

I wonder about the young women growing up - whether even feminism means anything. They even think our anger is irrational. Why are we so angry? They think they are cool and their boyfriends treat them pretty cool so why are we so angry? Despite globalization and the media opening up, I wonder if they are conscious of this on any level, that the world is such a small place.

**Q: What about young women and fundamentalism?**

What I am being told is that the fundamentalists are trying to reach this age group. They are saying we couldn't control your mothers or older sisters but we can control you. I think this is all part of the brainwashing of the fundamentalists. You may want to speculate on this view because I really have no proof that they are actually reaching out to youth. All I can say is a growing mass of middle class young people are becoming increasingly pro-Hindu and pro-dominant ideology. Fundamentalists also say openly that the Muslim minority will outpopulate the Hindu race. This is statistically impossible, demographers know it so do feminists.



Elephant God Ganesh

*personal views*

**The Rhythm Is Off beat**

- a personal view of catholic teachings on contraception  
by Marilen J. Dañguilan, MD

***"I am convinced that my conscience is correct, even if it conflicts with the moral teachings of the Church."***

I am a Catholic. To non-believers and cynics, this statement may mean 'I am sexually repressed' or 'I am always guilty of something'. My Church is perceived as being obsessed with sex and sin. Unfortunately, this obsession has obscured the true meaning and significance of what my Church stands for - social justice and love.

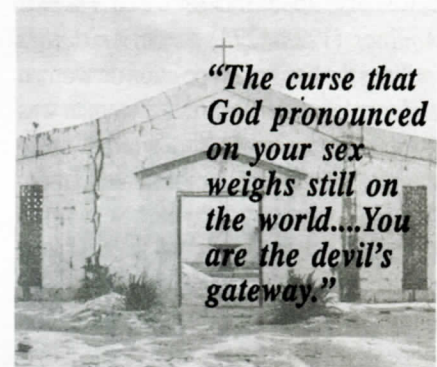
It has supported several causes which strike a harmonious chord in me. I agree when it urges government and international lending institutions to cancel odious loans. I agree when it pushes government to implement a genuine agrarian reform program that gives land to the tillers. I agree when it calls on policymakers to provide more humane housing conditions and just wages for the poor. I agree when it protests against laws like the one on Value Added Tax. I agree with my Church too when it declares that population is not the cause, but an effect of, or that it exacerbates the problems of poverty and underdevelopment.

But when it comes to the issue of contraception, my Church and I differ. After much study, prayer, and reflection, I am convinced that my conscience is correct, even if it conflicts with the moral teachings of the Church. And in inner peace, I cannot but follow my conscience.

I am trying to understand my Church's ban on contraception. I have to go back in time and trace the evolution of its stand. Let

me walk you quickly through its history.1.

It has been almost 2,000 years since Augustine theologically linked sex, sexual pleasure, and original sin. He asserted that sexual intercourse is inherently tainted and needed to be salvaged by procreation. This was a reaction towards a group which appreciated sexual pleasure as a privilege of marital sex and which believed that unbaptized babies had access to heaven.

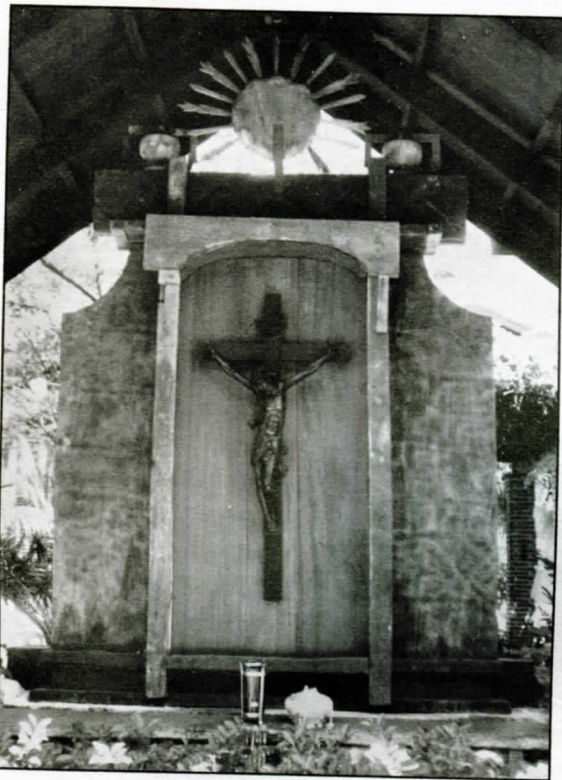


Bing Conception/FAIN

At about this time, women were already denigrated. Tertullian, a very influential third-century theologian, considers Eve as the cause of original sin and his judgement on women was harsh and severe: "Do you know that Eve is you? The curse that God pronounced on your sex weighs still on the world....You are the devil's gateway."

It has been close to 900 years since the monk Gratian compiled the first collection of canon law. It declared contraception a





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homicide. He was the same pope who prescribed hanging for adultery in Rome.

In 1880, 37 years after the vulcanization of rubber which led to the discovery of the [modern] condom, *Pope Leo XIII* issued his encyclical on Christian marriage, once more reaffirming that the procreation of children for the Church is noble.

***“those wicked parents who seek to remain childless”***

It's been 64 years since *Pope Pius XI* issued his encyclical, *Casti Connubii*, Of Chaste Spouses. During this time, the

Anglican bishops held the historic Lambeth Conference in which they decided that artificial contraception was morally licit and permissible. In response, *Pius XI* denounced “those wicked parents who seek to remain childless” or who avoid childbearing “not through virtuous continuance but by frustrating the marriage act.” *Pius XI*, however, declared sex lawful at those times when a couple believes conception to be impossible.

Forty-three years ago, *Pope Pius XII* announced that the rhythm method was available to all couples who for “medically, eugenic, economic, and social indications” wish to avoid procreation, even for the entire duration of the marriage. He warned though that couples shouldn't use this habitually for less than ‘grave’ reasons.

And 30 years ago, *Pope John the 23rd* called for “the winds of change” to blow. The winds came, for

sure, but they turned into a storm of controversies. And the eye of the storm was *Pope Paul VI's* encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, Of Human Life. *Humanae Vitae* categorically prohibited the use of contraception but made exceptions for rhythm or periodic abstinence.

Church history shows that several factors have contributed to the present Church's position on contraception: wrong notions of biology, such as *Tertullian's* view that the semen contained individuals waiting to be born and ejaculating outside the ‘vessel’ (woman) murdered the ‘seed’ individuals; *Aristotle's* view that females are conceived due to a weak seed or the dampness of the south wind); reactions to cultural norms and circumstances at the time; personalities of religious leaders; rival religions; anti-sexual; and sexist attitudes.

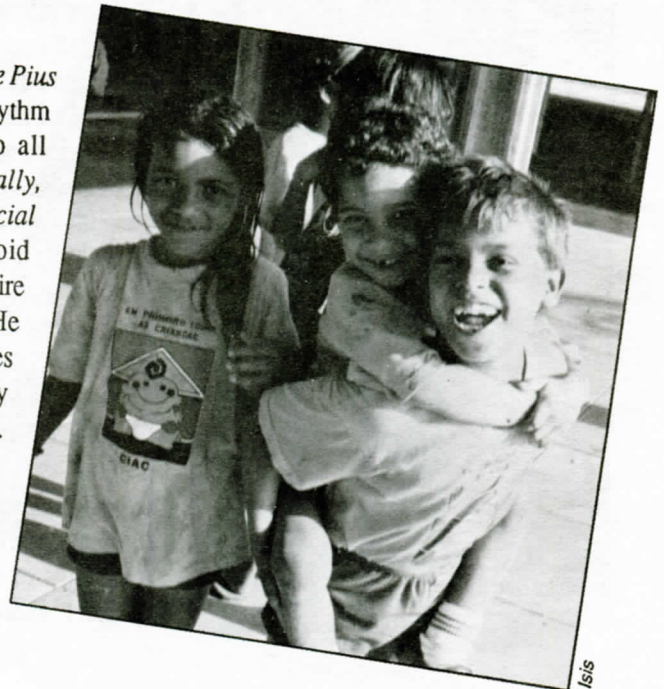
***‘The Church offers no proof, no scriptural texts, and no solid reasoning that lead to the conclusion that every procreative act must be open to new life.’***

sin, but not a grave one. Then, 90 years later, *Pope Gregory IX* compiled existing authoritative decrees into the universally binding *Decretals*. In the *Decretals*, contraception was condemned as murder.

It was also about this time that *Thomas Aquinas* (1225-1274) made *Aristotle's* writings the basis of his position on women and sex. *Aristotle* wrote that a woman was a misbegotten male and women were morally inferior and subordinate to men. *Aquinas* wondered “whether woman should have been made in the first production of things” but resolved this by finding a woman's value in procreation alone.

By this time, the anti-woman bias of the Church was well entrenched. *Odo of Cluny* wrote: “To embrace a woman is to embrace a sack of manure.” Several statements of this sort have been uttered to disparage women and their bodies.

It's been 400 years since *Pope Sixtus V* issued the bull *Effraenatam*, Without Restraint, which applied to contraception and abortion the penalties designated for



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The Church's stand on contraception therefore may not be divinely ordained as Pope John Paul II wants us to believe. He said: *"We are not dealing with a doctrine invented by man."* Rather, he continues, it is a teaching *"written by the creative hand of God in the nature of the human person."* And those who question the doctrine, he declares, may well question *"God's holiness"*. 2.

Today, the Church pushes natural family planning as the only method - not one of the methods - which couples can use. For the Church to say that this is the best for couples, especially for women, patronizes adult decision-making.



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The Church pursues this anyway with such single-minded intensity at a time when so many women are dying from abortions and pregnancy-related causes. It pushes this line when AIDS is on the rise, when couples have serious reasons for spacing children, and when one birth control method is not sufficient or effective for a human being's entire reproductive life.

The Church's teachings on contraception are untenable. The Church offers no proof, no scriptural texts, and no solid reasoning that lead to the conclusion that every procreative act must be open to new life.3.

It puts undue emphasis on the biological aspects of 'the act' which it perceives as something distinct and isolated from the totality of the human being. It [is] fixated on sex as sinful and of women as the source of sexual temptations and impurity.

It does not take into account the historical context and the evolution of the meaning and purpose of sexuality in marriage as stated in *Gaudium et Spes*: sexual intercourse within marriage is noble and worthy; marital love is a value in itself, apart from procreation.

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***'Why must choice of a birth control method be a basis for salvation or condemnation?'***

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It also ignores the Vatican II warning on the dangers of prolonged sexual abstinence.

Likewise, it pays no heed to the advice of *St. Paul* when he wrote *"...Where the intimacy of married life is broken off, it is not rare for its faithfulness to be imperiled and its quality of fruitfulness ruined."* And it almost pays no respect to the dignity of human beings born into this world without the possibility of being fed and educated decently.

Question such as these have been raised: Does sexual intercourse during the infertile period lead to what the Church calls a 'contraceptive mentality'? Doesn't periodic abstinence constitute a barrier method that separates egg and sperm in time, in much the same way that the pill does?

Is the unitive-procreative connection inseparable? On what basis does the Church declare that separating these two aspects of marriage by way of contraception, is intrinsically evil? Why



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must choice of a birth control method be a basis for salvation or condemnation?

Why does the Church stand alone on contraception, one that has its foundations in natural law, and which therefore should, in theory, correspond to the universal moral experience of humankind?

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***'one day...the Church may yet declare that sex, and an entire human being's sexuality... is beautiful, creative, erotic, life-giving, and life enhancing... simply a celebration of ourselves.'***

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Surely, what several Catholics, in good standing, think and feel in their hearts must count for something.

But I have not lost hope. I still believe in my Church. And I know that one day, a century late perhaps, the Church might



'open another window on the world' and call 'the winds of change' to blow. This time, the Church may yet declare that sex, and an entire human being's sexuality comes from God, and is beautiful, creative, erotic, life-giving, and life-enhancing. And it will recognize and appreciate that this is not a desire for licentiousness or sexual laxity but is simply a celebration of ourselves.

**Endnotes**

1. For the Catholic Church's History, I relied heavily on *Maggie Hume's Contraception in Catholic Doctrine: The Evolution of an Earthly Code*; John T. Noonan Jr. who authored *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1965; and *Ute Ranke-Heinemann's Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*. Penguin Books, 1990. 2. Religious News Service/Washington Post, Nov. 19, 1988 and Commonweal, Feb. 10, 1989, as cited in *Maggie Hume's Contraception in Catholic Doctrine: The Evolution of an Earthly Code*. Washington, D.C.: Catholics for a Free Choice, 1991. 3. *Bernard Haring, Charles Curran and Gregory Baum* level their criticisms against *Humanae Vitae* in *The Catholic Case for Contraception*. London: Arlington Books, 1965.

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## Is The Pope Catholic?

A new study released by Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) shows that Catholics worldwide disagree with the Vatican's stand on reproductive issues - abortion and contraception - and on social issues such as divorce, a married priesthood and the ordination of women.

Proponents of the institutional position on abortion and contraception often assert that dissent from official teachings is an almost exclusively American phenomenon. However, according to the data collected by CFFC and compiled in the new report, *Catholics and Reproduction: A World View*, disagreement among Catholics with church leaders on questions ranging from abortion to divorce is common worldwide.

**Among the report's findings:**

- Sixty-one per cent of Polish voters favor a legal right to abortion. Only 10 per cent agree with the hierarchy's position banning abortion completely. Sixty-one per cent of Poles think that the church has too much power, 76 per cent believe it should not interfere in elections, and 70 per cent believe that it should not interfere in government.
- When Ireland voted on the Irish abortion law in 1992, two-thirds of the electorate (66 per cent) disagreed with the Vatican's position against abortion by favoring a change in the constitutional amendment

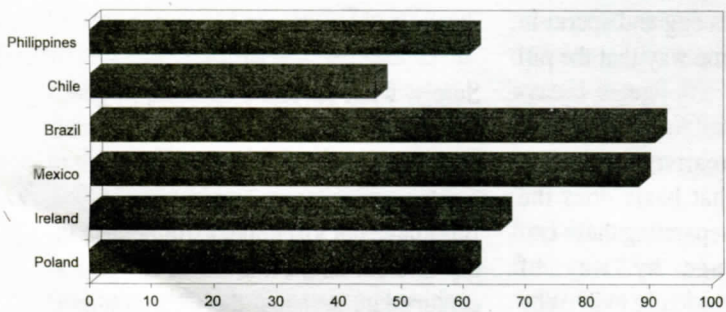
which banned abortion entirely. Fifty-two per cent of the Irish are also opposed to the Vatican's teaching in opposition to contraception. Among those aged 18-34, the number opposing the church's teaching on contraception is 71 per cent.



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- In Mexico, 88.4 per cent believe that the decision to have an abortion belongs either to the couple or to the woman. Only 7 per cent believe that this decision belongs to others.
- Although 76 per cent of Catholics in Brazil know that the Catholic church prohibits abortion under any circumstances, 40 per cent say that couples should be free to decide for themselves and 51 per cent said that they would not try to convince others not to have an abortion. Seventy-two per cent of Brazillian Catholics believe that it is permissible to use any method of birth control regardless of the Catholic hierarchy's position.
- In Chile, 46 per cent of the population believe that abortion should be either permitted in special cases or available to all women. Seventy-three per cent of Chileans disagree with the church's position against legal divorce, even though it remains illegal in Chile.
- Sixty-one percent of respondents in the Philippines agree that the choice of family planning methods is a personal decision of a married couple with which no one should interfere, and, contrary to the church's total prohibition, 83 per cent agree with the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS.

**Catholics opposed to official Vatican position on family planning and abortion**



*Frances Kissling*, President of Catholics for a Free Choice, says, "these surveys prove that the Vatican's views are out of step with the 994 million Catholics they purport to represent throughout the world."

Source: Catholics for a Free Choice, August 3, 1994 Memo, 1436 U Street, N.W., Suite 301, Washington, D.C. 20009-3997, USA. Tel: (202) 986-6093 Fax: (202) 332-7995.