

The Cairo Conference: Its Implications on the Filipino Family

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The *Book of Revelation*, known otherwise as the *Apocalypse* and reportedly written by the last apostle and evangelist John, presents a prophetic portrait of the last days, a panorama of religious imagery, particularly the cosmic spiritual battle which will herald the last judgment and the return of Christ to preside over the new Christian world order. Revelation begins with an appraisal of the Seven Churches of Asia, conveying affirmations and admonitions leading these communities to self-examination, repentance, reform and consequently, renewal. These Churches are: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamun, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Then the book speaks of the Seven Seals —seals of manuscripts whose opening unleash events of grave magnitude and meaning related to the prophesied spiritual battle. The first four of these broken seals let loose the feared and menacing Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The fifth seal brings to light and hearing the spirits of the martyrs who bear witness to the Word of God. The sixth seal sets off a universal avalanche of chaos and destruction in the earth and sky, and the emergence of the followers of the Lamb —protected by four angels and led to the springs of life-giving water—who survive the great period of trial, having washed their robes white with the blood of the Lamb.

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The seventh seal is the seal of the living God. Broken by the Lamb Himself, the seal is greeted with long silence, as the seven angels who minister in God's presence are given seven trumpets. The blares of the first four trumpets trigger off a sequence of cosmic catastrophes in the earth and heavens. The fifth trumpet releases a plague of grotesque locusts which sting unbelievers with endless excruciating pain. The sixth trumpet unleashes four angels commanding an army of 200 million warriors on horseback to slay the unrepentant.

Finally, the seventh trumpet issues a declaration of the Lord's claim over the kingdom of the world through His anointed one, the Christ and reveals the heavenly worship of God on His temple in heaven. Then,

"A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. Because she was with child, she wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky: it was a large dragon, flaming red with seven heads and ten horns, on his heads were seven diadems. His tail swept a third of the stars from the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, ready to devour her child when it should be born. She gave birth to a son—a boy destined to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and to his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert, where a special place had been prepared for her by God. Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. Although the dragon and his angels fought back, they were overpowered and lost their place in heaven. The large dragon, the ancient serpent, known as the devil or Satan, the Seducer of the whole world, was driven out; he was hurled down to earth and his minions with him." (*Apoc.* 12: 1-9).

Innumerable analytical interpretations have been articulated on the ideas contained in this panorama of symbols. But the one most relevant to our current concern is the emergence of the two signs: the sign of the woman about to give birth, and the sign of the dragon out to devour the unborn child. For this twofold sign enables us to understand the significance of the battle now raging in Cairo; it is most definitely a battle whose principal stake is *human life*: not merely an empirical statistic or an abstract idea, but the event that grants existence to a *human person*, who is not only a biological entity, but a child and image of God, a being whose spirit reflects the very Spirit of

God. In my view, the symbol of the woman stands for the Church, the Bride of Christ, who gives birth to the Faithful, the Body of Christ and Family of God, the collective person whose life purpose is to give glory and honor to God and in whom God's love is brought to perfection (*1 John* 4:12). The dragon, now full-grown from being only a serpent in Genesis, is Satan, whose life object is to abort the birth of the faithful—obviously out of abhorrence for the glory and honor of God.

Allow me to unfold a similar panorama of doctrine and intrigue as a means of providing context towards a deeper understanding of the significance of the *International Conference on Population and Development*, which by this time may already have completed its statement.

Twenty years ago, in 1974, the first World Population Conference was called in Bucharest, Romania. The so-called Third World countries had emerged over the past four centuries from the cultural and economic imperialism of Western nations. In the mid 1960's, the United States National Security Council expressed its alarm over the trends of population growth in the continents of Africa, Latin America and Asia, particularly in thirteen countries including the Philippines. This was expressed in National Security Memorandum No. 200, which recommended the American Government's active but covert intervention in proactively initiating and supporting population control policies and programs in these thirteen target countries. The Philippines, extremely and inordinately dependent upon the largesse of the United States government for our social, cultural, political, military, and economic survival (particularly after the nation's devastation from the Second World War), was a willing but unwitting cooperator in this insidious concern. The Church, entrenched in the culture of the people over centuries of institutional Catholicism, concerned itself largely with theological and liturgical matters; the faithful's adherence to the Church for the most part was of a merely social and sacramental character. The First Plenary Council of the Philippines, in 1953, had little relevance and impact on the lives of the Filipino people: Twenty-seven bishops or Vicars attended, and next to nothing is now known of its results.

In the meantime, an institutional child of a birth control agency that had been functioning from England—the Margaret Sanger Center—was quietly establishing an international network, sworn to promote all methods of fertility regulation, including the killing of infants in mothers' wombs; this network is today known as the

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the largest global machinery for barefaced abortion.

In the early 1960's, the blueprint for a global population control program gradually formed, drafted by the brilliant technocrats of the American military-industrial complex after the death of John F. Kennedy and his vision and program of peace. American industry had by then invented modern contraception and manufactured contraceptives on a commercial scale; the new industry needed markets. The Second Vatican Council was convoked by the good Pope John XXIII, advocating radical change in the very heart of the Church, giving direction and impetus to a vision of renewal through evangelization, and calling for an integration of faith and life through a second Pentecost. Vatican II pointed at new directions in the way of being "Church": the thrusts of *dialogue*, *participation* and *co-responsibility*; and it signaled the new and radical concept of the empowerment of the Catholic Laity. In counterpoint to the new wave of liberalism in Church liturgy and governance, Pope Paul VI issued, in 1968, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which clearly and conclusively defined Church teaching on the sacredness of human life, and declared as intrinsically evil the growing practices of contraception, sterilization and abortion.

Bucharest in 1974 witnessed the framing of the first *World Population Conference's Plan of Action*, which globally promoted contraception and the aggressive formulation by Governments in the United Nations, of national birth control programs, euphemistically called "*family planning*" and even borrowed a term used in Church language: "*responsible parenthood*." The effect of the Bucharest Conference was to enshrine birth control as an internationally-accepted norm, clearly in defiance of the tenets expressed in *Humanae Vitae*, and justified it with alarming neo-malthusian predictions contained in *Limits to Growth* —a book of Lester Pearson published by the prestigious Club of Rome—, none of whose predictions have come to pass, and which was consequently disclaimed by its publishers. It is to be remembered that in 1973, the United States Supreme Court declared abortion as a legal option, ironically in the largest Christian nation in the world.

Also in 1974, the IPPF's local affiliate, FPOP or the *Family Planning Organization of the Philippines*, imported for the Philippine program 200 "menstrual regulation machines" —sugar coated words meaning simply abortion by suction. Its Founding President 1972 was

a young rural physician named Juan Flavier [at present the Philippine Health Department Secretary].

The Second World Population Conference in Mexico in 1984 reaffirmed the alleged imperative to pursue birth control programs in response to pressures, mounted by global population increase, on *resources* and *the environment*, and advocated the more effective birth control methods, particularly the *injectables*, the *implants* and the single most effective method: *sterilization*.

The population control program thus added two new dimensions in its design to justify the engineering of human procreation: the perceived scarcity of resources, and the alleged threat on the natural environment. Little if any reference at all was made on the truths that 82% of world consumption of resources had been caused by the gigantic increase in consumption patterns of Western consumerist nations, which comprised only 17% of the world's population. The world's industrial economies, such as the United States and Japan, embarked on internal policies of strict resource conservation, utilizing instead the under-priced natural resources of Third World Countries in Africa and Asia, including the Philippines. Historically, the inability of the Filipino nation to develop economically was engendered by irrational policies propelling industrialization at the expense of agricultural food production. The irresistible lure of export earnings for cash crops such as sugar and coconut oil took precedence over developing the vital economic foundation of food production, and engendered the diversion of export profits away from domestic investments and towards international markets. The near exhaustion of our forests and arable lands resulted from the mad rush to fill the booming international markets for Philippine hardwood. Our natural resources were literally depleted through insanely liberal export policies which encouraged the rape of our forests. Greed, not need, motivated the destruction of our environment.

The decade between 1974 and 1984 witnessed the rise of martial law in the Philippines —one, however, which had the curious effect of awakening the Church, particularly to her prophetic role as the conscience of the nation. Yet the Philippine Church was still virtually ignorant and naive about the realities of the population control program, petrified to a "*Hear no evil; see no evil; speak no evil*" posture, perhaps because it was still dominated by the clergy, who had little knowledge of the devastating effects of birth control on the family and

on the morals of society. In the meantime, the population program amassed a "volunteer" corps of 52,000 barangay-based workers, and a nationwide network of 3,000 Full-time Outreach Workers based in local governments, all actively campaigning for a shift of norms towards artificial birth control, spending P200,000,000 annually for central services and personnel, and innocuously promoting a massive sterilization program using incentives for doctors, nurses and civilian motivators as well as for volunteer acceptors, to fuel its campaign for the most efficient birth control method —permanent infertility. Silently, a comprehensive population education program had been formulated, brandishing its centerpiece of sex education for secondary school children and nursing a long-term program for pre-school instruction on sex and population.

The Church was silent still; but in 1981, Pope John Paul II issued a firm and articulate reminder in his Apostolic Letter, *Familiaris Consortio*: a timely reiteration of *Humanae Vitae* and a prophetic warning that the family would soon be the target of the growing culture of death. The letter exhorted the faithful on the imperative of a revival of family values and a restoration of the mission and integrity of the family as the first sanctuary of life and the first school of learning. This was a most propitious reminder, as the global machinery for population control was now training its sights on the root, the core of resistance to its campaign against life: the conjugal bond and the family covenant. But the minds and hearts of Filipinos were held captive by anger and resentment against an oppressive military regime.

By this time, the *International Planned Parenthood Federation*, which found a welcoming sanctuary in the abortion-friendly Government of the United States of America, had flourished and now had infiltrated, by the attraction of its unflinching and straight-forward advocacy of abortion, the United Nations' welfare agencies, particularly the *Fund for Population Activities*, which had openly funded abortion, specially in China as it adopted its one-child policy.

The increased influence and control of the United States funding agencies engendered a concomitant increase in the weight of population control programs in these agencies, including the World Bank.

In the Philippines, the 20-year authoritarian regime had been ended by the 1986 bloodless people's revolt in EDSA, where the Church sprang alive in confronting the military force of the dictatorship, and

summoned people power to rescue a rebel group cornered in the Army camp by the big guns of the government's military troops. A new President was installed in 1986, who immediately called a Constitutional Commission to legitimize its accession to leadership. The Commission then framed in 1987 a patently pro-life and pro-family Constitution, having discarded provisions from the 1973 martial law-constitution which subscribed to the fundamental thrust of "managing population levels." The new government inflicted a national debt of over \$29 billion dollars, a graft-ridden bureaucracy, a restless and rebellious military force and a people mired in poverty; it was armed only with a politically inexperienced staff and an unorganized but supportive network of non-government organizations. It needed money and force; and dollars and arms were made available, but at the price of adhering to the international funding agencies' conditionality of continuing the U.S.-backed population control program.

In 1991 the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines was convened—a signal moment in the history of the Philippine Church, which in effect verbalized and legislated the adoption of Vatican II thrusts in the local Church. PCP-II explicitly articulated its prolife and pro-poor principles, and proclaimed the Philippine Church's fidelity to the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* and *Familiaris Consortio*. Three new documents were issued by Pope John Paul II: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, upholding the concept of authentic human development; *Centesimus Annus*, dissecting the imbalance in well-being between the peoples of the Northern and Southern hemispheres and proposing a critique of unbridled capitalism; and *Veritatis Splendor*, asserting the gospel as the absolute standard of morality and staunchly asserting the teaching authority of the Church. All these documents affirmed unconditionally the Church's adherence to *Humanae Vitae*, whose 25th Anniversary was observed in 1993.

The Philippine Population Control program, however, had escalated even under an Administration openly supported by the Church. Population control budgets exploded from P200 million annually under the martial law regime, to P1 billion annually under the new government. The Health Department assumed control of the artificial birth control program. In 1992 a Protestant President was elected and the impetus for population control gained greater strength; by 1993, \$100 billion were added to the population control war chest, now under the command of a Secretary of Health who had been the first president of the Philippine affiliate of the IPPF.

On August 1993, the *Council of the Laity of the Philippines*, in its 8th National Convention, unanimously approved a 12 point *Conciliar Resolution Against Artificial Birth Control*.

The current interest in the state of family values was stimulated by the United Nations' declaration of 1994 as the *International Year of the Family*. Yet, because the United Nations' concept of family included other forms, such as homosexually conjugal families, the Roman Catholic Church distanced itself from the United Nations' celebration, and declared her own "Year of the Family." The theme adopted by the Philippine Church was: "*Family: Heart of Church and Society*."

In order to appreciate the nuances of the Cairo Conference, it is also necessary to view the ancillary programs of the United Nations. Three (3) other International Conferences form part of the UN strategy for its so-called socio-economic transformation:

a. The 1990 *World Summit for Children*, which produced the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, granted power to determine children's rights in isolation from parents, family and community. Children are defined as *individuals* bearing specific rights which cannot be abridged. These rights include expression, privacy, and health care including family planning education and services.

b. The 1992 *United Nations Conferences on Environment and Development* (UNCED) established the need for the integration of population policies with environmental and development issues in keeping with the *individual's* freedom, dignity, and personally-held values. The policies of national governments concerning family size and population levels remain ultimately accountable to the United Nations. In addition, national governments are held hostage by economic leverage to loans and grants conditioned on the establishment and continuation of population control programs.

c. The 1993 *World Conference on Human Rights* confirmed the centrality of the *individual* in all population and development activities. International government was established as the source of all major human rights.

The 1994 *International Conference on Population and Development*, or the 'Cairo Conference,' is then best examined in the light of the obvious enshrining of the *individual* as the central figure in development policy. Deeper examination of this trend to focus on *individualism* reveals its incompatibility with the Catholic view, articulated by Pope

John Paul II in his recent encyclical, that the *human person* (rather than the individual) is to be neither removed nor alienated from the family —that the family is “the communion of persons established by the marriage of husband and wife which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society” (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Article 16-3*), and that the family is an institution founded upon the very nature of the human person and is the proper setting for the conception, birth and upbringing of children. The U.N. position therefore strikes with violence at the very heart of the family as understood in our faith. In the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, the Holy Father states:

It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life —the gift of God— can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life. Human ingenuity seems to be directed more towards limiting, suppressing or destroying the sources of life —including recourse to abortion— than towards defending and opening up the possibilities of life. (CA, 39)

Fueled by a strongly pro-abortion Presidency elected in 1992, the U.S. government actively advocated (and conveyed through a *Department of State Action Cable*, dated March 1994) the acceptance of abortion as a fundamental right.

The draft document of the International Conference suffers from major features which are offensive to the Christian worldview. First, it is a clear but faulty attempt to link population control with larger development concerns, as though the cause for chronic underdevelopment is overpopulation. In order to promote this link, U.N. agencies have consistently projected the vision of “sustained economic development” as conditioned on the reduction of fertility levels and population growth rates. The structure of the draft document itself, however, reveals its focus on population control and fertility regulation, as only 6 out of 83 pages addressed legitimate development issues, while 77 pages were devoted to population variables, family planning methods and reproductive health and rights.

Second, the language used cleverly conceals the document’s agenda for abortion. Phrases such as “pregnancy termination” or “reproductive health and rights,” or “freedom of choice” are expressions which,

although not explicitly containing the word "abortion," either mean the same behavior or are referenced in other conferences, manuscripts or statements as equivalent to, or inclusive of, abortion. The term "safe abortion" —one of the ambiguous terms used in the document— is misleading, because while abortion may be safe for the mother, it is violent and murderous for the unborn child.

Third, the individualistic character promoted in the conference draft is evident, rendering the family virtually irrelevant to the individual. It advocates the acceptance of sexual activity almost as an inherent individual right not only to unmarried persons, but also to adolescents and even children, and mandates individual access to reproductive services on demand.

Fourth, the document suggests that women's rights include unconditional control over their reproductive systems, including the right to terminate their pregnancy. This right can never be made absolute, as pregnancy involves the unborn child's inviolable right to life. The world has come to distort the matter of rights, which in Christian ethics, ought not to be exalted above their concomitant responsibilities. I personally believe that childbearing is a unique grace given to women, and that the women's rights movement has gone too far in claiming for itself the right of a mother to snuff off the life of an infant in her own womb, which ironically ought to be the safest sanctuary for the most helpless form of human life. The Cairo proposal thus hopes to pervert one of the vital components of family —the institution of motherhood itself.

Fifth, the document seeks to support the *plurality*, and recognizes the diversity, of family forms, thus negating the Christian principle that the family is rooted on the marriage union of man and woman as husband and wife.

Finally, the document advocates a massive increase of funding for the Conference's worldwide programme of action, including the distribution of contraceptives and the promotion of abortion and sterilization to \$13 billion up to the year 2000 and \$17 billion up to the year 2017.

In concrete, the implications of the Cairo Conference on the Filipino family are several and varied:

First, the Conference, while not legally binding, will establish norms internationally for assessing national plans and programs

which will have a definite influence not only on legislation but also on social values, attitudes and behavior. The 12-year old child who is informed of the International Conference's promotion of reproductive rights for adolescents and children will very likely advocate the adoption of this norm in public policy and rationalize their sexual activity on the grounds of international acceptance of this "right." The same is true with the admission of other forms of family. Ethical principles and moral rectitude will likely be discarded or at least ignored in the face of normative prevalence and pressure.

Second, although the acceptance of homosexual union as a legitimate form of family will not reduce the value of marriage-based family, society will be weakened by the confusion and ambivalence of roles and authority patterns. The God-ordained integrity of the family will be violated.

Third, the promotion of individual rights for adolescents and children will further erode the already-threatened principle (and commandment) of parental authority and weaken the accountability of parents for the care and education of children.

Fourth, the inordinate magnification of women's rights over their reproductive processes will weaken the conjugal bond and undermine the headship of husbands, and obscure the locus of leadership and accountability on the family.

Fifth, the legalization of abortion will be more difficult to combat, as the Conference shall have established abortion as an internationally-acceptable standard. International pressure on the Filipino people to swim with the tide of legalized abortion will be formidable.

Sixth, the continued campaign for contraception will relegate the marital relationship to a transactional contract governed by convenience and utility, rather than a love covenant formed by sacrifice and discipline.

Finally, sex education will tend to be institutionalized, robbing parents of the responsibility and joy of shaping the character of their children in the context and environment of their family.

It is imperative that we do not allow the values, principles and norms advanced in the Cairo Conference to gain a foothold in our society. To be sure, much of the Cairo scenario is already operative in

the Philippines. The use of pornography in promoting safe-sex and AIDS' prevention, the use of value-less modules in sex education, the unregulated dispensing and distribution of contraceptives by motivators with neither pretreatment examination for contra-indications nor written medical prescription, the virtual legalization of abortion due to complete negligence in the enforcement of its penal provisions, and the unchecked use of abortifacients as contraceptives for family planning—these are all glimpses of the Cairo vision happening now in our very midst.

The Ramos government claims it is against abortion. We cannot believe these words alone without the actions that prove them. Like the engineers of the Cairo Conference, the Government uninhibitedly uses double speak and psycho war in their dealings with Church and the Laity. We too must now resort to action. We must engage in our own war on all fronts—social, political, economic, electoral.

But no action has power that is not anchored on God's word. The letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians instructs us on how we must wage and win this war:

Draw your strength from the Lord and his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. Our battle is not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above. You must put on the armor of God if you are to resist on the evil day; do all that your duty requires, and hold your ground. Stand fast, with the truth as the belt around your waist, justice as your breastplate, and zeal to propagate the gospel of peace as your footgear. In all circumstances hold faith up before you as your shield; it will help you extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

If there is any spark of love for your family left in your hearts...; if you value our Catholic faith and still believe in sacrifice and discipline and honoring our parents...; if you accept that children are our heritage and reward from God...; and if you cherish the hope that the light and soul of the Filipino nation should remain in the heart of God, be one with us in this battle against the culture of death.