

A Cafeteria Pope

By Jan Brazill

On March 12, 2000, Pope John Paul II made history by asking forgiveness for the conduct of his Church over the centuries. The Church characterises those who pick and choose what to believe to be "cafeteria Catholics." Citing a long list of sins of his predecessors, the pope conveniently omitted his own crime against women and children, thus making his own apology a "cafeteria confession."

H. L. Mencken once observed, "It is now quite lawful for a Catholic woman to avoid pregnancy by a resort to mathematics, though she is still forbidden to resort to physics and chemistry."

This pope, who did not hesitate to utilise the advances of medical science to save his own life after being shot, adamantly denies women the life-saving use of contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies, calling that application of science "unnatural." Celibate himself, he offers the solution of "abstinence."

Why this fanatical adherence to an archaic doctrine?

Stephen D. Mumford provides the answer in his book, *The Pope and the New Apocalypse: The Holy War Against Family Planning*. In it he tells the story of the "Papal Commission on Population and Birth Control" in 1966. According to the National Catholic Re-

porter, this was convened by the Vatican with the tacit purpose of finding a way for the Church to approve contraception without undermining Church authority. The commission voted 64 to 4 that a change in the Church's stand on artificial birth control was both possible and advisable. However, this majority decision, as well as a majority vote of a smaller commission of cardinals and bishops, was overridden by Vatican politics, resulting in the publication of *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, which retained the ban on artificial contraception. Pope John Paul II, then a cardinal, was one who voted to retain the ban, and as current pope, he has been resolute about the issue.

Thus the authority of the Catholic Church and that of John Paul II is maintained at the expense of worldwide suffering. Many of the 78,000 deaths a year from illegal abortions could have been prevented with contraceptives. By not allowing the use of condoms, the Church contributes to the 2.5 million deaths each year from AIDS and the 5.8 million who become HIV-positive. Family planning would reduce pregnancy-

related death and illness. Increased child-spacing alone could decrease infant mortality by up to one-third in some developing countries.

Nor is this needless suffering limited to those of the pope's faith. Through the Vatican's undue influence at the United Nations and the lobbying of Catholic bishops in the U.S. Congress, international family planning

sands in devastating mudslides and floods. Burning fossil fuels and deforestation alters the composition of the earth's atmosphere, promoting global warming.

Intense population pressures cripple efforts to provide adequate education, nutrition, health care and shelter. This, in turn, creates economic refugees who flee to the developed coun-

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assistance has been sharply curtailed to all countries.

This has contributed to the world's explosive population growth that has now reached six billion with another billion projected in only 13 years at the current rate of growth. Many in our world suffer from malnutrition and starvation. As desperate peoples in developing countries strip the hillsides of wood for building, cooking and heating, nature retaliates by destroying thou-

tries, causing resentments, prejudices, and often persecutions.

John Paul's "apology" shows that popes are remembered not for the good they may do, but for the cruelty they sanction in the name of religion. We can only hope that a future pope will apologise for the sins of this one.

Source: Internet Infidels, <<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/features/2000/brazill1.html> - 14k>, 21 January 2003