. . . . We also urge that nothing be included in the Draft Program that might lead a government to assume it could have a legitimate role in directing, managing, or controlling decisions by parents regarding whether or not to procreate. Furthermore, we urge that the Draft Program address the fact that wives ought to be recognized as having an equal role and an equal moral responsibility with their husbands in arriving at decisions regarding whether or not to engage in the act of procreation.

**Sexual Morality and Marriage.** We believe that the only morally acceptable context for physical sexual intimacy is limited to heterosexual marriage. We believe also that government is responsible to support the marriage institution

by promoting abstinence from sexual intercourse outside of heterosexual marriage and by showing unambivalent disapproval for acts of sexual intercourse that are premarital, extramarital, or homosexual. We believe that government policies respecting such standards are appropriate because the practice of sexual morality is not merely a private matter. . . . Accordingly, we are deeply concerned that the Draft Program treats all sexual behavior as acceptable regardless of marriage, and regardless of whether in may involve heterosexual or homosexual partners. . . .

**Adolescents.** We are concerned, . . . that the Draft Program promotes the distribution of condoms and other contraceptive means to unmarried minors without parental notification or permission. We believe it is highly dangerous for any society to substitute technology for the moral discipline and accountability that parents provide their adolescent children as they mature into adulthood. Indeed, we believe that the United States has experienced the harmful effects of this false strategy, and we strongly desire to warn the world’s developing nations not to take a course that has proven so detrimental to family life in America. . . .

**The Family.** . . . We are alarmed that the Draft Program treats “various concepts of family” as a matter of indifference and includes homosexual unions in the definition of family under the term “other unions.” . . .

**Male Responsibility.** . . . The husband’s leadership responsibility is not a license for selfish demagoguery, but neither is it morally arbitrary or trivial. . . . We believe that husbands are obligated to love and care for their wives with the selfless love that God has for the Church, and that wives have a duty to recognize, accept and encourage the leadership of their husbands. Accordingly, we are concerned about the meaning, morality, and cultural implications of calls in the Draft Program for “gender equality.” . . . We are also very suspicious of the Program’s call to have “men share more equally in . . . domestic and child-rearing responsibilities.” This call is either highly confusing but meaningless (how does one measure “equality” in domestic and child rearing responsibilities?), or it is dangerous and immoral because it threatens to undermine or erase the historical and God-given role of male leadership in the home. . . .

**Poverty and Population.** We understand that the relation between poverty and population is highly complex and is more closely related to chastity, marital fidelity, self-discipline, strong families, education, the availability of natural and technological resources, political stability, chastity, marital fidelity, and good land management, than it is to contraception and strategies for family planning. Accordingly, we . . . dispute the fundamental assumption, running through the Draft Program, that economic development is necessarily tied to the availability of family-planning services, and that economic prosperity can be assured by promoting strategies to separate sexual intercourse from conception. Indeed, we believe in some settings—such as agrarian econo-

mies or cultures that build on the mutual support and cooperation [of] extended families—that the reverse can be true. . . . We urge, therefore, that the Draft Program look for ways to affirm and support the economic vitality of families in cultures where increasing the number of children may add to family wealth and strength, and to avoid rigid assumptions about connections between population and poverty and between fertility control and economic prosperity.

**The Role of Religion.** We note with real disappointment that the Draft Program nowhere recognizes the vital impact that religious faith and moral instruction does and should have on family life. . . . [H]uman population is much more a matter of spirituality, morality, and human relationships than it is a matter of reproductive technology. Accordingly, we urge that the Draft Program seek ways to affirm the vital role of religion in family and economic life, and to support the work of religious communities to resist morally destructive influences and to promote moral, social, and economic health.

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## Interview: Dr. Richard D. Land

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*Dr. Land, executive director of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, and a co-author of the statement, was interviewed on Aug. 9 by Nina Ogden.*

**EIR:** Can we discuss the plans of the Christian Life Commission in the period after the Cairo conference, especially since the U.N. is already planning follow-up conferences including the one on “women’s reproductive freedom” in China?

**Land:** China?! That’s Kafkaesque! . . . Actually all the arguments raised in the Cairo document are Kafkaesque.

The Christian Life Commission is the organization for the moral and social concerns of Southern Baptists. We are opposed to abortion and opposed most of all to the view that human babies are a threat to the well-being of any society. We see babies, born and unborn, as the greatest resource a society can have, not as a burden and hindrance to the future.

We will do everything to change the reprehensible policy of the administration, which sees abortion as birth control, whose anti-population-growth policy seems to be the ethos of the Cairo conference.

**EIR:** In President Clinton’s discussions with the pope, in Rome and in the pope’s phone call to him—

**Land:** Clinton stressed “safe, legal, and rare.”

**EIR:** He seemed to stress that he was backing away from coerced “family planning policies.”

**Land:** Really?

**EIR:** We are hoping that the opposition to the Cairo conference will create a paradigm shift.

**Land:** I certainly hope and pray, every day, that our methods will be used to create a paradigm shift in favor of life. We must watch what the administration does, not just what it says. For instance, the cable that was sent to the State Department offices was terrible.

**EIR:** In your paper, you have a section called “Poverty and Population.”

**Land:** We dispute the assumption that economic development is tied to the availability of family planning services and that economic prosperity can be assured by promoting strategies to separate sexual intercourse from conception. Obviously—look at Japan—it is one of the most densely populated countries, and one of the most developed. Look at the population density of Europe. It is clear that there is no direct correlation. These examples would be a counterbalance. Another argument is, that if you look at the countries that have most dramatically raised their living standards—like South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia—these examples would say that economic development is more predicated upon the economic theories embraced by the governments of these countries than by anything connected to the idea of overpopulation.

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## Interview: Daniel R. Heimbach

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*On Aug. 5, Nina Ogden interviewed Daniel R. Heimbach, Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, the principal author of the document excerpted above. His co-authors were Richard D. Land (see interview) and C. Ben Mitchell, Director of Biomedical and Life Issues, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.*

**EIR:** You attended the World Conference on Religion and Peace meeting in Geneva on July 26-29. Can you tell us what happened there?

**Heimbach:** The conference was billed as a multi-religious consultation on issues of population and development. People were sent from the major religious communities to share moral concerns with the draft program as put together by the Cairo conference and then compare these concerns, and to see how much commonality there would be. On the basis of that, they would prepare a statement that would be part of the official program presented at the Cairo conference within the NGO [non-governmental organization] forum. Also, the material would be given to every national delegate there and is voting on the Cairo program.

I came back from Switzerland very encouraged, actually. It was pulled together by a U.N. affiliate called the World Conference on Religion and Peace, which has NGO status in the U.N. complex in New York. Various major world religious bodies were asked to send someone who was able to

speak authoritatively for the tradition.

**EIR:** Did you feel that the draft of the common statement reflected the views of your paper?

**Heimbach:** Each religious representative was asked to have prepared a five-page summary statement from their religious tradition listing any moral concerns they had with the Cairo document. We spent the first day presenting those and discussing them, and then, the second day, we spent on issues of common concern and we drafted a tentative document, a general statement that mentioned certain principles. These will be added to by a list of specific recommendations for amendments and additions to the Cairo conference document.

We felt that it would not be enough to give a theoretical statement but to also include specific recommendations for amendment that would be harder to ignore. I've been working on a draft of some of that. Many of the issues that were raised in our paper were included, and I felt encouraged by that. Since the participants were designated and were speaking from the center of their tradition, it tended to be more conservative than other gatherings might be, particularly on issues such as the sanctity of life, the traditional family, and sexual ethics.

**EIR:** Tell us about some specifics of the paper.

**Heimbach:** It challenged the fundamental assumptions of the Cairo conference, first on the controversial area of male responsibility. This is the core of the Christian tradition. For those such as ourselves who try to live by the Bible as God's Word as divine revelation, that is spelled out very clearly, not only by example, but also in theological statements.

**EIR:** You say in the paper that you are very suspicious of the Cairo Draft Program's call to have men share more equally in domestic and child-rearing responsibilities and then you say, very ironically, "How does one measure equality of domestic and child-rearing activities?"

**Heimbach:** This point was not a point that was shared by those who were at the multi-religious conference. So, that particular point will not be in the common statement. There will be an addendum so that our statement, along with the common statement, will be in the hands of all the national representatives. It seems that the Cairo document itself was pushing a certain ideology with respect to male-female relationships in the family which we wanted to specifically call attention to.

We're suspicious that when you get into terms like "gender equity," that other things are involved, especially when they start talking about men sharing more equally in domestic and child-rearing responsibilities—the suggestion that somehow the roles in the family are interchangeable or the idea that some kind of monitoring is going to go on and someone is going to be adding up the number of minutes spent in domestic as opposed to out-of-the-family time; obviously that's ludicrous.

**EIR:** In the section on population and poverty you say, "We dispute the fundamental assumption running through the Draft Program that economic development is necessarily tied to the availability of family planning services."

**Heimbach:** That portion is what we found to be shared by all the religious communities that were represented. It's really questioning one of the fundamental notions in the Cairo document, or at least the notion held by many whose views seem to be reflected in the Cairo document, that there is a one-to-one relationship between poverty and/or economic development and population, and that if you control fertility and restrict population growth, that will result in economic development, and if you don't, that it's going to lead to poverty.

I wouldn't want to dispute that there can be some connections. But it's a very complex relationship and there are many, many other factors that impact poverty or economic development and most of those are much more influential on economic prosperity than population is.

**EIR:** In the section "Viewing Children as a Threat," you object to the assumption in the draft program that having children is a burden on well-being and threatens economic development. You end that by saying, "For example, we know that the United States and other developed countries of the world achieved their economic status without reproduction control efforts."

**Heimbach:** Absolutely! That assumption is very "paternalistic," even if it were right, but you might challenge if it were right at all. One of the very obvious and undeniable facts is that the developed countries—the ones that have already achieved the prosperity that the developing countries are seeking to obtain and that the draft document purports to be encouraging—achieved that without any strategy of reproduction control.

**EIR:** The beginning of your document expresses a certain creed saying "Southern Baptists as Christians hold that despite cultural diversity and religious pluralism, moral standards on essential matters are not inventions of human imagination, will or culture."

**Heimbach:** That was an important statement to make, because what it is challenging, is the notion that is sort of an ethical extension of multiculturalism, a philosophy or ideology that there is no standard beyond the individual experience or individual culture and that there is no way of judging right or wrong. Yes, there are different cultures, and yes, there have been different experiences, and yes, there are different religions; but that doesn't mean that there is no universal standard of right or wrong. It doesn't mean that it's inappropriate to discuss moral issues at an international forum. We do not want to be boxed in by the idea that "This is your religion, this is your culture, therefore, it's good for you but doesn't apply to anybody else." We speak from our tradition, but it's not just because it's our tradition. We believe these are universal truths.