



The War on Faith

How Catholics for Choice Seeks
to Undermine the Catholic Church

By Thomas E. Woods, Jr., Ph.D.

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ORGANIZATIONS
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PREFACE

This paper inaugurates two new programs at the Catholic Family & Human Rights Institute. The first is the institution of the International Organizations Research Group. The second is our White Paper Series.

The International Organizations Research Group (IORG) has been founded as a think-tank to research and write about organizations that are a direct threat to the Catholic Church, the family and the unborn. The IORG will focus its attention on a variety of organizational types. There will be investigations of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Catholics for Choice and International Planned Parenthood Federation. These organizations work in close conjunction with UN agencies and national governments and often receive substantial funding to act as their surrogates. The IORG will investigate UN agencies like the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), evaluating the propriety of their goals and methods, as well as their general influence and effectiveness. It will examine international organizations such as the World Bank and the World Health Organization, agencies that are only indirectly linked to the UN, but that, we believe, play a significant role in international efforts to attack the Church, the family and the unborn. And, finally, the IORG will look deeply into the large engines of money that fund these attacks, like the Turner Foundation, the Gates Foundation, Ford and Rockefeller, Hewlett and Packard and many others.

The White Paper Series published by the IORG will adhere to the highest standards of academic scholarship. There will be no conjecture, no rhetoric, no rumor, only sober, moderate analysis. The White Papers will always be fully objective, lest they distort the objective truths they seek to defend.

This first White Paper looks closely at Catholics for Choice (CFC)¹, a group granted frequent access to the major media in order to criticize the Church hierarchy and Church doctrine, but whose claims, funding and ultimate goals remain almost completely unexamined. We thank Dr. Thomas E. Woods Jr. for this inaugural White Paper, and hope that those who seek to defend the Church, life and family will find it instructive.

We believe that Dr. Woods has made some astounding findings. Dr.

1 Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) has changed their name to Catholics for Choice (CFC).

Woods has shown that CFC members do not simply embrace a Culture of Death, but advocate an explicit theology of death. Some of the most gripping and disturbing passages of the paper explore CFC attempts to elevate abortion into a liturgical and sacramental event. While members of CFC ridicule the seven Catholic sacraments, they believe that abortion best communicates a woman's power and divinity, and thus deserves the status of a sacrament.

Dr. Woods has carefully exposed the truly radical nature of the Catholic "reforms" CFC members seek. One reform would entail convincing Catholics to pray to goddesses like Athena and Gaia, rather than to Mary. Other reforms would include teaching Catholics that individuals need not be redeemed from sin; that morality is relative to the individual, and sexual morality is determined by what feels good; that the earth is divine; that Catholicism must incorporate elements of other religions; and that transubstantiation is nonsense.

Dr. Woods has shown how CFC attempts to infiltrate the Church and transform it from within. CFC agitates for women priests so that CFC members — and others who share their beliefs — can preach from the very pulpits of churches. CFC considers a priesthood open to women to be the most significant step towards a polytheistic and druidical Catholic Church.

From this paper, it must be concluded that CFC seeks to destroy the Church, not reform it. Thus, dialogue with CFC members is more than futile, it is potentially dangerous to both the institution of the Church and to individual members of the Church. Through the White Paper Series, a portrait will begin to emerge of those forces on the world stage that are arrayed against the Church, the family and the unborn. It is our belief that only through authoritative knowledge of those forces can their threats be effectively countered.

Austin Ruse
President
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Douglas A. Sylva
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November 14, 2001

Introduction

For decades, an organization called Catholics for Choice (CFC) has portrayed itself as a group of earnest Catholic laypeople who, in their own words, seek only to nudge the Church forward on issues relating to sexuality and human intimacy — even to make the Church relevant again — by advocating the adaptation of the Church’s sexual dogma to the actual beliefs and practices of American Catholics. As such, they claim to be the spokespeople for large numbers of disaffected Catholics, the people in the pews who love the Church, but who struggle with the Church’s positions concerning abortion and contraception. In this capacity, media outlets routinely ask the members of CFC to comment on issues relating to the Church. CFC commentary is considered by the media to be a counterweight to official pronouncements from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and from the Vatican; by printing or broadcasting CFC commentary, it is thought, the full spectrum of Catholic opinions on sexuality can be represented.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest that the media is mistaken — that the media should not look to CFC for Catholic opinion — because CFC is not a Catholic organization. It is, instead, composed of a very small group of non-Catholics and ex-Catholics, and perhaps even excommunicated Catholics, who do not believe the Church’s fundamental dogmatic teachings (sexual or otherwise), and who advocate extremely radical steps towards further sexual permissiveness. CFC’s funding comes from sources like *Playboy* and Planned Parenthood, not Catholic parishes and charities; its theologians endorse a mixture of moral relativism and New Age thought, not Christianity. All of these facts, combined with an acknowledgment of the frequently virulent, vituperative tone of CFC’s commentary on Catholicism, leads one to conclude that CFC is not a group of ardent and sincere Catholics, but an arm of the reproductive and sexual industries, designed to undermine the last organized resistance to their revolution.



Part I: The History of CFC

CFC originated in 1970 under the name Catholics for the Elimination of all Restrictive Abortion and Contraceptive Laws.² In an interview on the occasion of CFC's 25th anniversary, Frances Kissling, the current director of CFC, recalled the founding of Catholics for Choice as it exists today: "Three New York women — Joan Harriman, Patricia Fogarty McQuillan, and Meta Mulcahy, who had been colleagues in the National Organization for Women — chartered CFC in 1973, the year of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe* decision." They believed that "the bishops did not represent the Catholic people on reproductive rights issues." "At the time," Kissling explained, "little if any active dissent movement existed in the Church."³ CFC was not slow to change that state of affairs, and did so in a fairly colorful and high-profile manner on the one-year anniversary of *Roe vs. Wade*, when Patricia Fogarty McQuillan crowned herself pope on the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Fr. Joseph O'Rourke, S.J., who was expelled from the Jesuits and the priesthood in 1974, was the first president of the organization, and served in that capacity until 1979. Planned Parenthood had provided office space in New York for CFC from its early days, but in 1980 the organization moved to Washington, D.C., and two years later named Frances Kissling its new director. Raised in Flushing, New York, Kissling spent six months as a postulant at the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, after having spent two years as a student at St. John's University. When she left the convent, Kissling says that she left her faith behind as well. She describes herself at the time as a

[Catholics for Choice] believed that "the bishops did not represent the Catholic people on reproductive rights issues."

"typical person of the sixties. I was single.... I protested the war, and I was sexually active."⁴ Kissling later underwent sterilization: "For me to be pregnant

2 Donna Steichen, *Ungodly Rage: The Hidden Face of Catholic Feminism* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), pp. 320-24.

3 "A Mouse that Roars: An Interview with CFC President Frances Kissling," available at <http://www.cath4choice.org/mouse.html> (accessed on June 1, 2001).

4 Doyle, "Agent of Influence," p. 44

would be an enormous violation of my own personal integrity,” she said.⁵

Kissling had been connected to the abortion issue for years by the time she joined CFC in 1979. In 1970, she operated two abortion clinics in New York, one in Pelham and the other in New York City; the Pelham clinic, according to Kissling, averaged 250 abortions per week.⁶ She helped to open abortion clinics around the world, even in places where abortion was illegal, including Mexico and Rome, itself. “I felt what we were doing at the clinic was correct,” she recalls with regard to her work in Rome. “Abortion goes on whether it’s legal or illegal. The question was what kind of abortion is a woman going to get.”⁷ In 1976, she founded and became the first president of the National Abortion Federation, a kind of trade association for abortion providers.

For the first decade of its existence, CFC was all but invisible, with a budget of \$20,000, most of which was supplied by a Unitarian Universalist church in New York. It was during the 1980s that the organization truly became a public presence. At a press conference at the U.S. Senate in late 1981, CFC protested the Catholic bishops’ testimony in favor of protection for the unborn. CFC claimed that the bishops’ position was unrepresentative of Catholic opinion as a whole, and eventually released a study documenting Catholic women who had had abortions, even though most of the women involved described themselves as “non-practicing” or “ex-Catholics.”⁸

In late August of the following year, CFC joined other members of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR), of which it was an affiliate, in filing a brief in the Supreme Court case of *City of Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health*. The brief included an argument to which CFC has made repeated reference over the years: that all restrictions on abortion ultimately derive from a theological perspective on life and its beginnings, and for that reason are invalidated by the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of religion. Making scientific descriptions available to women seeking abortions was also anathema, according to the brief, since they represent a “propaganda tool for the anti-abortion position.” CFC joined in on a brief that raised similar issues in *Kendrick v. Heckler*, a 1985 U.S. District Court case.⁹

In tandem with its involvement in these cases, CFC defended its position in a key 1985 article in *Conscience*, the organization’s newsletter. According

5 “Kissling Takes Debate to London: Challenging the Vatican on Abortion,” *Conscience*, May/June 1988, beginning on back cover.

6 Doyle, “Agent of Influence,” p. 44.

7 “Kissling Takes Debate to London.”

8 Richard Doerflinger, “Who Are Catholics for Choice?” Supplement to the Catholic League Newsletter, n.d.; reprinted from *America*, November 16, 1985; no pagination.

9 Doerflinger, “Who Are...”

to the article, “for any church to recommend that one particular doctrine or dogma, to which others of different faith do not subscribe, be enforced by law, such as making abortion illegal, would certainly be coercive and therefore unacceptable....” It goes on: “We submit that any statement by our church that would persuade by religious pressure or would recommend by legal sanction against abortion would be ‘unworthy of the Gospel.’”¹⁰

CFC’s activities and publicity continued to increase throughout the decade, especially on two high-profile occasions in 1984 and 1986. In 1984, as a way of lending support to the vice-presidential campaign of the pro-abortion and self-described Catholic Geraldine Ferraro, CFC published a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* featuring the signatures of ninety-six Catholic feminists denying the existence of a single “legitimate Catholic position” on abortion, and claiming that dissent on this issue did not prevent one from remaining a Catholic in good standing. The advertisement was also an example of CFC’s continuing cooperation with Planned Parenthood, having been designed and placed free of charge through the latter’s New York advertising agency, Smith/Greenland; Smith/Greenland president Norman Goluskind described it as “a favor to Planned Parenthood.”¹¹ The second advertisement, which ran on March 2, 1986, was in effect a show of support for those who had signed the earlier one, and featured more than one thousand signatures — “representing a large percentage of the Catholic feminist constituency,” according to Donna Steichen, an authority on Catholic feminism.¹²

Today, the group remains active and visible, most recently with its so-called “See Change” campaign, the effort by which this “Catholic” organization seeks to have the Vatican expelled from the United Nations. In this campaign CFC has been far less successful: while it took them a full year to get 350 organizations to sign on to its effort, a campaign in support of the Holy See conducted by the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (C-FAM) had already netted 1,015 NGOs in 44 countries after a secret campaign of only sixty days. Eventually C-FAM’s campaign grew to 4,207 groups from all over the world while CFC’s campaign mustered only 500. C-FAM’s campaign also resulted in what the Vatican called an historic document, a resolution by the U.S. House of Representatives endorsing the Holy See at the UN that passed 416-1.

10 Patricia Wilson-Kastner and Beatrice Blair, “Biblical Views on Abortion: An Episcopal Perspective,” *Conscience*, November/December 1985, pp. 4-8.

11 Doyle, “Agent of Influence,” p. 43; Doerflinger, “Who Are...”

12 Steichen, *Ungodly Rage*, p. 321.



Part II: The CFC Claim

The *New York Times* advertisements highlighted one of CFC's central claims: there is no single Catholic stance on abortion. The group argues that a number of Catholic theologians as well as Catholic laity oppose the Church's teaching on abortion on legitimate theological grounds. One of CFC's key publications, a pamphlet by Marjorie Reiley Maguire and Daniel C. Maguire called *Abortion: A Guide to Making Ethical Choices*, concludes: "Thus, the Catholic Church, when considered in its rich diversity, teaches that some abortions can be moral and that conscience is the final arbiter of any abortion decision. Unfortunately, the Catholicism that is taught in many Catholic parishes does not reflect the richness of the Catholic faith."¹³

That the Church presents a "monolithic" stance on abortion is routinely taken by Kissling and CFC as evidence of an incorrigibly tendentious and even sinister hierarchy, bent on suppressing the "richness" of the Catholic position on abortion. However, the wide variety of Catholic theologians whom CFC claims in support of its position turns out to be confined to an extreme fringe group of laicized priests, radical feminists, and peculiar New Age spokesmen, all of whom insist on retaining the Catholic label for themselves.

The primary theological argument advanced by CFC in favor of abortion as a morally legitimate option involves a principle called probabilism, according to which a person may have recourse to his conscience when a doubtful matter of fact is involved in a moral question. Therefore, according to this argument, since the precise questions of the ensoulment and personhood of the fetus have seen some variation over the course of Church history, the matter is at least arguably doubtful, and thus the abortion issue reverts to one of individual conscience in the face of uncertainty. ("The theory I have developed," said Marjorie Maguire, "is that personhood begins when the woman consents to the pregnancy."¹⁴ Thus the personhood of the developing child is bestowed not by God or nature but by the whim of another.) According to Daniel Maguire, probabilism also allows that "if you found five or six theologians, known for their 'prudence

13 Marjorie Reiley Maguire and Daniel C. Maguire, *Abortion: A Guide to Making Ethical Decisions, Catholics for Choice*, September 1983.

14 Quoted in Steichen, *Ungodly Rage*, p. 178.

and learning,’ who held the liberal dissenting view, you could follow them in good conscience even if the other ten thousand theologians — including the pope — disagreed.”¹⁵

Richard Doerflinger, then-assistant director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Office for Pro-Life Activities, dispensed with this argument in 1985. CFC’s position, he wrote, “betrays a serious misunderstanding of the theory of probabilism. It has never been seen as authorizing deliberate disobedience to the clear moral teaching of the Church, and has always been seen as invalid when one’s action could lead to the killing of an innocent human being.” Moreover, the Church’s constant condemnation of abortion, a teaching 2,000 years old, never relied on any particular theory of personhood or ensoulment for its binding force.¹⁶

For instance, both St. Jerome and St. Thomas Aquinas speculated as to the exact moment of ensoulment. Yet both of these saints, as well as all the saints who have addressed the issue of abortion, denounced abortion as an abominable crime; Jerome referred to it as the “murder of an unborn child.”¹⁷ *The two issues had nothing to do with one another.* As St. Basil the

What CFC spokespeople are attempting to evade — and the fact that they are attempting to obscure — is that abortion has always been condemned throughout the history of the Church.

Great put it, “The hairsplitting difference between formed and unformed makes no difference to us. Whoever deliberately commits abortion is subject to the penalty for homicide.”¹⁸ What CFC spokespeople are attempting to evade — and the fact that they are attempting to obscure — is that abortion has always been condemned throughout the history of the

Church. No papal statement, no commentary from any member of the Church’s hierarchy, has ever been cited to the contrary. If CFC could find

15 Thus see Frances Kissling, “Latin American Feminists Speak Out,” *Conscience*, July/August 1989, pp. 21-23; Daniel C. Maguire, “Where There’s Doubt, There’s Freedom,” *Conscience*, Spring/Summer 1993, p. 15; idem, “The Splendor of Control: A Commentary on *Veritatis Splendor* and the Elephant in the Living Room,” *Conscience*, Winter 1993-94, pp. 26-29; idem, “Catholic Options in the Abortion Debate: Probabilism in a Pluralistic Society,” *Conscience*, Summer 1996, pp. 19-23.

16 Doerflinger, “Who Are...”

17 St. Jerome, *Letter to Eustochium*, 22.13.

18 St. Basil the Great, “First Canonical Letter,” in *Three Canonical Letters*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. III, pp. 2023.

such a statement concerning abortion, we would certainly know about it by now.

The very title of the CFC newsletter, *Conscience*, along with a great many of the organization's public comments and published remarks, indicates an understanding of the role of conscience that is demonstrably at odds with that of the Church. CFC maintains that "Catholic theology tells individuals to follow their own consciences on moral matters, even when one's conscience is in conflict with church teachings."¹⁹ But the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, while insisting that it is "by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law," at the same time warns at great length of the need for a *properly formed* conscience. The Church's position on conscience does not suggest a radical moral autonomy, whereby every individual judges the morality of actions for himself. Rather, the Church holds that the conscience must be informed and instructed to know what is right. "The *education* of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings".

More to the point, conscience is not infallible. "Faced with a moral choice," the *Catechism* explains, "conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law or, on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them." Errors of judgment in moral conduct, according to the Church's official *Catechism*, may derive from: "Ignorance of Christ and His Gospel, bad example given by others, enslavement to one's passions, assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience, rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching, lack of conversion and of charity."²⁰ Thus, the CFC position on "conscience," although presented as traditional Catholic teaching, actually contradicts what the Church officially teaches.

Tied to probabilism and CFC's mistaken view of conscience is a repudiation of the Church's hierarchy of pope and bishops. This is a necessary strategic step: since the hierarchy's positions disagree with CFC's, the hierarchy's role as the true authority and legitimate repository of Catholic doctrine must be undermined. Kissling frequently makes statements such as "Jesus Christ didn't come here and say, 'You gotta have a pope, you gotta have cardinals, you gotta have bishops, you gotta have

19 "Abortion and Catholic Thought: The Little-Known History," *Conscience*, Autumn 1996, pp. 2-5.

20 On the Church and Conscience, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1776-1802, (emphasis added).

priests.’ . . . This system is man-made, and really modeled upon a European feudal system.” Kissling noted with pleasure to the *Washington Post* in 1986 that the secular press “no longer treats 300 men in dresses as representatives of the Catholic Church.”²¹

What Kissling is rejecting here can in no way be described as a dispensable adjunct of the Catholic faith, but rather is utterly fundamental to what the Church is. Thus as early as the second century A.D., when St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon and the century’s most important theologian, was faced with the problem of the Gnostics and their claim that they possessed a “hidden knowledge” necessary for salvation, *he rested the foundation of his seminal reply on the existence of the Church’s hierarchy*. How could his flock be certain that they possessed the complete and unadulterated Gospel? Because, he said, they could trace their bishops in a direct succession back to the apostles, from whom the full Catholic faith had been passed down without adulteration from generation to generation. Since he could not in such a short overview delineate the succession of bishops in all the churches, he confined himself to listing the bishops of Rome, “the greatest and most ancient Church known to all.”²² He likewise cautioned:

It is necessary to obey those who are the presbyters in the Church, those who, as we have shown, have succession from the Apostles; those who have received, with the succession of the episcopate, the sure charism of truth according to the good pleasure of the Father. But the rest, who have no part in the primitive succession and assemble wheresoever they will, must be held in suspicion.²³

Even earlier than that of Irenaeus is the testimony of St. Ignatius of Antioch, who died around 110 A.D. and who had known the apostle John. Ignatius’ letters refer unambiguously to a hierarchical Church with a monarchical episcopate. “Be subject to the bishop and to one another, as Jesus Christ was subject to the Father,” Ignatius advises.²⁴ For “anyone who acts without the bishop and the presbytery and the deacons does not have a clean conscience.” Such remarks by Ignatius could be multiplied.²⁵

From the earliest days of the Church it was clear that it was not possible

21 Doyle, “Agent of Influence,” p. 45.

22 Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. William A. Jurgens (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1970), p. 90 [3, 3, 2].

23 Ibid, p. 96 [4, 26, 2].

24 Ignatius of Antioch, “Letter to the Magnesians,” in Ibid., p. 20 [13, 1].

25 Ignatius of Antioch, “Letter to the Trallians,” in Ibid., p. 21 [7, 2].

to reject the role of the Church's hierarchy and remain a Catholic in good standing. In the battle with Gnosticism, one of the first crises to befall the Church, the fact that the Church in her episcopate had maintained the apostolic succession, linking the present generation with the very birth of the Catholic faith, *was considered the central argument for the authenticity of Church teaching*. To suggest that such a structure was "manmade" or in any way superfluous would have made no sense to these early theologians, or to any who followed them.



Part III: Not Just Abortion

To be sure, CFC takes a radical position on abortion. It opposes parental consent and even notification: “We argue that minor girls must be free to choose abortion without consent or notification so that they may have opportunities for growth into free and independent women and citizens.”²⁶ Kissling has even argued for the need to teach abortion procedures among segments of the general public, even to pass this knowledge down from generation to generation: “I would like to see a huge underground of activist women learning how to do menstrual extractions and vacuum aspiration abortions, mothers teaching their daughters, *sub rosa* classes at campus women’s centers....”²⁷

Despite all the attention CFC devotes to abortion, the organization goes far beyond that issue in its condemnation of the Catholic Church. “What I am doing is not just dealing with the issue of abortion or reproduction,” Kissling says, “but with the structure of the Catholic Church.... I do not agree with the Catholic Church’s position on sexuality. Nor do I think there is any sense to the position in which a person who chooses not to marry is expected to lead a chaste life.... I don’t think God cares very much about our sexual activity. I think he cares about how we treat each other.”²⁸ “My sexual life,” she said on another occasion, “has been shaped far more by my sexual

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26 Lynn M. Paltrow, “Religious Freedom and Family Life: Reflections on the Right to Choose,” *Conscience*, November/December 1985, pp. 1, 3, 12.

27 Quoted in Brett Harvey, “The Morning After,” *Mother Jones*, May 1989, pp. 28-31 and 43.

28 Janet Wallach, “The Cardinal of Choice: Frances Kissling’s Crusade to Change the Church,” *The Washington Post Magazine*, August 24, 1986.

desires, needs and partners than by religion.”²⁹

These are far from isolated statements. “The area of sexual ethics,” according to *Conscience*, “is a wasteland in the Catholic Church. Teachers of Catholic sexual ethics have the choice of either addressing real life with useful critical moral reflection, or being faithful to the Magisterium (the official teaching authority of the Catholic Church located in the pope and bishops). It is impossible to do both. More bluntly put, one can either be Christian, or one can be faithful to the Magisterium.”³⁰ In its official publication, CFC routinely makes such statements — namely, that one cannot be a true Christian if he follows the teachings of the Church.

In effect, CFC is a mouthpiece for the most radical aspects of the sexual revolution. Thus *Conscience* contributor and Xavier University theology professor Christine E. Gudorf wonders: “Why is it that sexual pleasure needs to be justified by something beyond itself?... It doesn’t.... Good sex — sex which is as pleasurable as possible on as many levels as possible — operates as a channel of grace.”³¹

Another contributor writes that she was pleasantly surprised when she “heard these comments from a Roman Catholic theologian [Gudorf] a while back.... [T]he endorsement was extended to homosexual activity as well as heterosexual, and — while a commitment such as marriage may well add to sexual pleasures — masturbation and sex between unmarried people also were included. ‘A marriage license does not endow sex with new power. Sex *itself* has a sacramental power. I propose that sexual pleasure is good for its own sake.’” Such theologians, the writer continued, “aren’t throwing out the idea of standards or ethics in sexuality. Quite the opposite: by combating gratuitous shame, challenging narrow assumptions, and promoting an honest, mature appreciation of sexuality, they encourage good sexual ethics.”³²

29 Quoted in “Divine Ecstasy: Sin, Asceticism and Sexuality in the Catholic Tradition,” Nerve.com’s interview of several commentators, March 30, 1999, available at <http://www.nerve.com/Dispatches/voicebox/religion> (accessed on June 1, 2001).

30 Judith Paterson, “The Civil Rights Restoration Act and the Bishops,” in *Civil Rights Held Hostage: The United States Catholic Conference and the Civil Rights Restoration Act*, Catholics for Choice, March 1987, pp. 7-23.

31 Maggie Hume, “Editor’s Note: The Joy of...,” *Conscience*, Winter 1993-94, inside front cover.

32 *Ibid.*, (emphasis added).



Part IV: Funding

For years, spokesmen for CFC boasted that the group had 5,000 members. The organization’s tax returns, however, consistently told a very different story, with a negligible fraction of CFC’s income coming from subscription fees and over 97% of its funds being donated by private foundations and tax-exempt groups.³³ Under pressure, Kissling ultimately admitted: “We’re not a membership organization. We have no membership.”³⁴ As one commentator put it, “The voice of dissent, it turned out, was not a mass movement, but a spokesperson with a fax machine.”³⁵

A recent article in *Philanthropy*, a magazine that chronicles charitable giving, also took a close look at the matter. Surveying the large foundations providing grant money to CFC, author Francis Butler found that Kissling’s organization was “without a single major supporter whose program focus is Catholic philanthropy.” That is rather an understatement: CFC’s funding comes largely from secular and even anti-religious sources, which see Kissling’s organization as a convenient vehicle for undermining Church teaching.

The Sunnen Foundation has been one major funding source for CFC, providing well over a million dollars over the years. Sunnen Products was a pioneer in the contraceptive industry, producing Emko contraceptive foam. As such, it considers the Catholic Church a philosophical enemy, as well as a challenge to its profit margin. Sunnen advocated withdrawing the Catholic Church’s tax-exempt status as a religion.

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What is more, a Sunnen director, describing the Church’s teachings as “detrimental to the world,” even hinted that the Church might be forced by the state to abandon those teachings, just as the Mormons had to jettison

33 Doerflinger, “Who Are...”

34 Doyle, “Agent of Influence,” p. 41.

35 Ibid.

polygamy.³⁶ Sunnen also helped to pay for the litigation that led to *Roe v. Wade*.

Another large donor (providing hundreds of thousands of dollars) is the George Gund Foundation, a Cleveland-based organization whose philanthropy has been directed over the years toward a number of pro-abortion and population-control groups. The same can be said of the Educational Foundation of America of Westport, Connecticut. The Packard Foundation of Los Altos, California, another key donor, has provided millions of dollars to organizations promoting abortion, sterilization, and population control. An exhaustive study of CFC's funding sources was prepared several years ago, documenting the expressly anti-Catholic nature of the organization's donors.³⁷ These donors either profit directly from the contraceptive and abortion industries, or endorse the work of these industries.

CFC, which portrays itself as a champion of the dignity of women, has twice accepted grants from Hugh Hefner's Playboy Foundation. (Kissling insisted that she would, however, never accept money from Larry Flynt and *Hustler* magazine, noting that "there are boundaries of good taste.")³⁸

Examining the array of foundations that have funded CFC over the years, *Philanthropy* observes: "One looks in vain at these organizations' program areas for evidence of meaningful support of parochial schools, retired nuns, Catholic missions, religious vocations work, or parish ministry — the areas that are the meat and potatoes of Catholic philanthropy today." This is all rather revealing: none of these enormous grants are coming from Catholic donors.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

37 Human Life International, "Catholics for Choice" *Exposed: Dirty Ideas, Dirty Money*.

38 Doyle, "Agents of Influence," p. 41; "Playboy Funds Pro-Abortion Group," *National Federation for Decency Journal*, February 1985, p. 16.



Part V: CFC's Key Figures, A Closer Look

Arguably the best-known ally of CFC is the radical theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, who teaches at Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois and who for years has been a member of CFC's board of directors. In addition to her writings for CFC, which include the monograph *Women and Roman Catholic Christianity* and many conference presentations and articles for *Conscience*, Ruether is the author of a great many books, including *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (1983, 1993) and *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (1992). She also appears in one of CFC's newspaper advertisements calling on the Church to reverse its opposition to artificial contraception.

Taken as a whole, Ruether's work is a thorough and complete rejection of Catholicism. "The heart of my understanding of inspiration and religious authority," she explains, is that "God did not just speak once upon a time to a privileged group of males in one part of the world, making us ever after dependent on the codification of their experience....Feminist readings of the Bible can discern a norm within Biblical faith by which the Biblical texts themselves can be criticized. To the extent to which Biblical texts reflect this normative principle, they are regarded as authoritative. On this basis many aspects of the Bible are to be frankly set aside and rejected...."³⁹ Thus the biblical text is not to be accepted in its original integrity, but is instead to be made to conform to an external ideology — modern feminism — utterly foreign to it. This is Ruether's conception of exegesis.

Thus the biblical text is not to be accepted in its original integrity, but is instead to be made to conform to an external ideology — modern feminism — utterly foreign to it. This is Ruether's conception of exegesis.

39 See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

Ruether rejects practically every dogmatic teaching of the Church. She does not believe in the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ in the Mass, and she rejects the entire Catholic theology of the priesthood. She even rejects the Church's fundamental contention regarding the immortality of the individual soul — the touchstone on which all forms of Christianity are based. "In effect," she writes, at death "our existence ceases as individuated ego/organism and dissolves back into the cosmic matrix of matter/energy, from which new centers of the individuation arise. It is this matrix, rather than our individuated centers of being, that is 'everlasting.'"⁴⁰

Just as Ruether systematically discards or redefines all Catholic thought and terminology, she likewise wishes to change our conception of the meaning of redemption. Since there is no individual soul, redemption cannot have the classical significance it has always possessed, both in Catholic and Reformed Churches. "Redemption is realized," she contends, "not primarily in an otherworldly escape from the body and the finite world, but by creating and encouraging personal and social relations of justice and peace between all humans here and now. This is the true message of Christ and the Gospels. The churches have betrayed Christ by preaching a theology of female silence and subordination.... Feminism sees patriarchy as a multi-layered system of domination, centered in men's control of women, but including class, race and generational hierarchies, clericalism, war, and the domination of nature...."⁴¹

Ruether's revisions go well beyond even this. According to Ruether, "Feminist theologians" such as herself "reject the classical notion that the human soul is radically fallen, alienated from God, and unable to reconcile itself with God, in need of an outside mediator." What Ruether and her feminist colleagues are rejecting, therefore, is Christianity itself. The Catholic Church's concern with reconciling alienated souls to God is fairly obvious in her sacraments, ritual, and theology, and the tradition emanating from the Reformation is no different: Martin Luther was profoundly concerned with the state of his soul and the question of justification. This is a foundational element of all Christianity. But, according to Ruether, all of this is to be set aside. "Instead, the human self is defined through its primary identity as image of God.... Jesus' role becomes quite different in feminist theology.... No one person can become the collective human whose actions accomplish a salvation which is then passively applied

40 Ibid.

41 Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Created Second, Sinned First: Women, Redemption, and the Challenge of Christian Feminist Theology," *Conscience*, Spring 1997, pp. 3-6.

to everyone else. Jesus' story can be a model for what we need to do for ourselves and with one another....Feminist Christianity is the true gospel of Jesus.... This dismantling of the patterns of patriarchal Christianity, reconstructing a radically different understanding of the key touchstones of Christian theology (God, humanity male and female, sin and fall, Christ and redemption) raises the question of how feminist theology relates to scripture and tradition...."⁴² Ruether here states her mission in stark terms: the "dismantling" of Christianity as it has existed since its founding and the imposition of a "radically different understanding" on all its major dogmas.

She goes on to suggest: "What happens to Christian feminist theology when Christian symbols are one resource among others, along with Shamanism and Buddhism.... Multi-religious solidarity and syncretism are not only allowable, they are required."⁴³ At no time has the Church ever had anything but condemnation for syncretism, or the blending of features among various religions. In fact, had the Church been willing to accept such a thing, the Roman Empire would never have persecuted it. Syncretism, the approach that Ruether claims is "required," was all the Romans were asking of Catholics. The Church would have been left in peace had it been willing to allow its God to be recognized as one among many. Great multitudes went to their deaths rather than reconcile themselves to this.

In a 1985 interview with *U.S. Catholic* Ruether admitted to polytheism, believing in a number of goddesses: "I could hardly tell her [a nun] that my devotion to Mary was somewhat less than my devotion to far more powerful females I knew: Isis, Athena, and Artemis."⁴⁴ She favors the ordination of women to the priesthood, even though the Pope has declared the matter closed. For Ruether, ordaining women would constitute an essential first step in implementing her radical changes in theology — rejection of monotheism, rejection of the notion of sin and the need for redemption, rejection of the central role of Christ as a sacrifice for humanity. Female priests, she supposes, would bring with them into the Church this feminist, polytheistic theology. Ruether observes that "most Catholic women neither can nor wish to be ordained in priesthood as presently defined."⁴⁵ For her, ordaining women as priests would not simply put an end to an ancient injustice, it would also constitute the beginning of far deeper changes — a revolution in what the Church actually believes.

Linked to this theology, especially to the belief in the earth goddess

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 "Rosemary Radford Ruether Unmasked," *HLLI Reports*, November 1994.

45 Ibid.

called 'Gaia,' is a radical view on social policy and population. The difficulty here is not so much her repetition of long-debunked "overpopulation" myths, but rather her solution to how overpopulation might be rectified. According to Ruether what is needed is a drastic reduction in population levels worldwide. She argues that "the flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease." She told

"[W]e need to seek the most compassionate way of weeding out people." It is not pro-life, [Ruether] said, "to allow unrestrained fertility," "A good gardener weeds and thins his seedlings to allow the proper amount of room for the plants to grow properly..."

participants at a 1998 conference that "we need to seek the most compassionate way of weeding out people." It is not pro-life, she said, "to allow unrestrained fertility." "A good gardener weeds and thins his seedlings to allow the proper amount of room for the plants to grow properly.... Our current pro-life movement is really killing people through disease and poverty." In its place, she recommends the cultivation of a "spirituality of recycling," a "spirituality that includes

ourselves in the renewal of earth and self. We need to compost ourselves."⁴⁶ At a Call to Action conference later that year Ruether was more specific: "We must return to the population level of 1930," she said.⁴⁷ In 1930, the world population was 2.07 billion people. Either Ruether is engaging in irresponsible exaggeration, or she is calling for the deaths of four billion people now living.

Another figure associated with CFC, who has written for *Conscience* and whom Kissling cites with approval, is Anthony Padovano, a laicized priest who left the priesthood a generation ago to marry. In 1974 he founded the Core of Retired Priests United for Service (CORPUS), an organization whose ostensible purpose is to advocate a married priesthood. In fact, however, CORPUS is composed primarily of former priests who, like Padovano, were laicized in order to contract marriage and now, also like Padovano, want to have their faculties reinstated. (Padovano, however,

46 Michael S. Rose, "Feminist Theologian Urges Religious to Find a Way to 'Weed Out People,'" *The Wanderer*, June 11, 1998, p. 1.

47 Ann Sheridan, "CTA Conference Presents the Reality of Unreality," *The Wanderer*, November 12, 1998, p. 1.

in an apparent violation of his laicized state, advertises himself on the Internet as a “rent-a-priest” who is available to baptize, marry, and offer “Eucharistic celebrations.”⁴⁸ Kissling points with interest to Padovano’s rather novel suggestion that Christ may have been married.

Like Ruether, for whom women’s ordination is not an isolated demand but only the beginning of a radical reorientation of Catholic theology, Padovano is clear that he would be far from satisfied if his principal demand were granted. “If there were a readmission of noncanonical priests and nothing else was changed,” he once asked, “why would I go back if I would have to be silenced on every other issue of reform?” He concluded that “a truncated ministry like that would be unbearably oppressive,” and added that among members of CORPUS there was “virtual unanimity” on this point.⁴⁹ It can hardly come as a surprise, then, that the second keynote address at the 1998 CORPUS conference was delivered by — Rosemary Radford Ruether.

Then there is CFC board member John Giles Milhaven, ex-Jesuit and Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Brown University. Scholar Samuel Gregg rightly speaks of “the curious idea advanced by John Giles Milhaven that ‘modern people,’ by virtue of their ‘modernity of spirit,’ enjoy a type of standing dispensation from God to pursue what they ‘feel’ to be the greater good or the lesser evil.”⁵⁰ Milhaven expressly embraces the moral relativism implicit within most CFC positions.

CFC’s board has also included Mary Hunt and Diann Neu, frequent participants in CFC events and co-founders of WATER (Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual), a pillar of Women Church Convergence, a radical feminist umbrella group. WATER publishes the newsletter *WATERwheel*;⁵¹ among the “songs, prayers, chants, readings” listed in *WATERwheel’s* index are “Woman river flowing on,” “Everything is a human being,” and “Marvelous menstruation moments.”

48 Defenders of the Magisterium, “Anthony T. Padovano Sneaks into Town for Secret Gathering,” at <http://www.dotm.org/padovano-sneaks.htm> (accessed on February 9, 2001).

49 Anthony Padovano as quoted at an Emory University conference, July 28-August 1, 1999; cited in *National Catholic Reporter*, August 13, 1999.

50 Samuel Gregg, “Ordered Liberty: Faith, Truth, and Freedom,” lecture delivered at the Centre for Independent Studies, NSW, Australia, October 12, 2000; see also John Giles Milhaven, “Moral Absolutes in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Absolutes in Moral Theology*, ed. C. Curran (New York: Cross Books, 1968), pp. 154-85.

51 Steichen, *Ungodly Rage*, p. 108.

Hunt described her perspective on sexual issues and the Church in *Conscience* in 1993:

“I testify...as a lesbian feminist who is a Catholic theologian, a woman who prepared fully with the Jesuits for priesthood....To be a lesbian feminist is to love all women.... My experience of coming out ten years ago was very exciting and positive for me, although the institutional church never congratulated me on my insight.... We had never been told about this foolproof means of natural birth control! [lesbianism]...Having learned by the early '70s that much of what the institutional, hierarchical church teaches about women is morally bankrupt, I cannot say that I ever gave the church's position much credence. To the contrary, because the church's positions on birth control, abortion, and sterilization, not to mention sexual relations outside of marriage, and masturbation, were so far off the mark, my discovery of the church's prohibition of lesbian sexuality only enhanced my sense that it was probably important for women to affirm the lesbian in all of us.”⁵²

Hunt has recommended “substituting friendship as a metaphor for family,” an idea she illustrated this way: “Imagine sex among friends as the norm, young people learning how to make friends rather than to date. Imagine valuing genital interaction in terms of whether and how it fosters friendship and pleasure.... Pleasure is our birth-right of which we have been robbed in religious patriarchy. It is time to claim it anew with our friends.... Responsible relational sexuality is a human right. I picture friends, not families, basking in the pleasures we deserve because our bodies are holy and our sexuality is part of creation's available riches.”⁵³

Hunt and Neu live together “in what is believed to be a lesbian relationship.”⁵⁴ Hunt herself said not long ago: “Of course my neighbors have noticed that my partner and I are both women... every house should have as much love as Mary and Diann's does...love and lesbian go together like love and justice and hearts and flowers.”⁵⁵

Neu, a self-described “liturgist,” has manufactured a number of feminist “liturgies,” not one of which bears the slightest resemblance to

52 Mary E. Hunt, “The Examined Life,” *Conscience*, Spring/Summer 1993, pp. 50-52.

53 Quoted in HLI, *CFC Exposed*, pp. 8-9.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

55 Mary E. Hunt, “Attending to Choices About Personal Life and Community Living,” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 2, 1994, quoted in HLI, *CFC Exposed*, p. 9.

anything traditionally Christian, let alone Catholic. “The spirit is speaking to us and through us as Women Church,” she explains in an introduction to a series of Lenten liturgies. “Let her wisdom be heard as we gather together in her name.”⁵⁶ She explains that readings and music “need to be written with inclusive language that is they need to be free of sexist, classist and racist words for people and for God/ess.” Not surprisingly, the word “men” is condemned when used to describe all people, but equally offensive is the use of the “classist” word “Lord,” which is to be jettisoned in favor of “Sovereign One.” Likewise, “darkness” has “racist” overtones, and is to be replaced by “shadow.”⁵⁷ And so on.

Something of the flavor of Neu’s liturgies can be seen in her Holy Thursday celebration, including a litany by Mary Hunt that deploras, among other things, “women harassed by the Vatican, Nicaraguans harassed by the CIA...”⁵⁸ During the Easter vigil, the following is

proclaimed: “As Women Church we claim a new baptism — a baptism into a church which acknowledges that it is guilty of sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism....”⁵⁹

Hunt and Neu go far beyond regretting abortion as a tragedy for all involved; rather, they attempt to endow abortion with sacredness and religious significance. “Women’s right to choose is what I, as a Catholic, dare to call sacramental,” Hunt says. “Reproductive choice is a sacred trust and women are more than equal to the task. Bringing this to public expression, ‘praising our choices’ as poet Marge Piercy has said, is something that a just society will celebrate as sacramental.”⁶⁰ At a 1988 CFC conference in Albuquerque, Diann Neu gave abortion a liturgical dimension: “I want to suggest how we might reinforce and affirm moral choice through attention to liturgy and ritual about reproduction.... I want us to see choice as a holy, moral option, one that not only makes us whole but that underscores

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56 Diann Neu, *Women Church Celebrations: Feminist Liturgies for the Lenten Season* (Silver Spring, MD: WATER, 1985), p. 2.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

60 Mary E. Hunt, “Abortion in a Just Society,” *Conscience*, July/August 1988, pp. 9-12.

the reverence we have for life, beginning with our own..." She went on to describe what such a ceremony would be like:

Sue has made a difficult and wrenching decision to have an abortion. After her procedure, she asks the doctor to give her the remains so that she can dispose of them in a thoughtful way. As you can see, Sue respects the integrity of her body, and she has a deep sense of her own body. At home, she gathers her friends together, including her partner, Tom, for a ceremony of mourning. They unite in a circle with arms around one another as they sing. Her friends express their sadness and affirm Sue in her choice. They pray. "Blessed are you, holy God, mother and father, that you've given us the power of choice. We are saddened that the life circumstances of Sue and Tom are such that the choice to bring this pregnancy to completion is not a life-giving one for all involved. Such a choice is never simple; it's filled with pain and hurt, with anger and questions. Our beloved sister has made a very hard choice. We affirm her and support her in her choice. We promise to continue to stand with her in her ongoing life. Blessed are you, Holy One, for your presence with her." Then Sue speaks about her choice to have an abortion and why she has made this choice. After she finishes she digs a hole in the earth, and her partner, Tom, does the same, and they bury the material from the abortion in the earth and pray. "O Mother Earth, we lay this spirit to rest in your bosom."⁶¹

This grisly and disturbing description is only one example of CFC's attempt to lend a liturgical aspect to the abortion procedure. An undated CFC pamphlet called "You Are Not Alone" included a special liturgy for women deciding to have an abortion. A sampling:

1. Play soothing background music.
2. "Light a candle, absorb its power, and pray"
3. Imagine yourself in ten years, a) with a child and b) without a child. Talk about your feelings with an assistant.
4. Sing a song entitled, "I found god in myself."
5. Decide to have an abortion.
6. The "celebrant" and assistant(s) pray as follows: "Praised

61 Diann Neu, "Affirming Our Work, Creating Our Community," *Conscience*, January/February 1989, pp. 9-12.

be you, Mother and Father God, that you have given your people the power of choice. We are saddened that the life circumstances of (aborting woman's name) are such that she has had to choose to terminate her pregnancy. We affirm her and support her in her decision.”

7. The “celebrants” may then express their “sorrow” by “sprinkling flower petals, or sharing dried flowers.”
8. Do something “nice” for yourself.

What all of this reveals is that CFC is obviously not simply a Catholic organization working to change one or two fundamental Church teachings. It is at the forefront of a fringe movement that has no connection whatever to Catholicism, and whose palpable loathing for the Church is channeled into a massive effort to transform this “patriarchal” and “oppressive” institution beyond recognition. Kissling herself is a strong supporter of the “Women Church” movement described above; not only does she feature representatives as speakers at her conferences, but she also boasts of CFC’s affiliation with Women Church Convergence on CFC’s website. “In women-church,” Kissling explains, “we come together to celebrate our lives, to study, and to work for a change in the institutional church.”⁶² It is no coincidence that none of these organizations features a patron saint or makes any references to the saints at all, since it would be difficult, to say the least, to find a single saint in the Church’s entire history who could be cited in support of this movement.

62 Frances Kissling, “Latin American Feminists Speak Out,” *Conscience*, July/August 1989, pp. 21-23.



Part VI: Dishonesty

One of the Left's consistent problems over the past generation, in an astonishing number of cases, has been the exaggeration and even the outright manufacture of data. Thus Gloria Steinem claimed that the oppressive standard of beauty in American culture caused 150,000 American women to die annually from an eating disorder called anorexia nervosa, when in fact the real figure hovers around 100. (Not 100,000, but 100.) Nevertheless, the 150,000 figure was uncritically repeated in mainstream news outlets and even in a textbook. Likewise, the oft-repeated claim that domestic violence increases 40% the day of the Super Bowl has no basis in fact.⁶³ The claim that three million Americans are homeless is based exclusively on a statement by the late homeless advocate Mitch Snyder, who admitted that he fabricated the figure to gain attention. The true figure, according to government studies, is about one-tenth as large. Many, many more instances could be cited.⁶⁴

Perhaps not surprisingly, CFC also uses falsified statistics to advance its agenda. Thus Kissling claims in CFC's official publication that "[w]e know for a fact that at least 70,000 women per year die from illegal or clandestine abortions."⁶⁵ The real figure is somewhere around 2,000.⁶⁶ That is a difference of 35 times. *Conscience* also makes claims about the days when abortion was illegal in the United States. Writing in the Winter 1997-

63 Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

64 Myron Magnet, *The Dream and the Nightmare: The Sixties' Legacy to the Underclass* (New York: Willima Morrow, 1993).

65 Frances Kissling, "Abortion: Taking on the Hard Questions," *Conscience*, Autumn 1999, pp. 2-12.

66 According to the Allan Guttmacher Institute, illegal abortions are twenty times as dangerous as legal abortions. The current worldwide mortality rate for legal abortions is calculated by the Guttmacher Institute to be about 0.6 per 100,000. Thus, the mortality rate for illegal abortions must be 12 per 100,000 (20*0.6). The Guttmacher Institute also estimates that there are between 10 and 22 million illegal abortions performed worldwide each year. If we take the highest number (22 million) and multiple it by the mortality rate (12/100,000), we arrive at 2640. According to these figures, 2640 is the *maximum* number of women who die annually as a result of illegal abortions. The Guttmacher Institute derived all statistics from Stanley K. Henshaw, "Induced Abortion: A World Review," *Family Planning Perspectives*, March-April 1990, pp. 76-89.

98 issue, Alexander Sanger, president of Planned Parenthood of New York City, claims that “[i]n the 1930s, despite the criminalization of abortion, it is estimated that women had over one million abortions annually. An estimated 3 percent of these women died – that’s 30,000 in one year.”⁶⁷ This figure, offered with no footnote or citation of any kind, is several times

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larger than the 5,000 or 10,000 figure routinely repeated by the pro-abortion movement over the past several decades and which former abortionist Dr. Bernard Nathanson has repeatedly exposed as a fabrication, supported by no evidence whatever. “How many deaths were we talking about when abortion was illegal?” Nathanson wrote in his book *Aborting America*. “In NARAL [the National Abortion Rights

Action League], we generally emphasized the frame of the individual case, not the mass statistics, but when we spoke of the latter it was always ‘5,000 to 10,000 deaths a year.’ I confess that I knew the figures were totally false, and I suppose the others did too if they stopped to think of it. But in the ‘morality’ of our revolution, it was a useful figure, widely accepted, so why go out of our way to correct it with honest statistics? The overriding concern was to get the laws eliminated, and anything within reason that had to be done was permissible.”⁶⁸ Pro-abortion author Marian Faux admitted the movement’s carelessness with facts: “An image of tens of thousands of women being maimed or killed each year by illegal abortion was so persuasive a piece of propaganda that the [pro-abortion] movement could be forgiven its failure to double-check the facts.”⁶⁹ CFC continues to repeat exaggerated figures such as these to further this cause.

The United States Bureau of Vital Statistics and the Center for Disease Control report that the last time even a thousand American women died in one year from illegal abortions occurred in 1942, before the availability of penicillin.⁷⁰ The decade prior to *Roe v. Wade* saw between 90 and 150 such

67 Alexander Sanger, “Into the Next Millennium,” *Conscience*, Winter 1997-98, pp. 36-37.

68 Bernard Nathanson, *Aborting America* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), p. 193.

69 Marian Faux, *Roe v. Wade: The Untold Story of the Landmark Supreme Court Decision that Made Abortion Legal* (New York: Macmillan, 1990).

70 Matthew J. Bulfin, M.D., “Deaths and Near Deaths with Legal Abortions,” paper presented

deaths per year.⁷¹

Another writer for *Conscience* claims that “forty thousand children die every day of hunger and hunger-related causes.”⁷² According to the World Bank, a total of about 1,650 people die of hunger and hunger-related causes each day, which means that CFC is exaggerating by a factor of about 2,400 percent.⁷³

Most egregious of all, perhaps, is this outright falsehood found in CFC’s newsletter: “Four million abortions are performed annually in Brazil... Most significantly, ten percent, or 400,000 of the abortions, result in the death of women, because of poorly performed procedures.”⁷⁴ According to the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE, or Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), only 55,066 Brazilian women between the ages of 14 and 50 died *of all causes* in 1980. The IBGE figures were confirmed by World Health Organization statistics showing that 41,685 Brazilian women between the ages of 15 and 41 died in 1986 and, of these, 241 died of complications due to both legal and illegal abortions.⁷⁵ This is worth repeating: the figure alleged by CFC was 400,000; the true figure was 241. Not 241,000, but just 241.

“Our research and our scholarship need to be impeccably accurate,” Kissling once wrote in *Conscience*.⁷⁶

at the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Convention, Orlando, Florida, Oct. 28, 1975.

71 Ibid.

72 Christine E. Gudorf, “To Make a Seamless Garment, Use a Single Piece of Cloth,” *Conscience*, Autumn 1996, pp. 10-21.

73 Calculated from data contained in “Investing in Health,” *World Bank Development Report* 1993, pp. 224-225.

74 “Gazette,” *Conscience*, May/June 1988, p. 18.

75 December 30, 1991 letter of Dr. Geraldo Hideu Osanai, President, Associacao Pro-Vida de Brasilia to Andrew M. Nibley and Thomas D. Thompson of the Reuters News Agency in New York City.

76 Frances Kissling, “Responding to Religious Conservatism: Plenary Speech to the Non-governmental Forum, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995,” *Conscience*, Winter 1995-96, p. 7.



Conclusion

CFC has been condemned by official channels of the Church with great frequency, both by individual bishops and by the body of the American episcopate as a whole. In 1993 the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) declared: “Because of its opposition to the human rights of some of the most defenseless members of the human race, and because its purposes and activities deliberately contradict essential teachings of the Catholic faith...Catholics for Choice merits no recognition or support as a Catholic organization.” (Administrative Committee, USCCB, 1993) Last year, Most Rev. Joseph A. Fiorenza, USCCB president and Bishop of Galveston-Houston, issued a statement that began:

For a number of years, a group calling itself Catholics for Choice (CFC) has been publicly supporting abortion while claiming it speaks as an authentic Catholic voice. That claim is false. In fact, the group’s activity is directed to rejection and distortion of Catholic teaching about the respect and protection due to defenseless unborn human life.

On a number of occasions the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) has stated publicly that CFC is not a Catholic organization, does not speak for the Catholic Church, and in fact promotes positions contrary to the teaching of the Church as articulated by the Holy See and the NCCB.

CFC is, practically speaking, an arm of the abortion lobby in the United States and throughout the world. It is an advocacy group dedicated to supporting abortion. It is funded by a number of powerful and wealthy private foundations, mostly American, to promote abortion as a method of population control. This position is contrary to existing United Nations policy and the laws and policies of most nations of the world. (U.S. Catholic Conference press release, May 10, 2000)

Beyond the question of ecclesiastical recognition or approval, neither of which CFC possesses, is the degree to which its staff, and Kissling in

particular, are in fact practicing Catholics. Joseph O'Rourke, the former Jesuit who headed the organization in its early years, once remarked: "CFC really was just kept alive for years because the mainline pro-choice movement wanted a Catholic voice."⁷⁷ For her part, Kissling once remarked: "When I say I came back to the Church, I never came back on the old terms....I came back to the Church as a social change agent; I came back to woman-church." The Church's sacraments are not central to this vision. "I am not talking about coming back to Sunday Mass, confession, and all these things, that are memories of my childhood." She told Marian Faux: "I still don't pray. I don't say the rosary; there are no crucifixes in my house."⁷⁸

Kissling's writing and public statements reveal none of the affection for the Church that one might reasonably expect from a self-described Catholic. Thus she has described her organization as "one of the most viable threats to the Catholic Church today."⁷⁹ Elsewhere she observed, "God put me on earth to give the pope a hard time."⁸⁰ Likewise, devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, is a characteristic one routinely associates with Catholics; but here is how Kissling's newsletter speaks of Mary: "The Virgin Mary, especially Guadalupe as a model, has been instrumental in maintaining our subservience.... So logically religion, in our case Catholicism, has been lived mostly as an instrument of oppression and sometimes annihilation of our potentialities as women."⁸¹

It is clear that the activists who comprise CFC do not worship in the same way as ordinary Catholics do — they do not believe in the basic dogmas and doctrines of Catholicism, nor do they live the life of the sacraments. It is also clear that their work, the public advocacy of abortion, has been condemned by Catholic bishops. But what of their personal status as Catholics? Frances Kissling, for instance, frequently refers to herself as a "Catholic in good standing." Is this true?

Like so many of the other claims of CFC, for these people to be "in good standing" with the Church would require a fundamental rejection of what the Church has always believed. In this case, CFC contends that membership within the Catholic Church is defined solely by the feelings, beliefs and terms of the individual Catholic. The individual makes claims upon the Church, shapes the Church any way he would like, while the

77 Mary Meehan, "Foundation Power," *Human Life Review*, Fall 1984, pp. 42-60.

78 Doyle, "Agent of Influence," p. 45.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 46

80 Frances Kissling, quoted in *Conscience*, September/December 1987, p. 17.

81 "Mexican Feminism: An Interview with Sylvia Marcos," *Conscience*, January/February 1991, pp. 16-17.

Church can require nothing in return. Kissling advanced this very notion during a debate with Rev. Jerry Falwell on C-Span:

Rev. Falwell: I'm very sorry that you as a Catholic have repudiated the teaching of your own church, which is in my opinion, biblical teaching. And I really think you do the church a disservice by going under the heading "Catholics for Choice." You may be an individual for a free choice but you are not a Catholic for a free choice. Because frankly the Roman Catholic Church stands totally and entirely against what you're proposing tonight.

Kissling: Yeah, except the fact of the matter, Rev. Falwell, is I think I probably know a lot more about Catholic teachings than you do, number one. And secondly, the Catholic Church is not a club. Membership is not based simply upon the following of a certain set of rules and regulations. The Catholic church is a church of the people. [My faith] is a contract and a covenant that I have with God personally.⁸²

For Kissling, claiming to be a Catholic makes one a Catholic. What Kissling and CFC seem to be insisting on is that the Catholic Church should be the only organization in the world that possesses no fundamental nature, and whose individual members alone get to decide what it is and what it stands for.

Of course, this position contradicts Catholic teaching. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* explains why the Church reserves the right to determine its membership — even why it reserves the right to ostracize certain members through excommunication:

Every society has the right to exclude and deprive of their rights and social advantages its unworthy or grievously culpable members, either temporarily or permanently. This right is necessary to every society in order that it may be well administered and survive. The fundamental proof, therefore, of the Church's right to excommunicate is based on her status as a spiritual society, whose members, governed by legitimate authority, seek one and the same end through suitable means. Members who, by their obstinate disobedience, reject the means of attaining this common end

82 From CFC website, www.cath4choice.org (accessed on June 1, 2001).

deserve to be removed from such a society. This rational argument is confirmed by texts of the New Testament, the example of the Apostles, and the practice of the Church from the first ages down to the present.⁸³

Thus, the final arbiter of Church membership is the Church, not the individual.

But if the Catholic Church possesses the authority to expel from its ranks people such as Frances Kissling, why has it not done so? As far as is publicly known, the Church has not taken action to excommunicate Frances Kissling, or any other members of CFC. The closest such action came in 1996, when the Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska, the Most Rev. Fabian Bruskewitz, published a legislative pronouncement naming twelve organizations — including CFC — in which membership was “always perilous to the Catholic Faith and most often is totally incompatible with the Catholic Faith.” Bishop Bruskewitz went on to say that “Any Catholics in and of the Diocese of Lincoln who attain or retain membership in the above listed organizations or groups after April 15, 1996, are by that very fact (*ipso facto sententiae*) under interdict and are absolutely forbidden to receive Holy Communion.”

This was a local matter; Bishop Bruskewitz’s authority does not extend to people living outside of his diocese. But it raises an essential point: the Catholic Church believes that there are certain actions that, having been done, automatically result in a person’s excommunication. This is what is known as excommunication *latae sententiae*, excommunication “by the very commission of the act.” This type of excommunication does not require the intervention of an ecclesiastical judge. And it does appear that, by their actions, the members of CFC have placed themselves at risk for excommunication *latae sententiae*. Therefore, Frances Kissling and her fellow CFC members may not remain “Catholics in good standing” — they may in fact be excommunicated Catholics — even if every Church authority remains silent about them.

There appear to be three separate grounds for the excommunication *latae sententiae* of CFC members. The most obvious ground arises out of CFC involvement with abortion. Not only do CFC members advocate abortion, but they participate in abortion as well. As we have already seen, Frances Kissling has opened and administered abortion clinics on a number of occasions. According to Canon Law code 1398, “A person who

83 *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume V, 1909.

actually procures an abortion incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication.” This judgment would extend to the people who provide or assist in an abortion, as well as to women who receive abortions. The importance of this point cannot be overstated: the Church considers abortion to be the taking of innocent human life, and therefore murder. According to the *Catechism*:

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person — among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.... Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law....⁸⁴

People who not only refuse to seek repentance and absolution for their complicity in murder, but who also continue to participate in murder and advocate other murders, simply cannot be Catholics in good standing.

A second ground for excommunication concerns heresy. “A heretic is one who rejects a Catholic dogma...who, being in the Catholic Church, obstinately repudiates a truth of faith. Excommunication is incurred by him, if, with full knowledge, he exteriorly formulates an heretical position.”⁸⁵ Although Catholic bishops have become

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loath to use the language of heresy, there can be little doubt that the published opinions of a number of CFC members are heretical. As we have seen, CFC members seem to reject *all* of the dogmas of the Church; it is difficult to find one point of Catholic thought that is endorsed in CFC writings. Perhaps most seriously, CFC members reject the Trinity by embracing the existence of goddesses. Polytheism is clearly a heretical notion to the Catholic Church. The culpability of this heresy is compounded by the fact

84 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Vatican City, 1994, paragraphs 2270-2271.

85 *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume V, 1909.

that the mission of CFC seems to be to spread such thoughts as widely as possible, to persuade as many other people to accept these doctrinal errors.⁸⁶

Another ground for excommunication is the rejection of the spiritual authority of the pope. Catholics “who elude or obstinately withdraw from the authority of the reigning Roman pontiff” are called schismatics, and are in danger of excommunication.⁸⁷ Obviously, CFC continually asserts that the pope does not possess the authority to speak for Catholics: “We’re there to say to people that the picture you get of the church from Rome... in which all members are required to follow the opinion and teaching of one man is not a true picture of what it means to be a Catholic.”⁸⁸ One of the primary goals of CFC is to undermine papal authority. CFC members mock and ridicule the pope; Frances Kissling has gone so far as to label Pope John Paul II “authoritarian.”⁸⁹

For all of this, it is reasonable to conclude that, by their actions, members of CFC have jeopardized their own status as Catholics. Frances Kissling repeats that “no Church official has ever suggested that I should be excommunicated or that I am not a Catholic;” she always fails to mention that the Church recognizes that there are some crimes that result in automatic excommunication, that do not require any pronouncements from Church officials. A Catholic who has committed these acts — acts punishable by excommunication *latae sententiae* — cannot be considered a Catholic in good standing.

Let us take stock. Kissling rejects the very idea of Church hierarchy, which such Church Fathers as Ignatius and Irenaeus argued as early as the second century was fundamental to the Church’s identity and mission. She rejects the power of the pope to bind the faithful in matters of faith and morals, thereby rejecting the teaching of the First Vatican Council (1869–70). Most obviously, she rejects the Church’s position on abortion, taught by the pope, the bishops, the Second Vatican Council, and indeed by the uninterrupted tradition of 2,000 years of Church history. She views the Church as a “mechanism for social change” and thus disparages the need for the sacraments, the seven rites by which, according to Church teaching, God’s grace is imparted to the soul. She rejects most of the major areas of Catholic life and practice that generally identify a person as a member of the Church. Finally, on at least three grounds — abortion, heresy and

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 CFC website.

schism — Kissling and CFC members are at risk of excommunication.

One observer summed up CFC this way: “Catholics for Choice repudiates fundamental Catholic beliefs, receives virtually all its funding from non-Catholic sources opposed to the Church; enjoys only marginal support in the Catholic community; and is headed not by a Catholic, but by an ex-Catholic, perpetrating a fraud, for an anti-Catholic objective. CFC is an anti-Catholic front group financed or supported by such adversaries of the Catholic Church as the contraception industry, the Ford Foundation, the Unitarian Church, Planned Parenthood, and *Playboy*. Its sole purpose is to attack the Church and discredit and misrepresent church teachings.”⁹⁰

In light of the evidence presented here, it is difficult to disagree with this assessment. Kissling blanches at the “anti-Catholic” label, but no

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other term so accurately conveys the visceral hatred she possesses for Catholicism, its teachings, its traditions, and its spokesmen. The obvious question, of course, is why people like Kissling, Ruether, and Padovano choose to retain a nominal attachment to the Catholic Church as opposed to simply leaving altogether. Ruether once addressed this question with unusual candor in *America* magazine. She counseled allies of the “spiritual revolution” of which she is a part to remember that “unless we manage to insert what we are doing...back into...main institutional vehicles of ministry and community...it will have no lasting impact.” Radical leftists should, therefore, “stay in the Church and use whatever parts of it they can get their hands on,” and in that way they “will have far more impact, both on the Church and on the world...than they could possibly gain if they separated from it.”⁹¹ That is, the program of Ruether and of CFC at large, while frankly rejecting anything even resembling Catholicism, is to be advanced by acting parasitically upon an already existing institution, the Church.

In short, Catholics for Choice has been perpetrating a glaring and

90 Doyle, “Agent of Influence,” p. 47.

91 Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Crises and Challenges of Catholicism Today,” *America*, March 1, 1986, p. 152; quoted in Steichen, *Ungodly Rage*, p. 78; see also “Rosemary Radford Ruether Unmasked.”

blatant fraud for decades, relying on sympathetic forces in the media to act as accomplices in its effort to portray itself as a Catholic organization. In light of the information within this paper, it is time for the media to stop the practice of seeking out this “Catholic” voice of dissent. The *New York Times* would not take seriously groups called “Communists For a Free Market,” or “Journalists For Censorship.” It is time for the media to apply its own journalistic standards in this case, to stop citing a group speaking as Catholics but preaching things antithetical to Catholicism. Even beyond the abortion issue, there is nothing Catholic about CFC. It has nothing but contempt for Catholic theology, the Catholic priesthood, Catholic ritual, and Catholic moral teaching. Its members disparage the Church’s sacramental life. Moreover, in response to the devastation wrought by the sexual revolution — in the form of rape, vulgarity, depression, alienation, abortion, the exploitation of women — CFC can come up with nothing more thoughtful or creative than more of the same. Its board members have promoted a militant brand of lesbianism and a sexual license that would have shocked even many sexual revolutionaries. Only the most obtuse can continue to lend any credence to Catholics for Choice, an organization that is flagrantly and obviously not what it claims to be.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CFC	Catholics for Choice
CORPUS	Core of Retired Priests United for Service
IBGE	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics
NARAL	National Abortion Rights Action League
NCCB	National Conference of Catholic Bishops
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
RCAR	Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USCCB	US Conference of Catholic Bishops
WATER	Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual

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