

# FIRST THINGS

## What Really Happened at Cairo

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Gargantuan international conferences replete with diplomats, "international civil servants," various "nongovernmental organization" (NGO) representatives, and the world press have been a staple feature of world politics since the Second World War. One does not fear sinning against charity by suggesting that many of these extravaganzas (in which the international ruling class cavorts, off-hours, in the sybaritic style to which it has become accustomed) are, in the Bard's familiar words, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." But there are exceptions, and they can be important.

The Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which produced the "Helsinki Accords" in 1975, was one such exception. When Leonid Brezhnev signed the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, he probably thought he was taking out a ninety-nine-year lease on Stalin's external empire. As things turned out, he was signing its death warrant. For "Basket Three" of the Final Act pledged the signatory nations of Europe and North America to certain human rights commitments. And those commitments in turn inspired the formation of "Helsinki monitoring groups," which were to become the backbone of the human rights resistance in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s: groups that were essential to the nonviolent collapse of communism in the Revolution of 1989 and the New Russian Revolution of 1991.

The September 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo might be another such exception, with yet another ironic outcome. The UN bureaucrats, Scandinavian politicians, Clinton Administration "global affairs" mavens, radical environmentalists, feminists, and population controllers who planned the conference intended it to be nothing less than the Great Cairo Turkey Shoot: a political slaughter in which the enemies of "individual autonomy," "sustainable growth," "global carrying capacity," "reproductive rights," "gender equity," abortion-on-demand, and the sexual revolution would be utterly, decisively routed.

But they were not. Indeed, the Cairo conference just may have marked a turning point in the international debate over population and development. It is too early to know for sure, but it is just possible that the radicals' attempt to take the Cairo conference by storm set in motion moral and cultural dynamics that will, over time, result in the defeat of the radicals' agenda.

Which, if it were to come to pass, would be a bouleversement of world-historical proportions.

## II

Cairo was the third in a series of decennial international population conferences. The first International Conference on Population was held in 1974 at Budapest, and the second (under the enlarged banner of "Population and Development") was convened in Mexico City in 1984. Planning for both of these meetings, within the UN bureaucracy and among the thousands of NGO activists who participate in UN-sponsored programs, was dominated by strident doomsayers and hard-core population controllers of the Garrett Hardin/Paul Ehrlich ("the battle to feed all humanity is over") school. That people were essentially a problem, even a pollutant, rather than a resource; that social, political, economic, and ecological catastrophe was right around the corner, unless drastic steps were taken to stabilize and then reverse world population trends- these were the themes, familiar to even the most casual student of the American anti-natalist lobby, that set the agenda for Budapest and Mexico City.

As it happened, these notions, and the prescriptions for coercive, governmentally enforced programs of fertility reduction that flowed from them, did not sit well with many of the putative beneficiaries of "population control": namely, the countries of the developing world. At Budapest, for example, the population technocrats were challenged both empirically and culturally: empirically, in that it was made plain that population patterns varied widely around the world, as the result of a complex interaction of economic, social, and cultural factors; and culturally, in that it became clear that there were many different understandings of how population

issues should be addressed, even among those who shared the belief that there was a "population problem." "Development is the best contraceptive" became the slogan (crude, but not inaccurate) that the Third World counterposed to the Hardin/Ehrlich anti-natalist hysteria of the well-to-do "North."

Ten years later, the population controllers suffered an outright defeat at Mexico City. Not satisfied with the results of their massive efforts to export mechanical and chemical means of contraception to the Third World (some of which had met considerable resistance on both moral- cultural and medical grounds), UN and private sector population agencies had increasingly turned to abortion as a means of family planning and population control. The Chinese policy of coercive abortion was, of course, the most draconian of such enterprises, but its extremism was merely the cruelest face of a general policy actively supported by the anti-natalists throughout the developing world. The population controllers came to Mexico City expecting the conference to give its sanction to abortion-on-demand, in the name of family planning. Yet they were soundly rebuffed. For the conference, with vigorous support from the Reagan Administration, adopted a final report that stated flatly that abortion was not a legitimate means of population control.

This was an ideological defeat for the population controllers, not least because the attention focused on the brutality of the Chinese program graphically demonstrated the lengths to which the controllers were willing to go; having seen what lay at the end of the road, some countries were prepared to question the legitimacy of embarking on the journey in the first place. But the Mexico City conference also had serious financial consequences: it resulted in restrictions on funding for abortion in UN programs; it eliminated such funding from the population components of many nations' foreign aid budgets; and, on the domestic front, it became the international legal instrument with which the Reagan and Bush Administrations forbade federal support for any public or private aid program that included abortion among its family planning activities.

As may be imagined, all of this stuck, hard, in the collective craw of the population controllers at the UN and World Bank, and among such major activist NGOs as Planned Parenthood of America and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. For not only had they suffered an

ideological and financial defeat at Mexico City; they also seemed to understand, however dimly, that they had suffered a moral drubbing as well. It seemed that many people—by their lights unenlightened, authoritarian, conservative, to be sure, but influential nonetheless—believed that the population controllers were not only wrong, they were bad. And since a powerful conviction of its inherent righteousness has been perhaps the chief psychological characteristic of the population control movement for well over a century, it was this moral rejection that cut most deeply, and inflamed the controllers' determination to "go beyond Mexico City" at the next decennial conference.

The U.S. presidential election of November 1992 promised the population controllers relief, and indeed more than relief. Bill Clinton and Al Gore had, after all, run on the most radical "social issues" platform in American history, committing themselves to federal funding of abortion-on-demand in the U.S. at any stage of a pregnancy; deploring "explosive population growth" in the Third World; and pledging to use federal tax dollars to fund "greater family planning efforts" in U.S. foreign aid programs. Moreover, the Democratic Party's most vocal activists included men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, who were deeply committed to securing, in American law and public policy, the sexual revolution's core principle of individual autonomy and its severance of sexual relations from marriage. Little wonder, then, that the controllers, determined as they were to "go beyond Mexico City," read the electoral entrails of November 3, 1992 as a mandate for radical change in U.S. population policy and, a posteriori, in the agenda of the third International Conference on Population and Development, which was to be held in Cairo in September 1994.

Their expectations were met in full. Indeed, among all the twists and turns of Clinton Administration policy on issues both foreign and domestic, one constant has been an unyielding commitment to abortion-on-demand at home and massive efforts at "population control" abroad. On Clinton's first day in office, which happened to coincide with the twentieth annual "March for Life" in Washington, he signed five executive orders widening the scope of federal involvement with, and funding of, elective abortion. Rigorous pro-Roe litmus tests were applied to all Clinton nominees to the federal judiciary; and few doubted that the Administration wished to see abortion included as a mandated "service" in any national health care reform. Nor, in a time of fiscal restraint, did the Administration hesitate to beef up the

population control portion of its foreign assistance budget. Thus ten months after taking office, the President's chief foreign aid administrator, J. Brian Atwood, announced a five-year, \$75 million commitment to fund the activities of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. (Mr. Atwood defended these and other population control expenditures on the bizarre grounds that the "core" of the chaos in Somalia, in which U.S. troops were then embroiled, was overpopulation. Somali vital statistics may not be the world's finest, but a reasonable estimate is that Somalia, whose territory is a little larger than that of California, Washington state, Maryland, and Massachusetts combined, had a population in 1992 of some seven million, forty million fewer than the aggregate population of those four states.)

It has never been clear whether the key players in the Clinton Administration really believed that the 42.8 percent of the popular vote they garnered in 1992 constituted a genuine mandate for radical change, or whether that slim plurality impelled the more ideologically fervent members of the Administration to strike while an iron likely to cool quickly was still hot. Whatever the answer, it is indisputably the case that the Administration, led by Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs Timothy Wirth, decided that merely "going beyond Mexico City" was an insufficiently grand goal for the Cairo conference. In league with several Scandinavian and West European countries, UN and World Bank population technocrats, and feminist, anti-natalist, and environmentalist NGOs, the Clintonites sought to engineer a dramatic shift in the focus of the Cairo conference. The packaging ("Population and Development") would remain, but the content would be dramatically altered-with the earth's "carrying capacity," "gender equality, equity, and empowerment of women," and "reproductive rights" supplanting mere "population and development" as the issues of moment. Which amounted, in brief, to a brazen attempt to use international law and the leverage of Western foreign aid programs to establish the sexual revolution, as lived in Stockholm and Hollywood, as the model of humane culture for the twenty-first century.

This radically altered agenda first came into focus in April 1994, when the third meeting of the Cairo conference preparatory committee (Prep- Com III) took place in New York. Among other things, this meeting underscored the ferocity of Undersecretary Wirth and his allies, who were taking no chances that open debate might put sand in the gears of their political machine. The chairman of Prep-Com III, as he would be of the Cairo

conference, was Dr. Fred Sai, usually introduced as the "representative of Ghana," but in real life (so to speak), the president of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Nongovernmental members of the U.S. delegation to the New York session included Bella Abzug, Jeannie Rosoff, president of the Alan Guttmacher Institute (the research arm of Planned Parenthood), Patricia Waak, director of the Audubon Society's population program, and staff members of the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Rockefeller Foundation, two major funders of population control activism. Those who wished to challenge the regnant Clintonite orthodoxies were treated as mere irritants. A seminar sponsored by the United States Catholic Conference, for instance, a registered UN NGO, was denied space in the UN itself; the organizers of the seminar were forbidden to post notice of their meeting; UN officials and population activist NGOs contrived to schedule two other seminars at the same time as the USCC meeting; and meanwhile the shell organization "Catholics for a Free Choice" was given room to operate within the UN complex.

Moreover, this ugliness spilled over from the periphery into the Prep-Com's formal sessions. When Msgr. Diarmuid Martin of the Vatican delegation criticized the proposed Cairo draft document for its ethical hollowness, he was chastised publicly from the chair by Dr. Sai, who complained that the Holy See was trying to foist its notions of sexual morality on the world. Sai's remarks were boisterously applauded by a gallery packed with anti-natalist NGO activists. (Sai's boorish conduct toward the Holy See delegation may have set something of a record for a UN committee chairman, but his anti-Vatican bias was hardly original in substance. At an earlier UN session, Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway had complained bitterly of obstacles placed in the Cairo conference's path by a "small state with no natural inhabitants.")

It was no surprise, then, that Prep-Com III produced a truly radical draft document for the Cairo conference, in which only six of 118 pages were devoted to the conference's ostensible topic of "population and development," with the bulk of the rest given over to proposals for a lifestyle revolution of awesome proportions.

Not that the classic population controllers did not do well at Prep-Com III. There was no serious challenge to the shibboleths of "overpopulation," and the controllers got a pledge of serious money, the draft document having

committed the international community to a massive increase in funding for population control activities, up from the current \$6 billion to \$17 billion by 2000. (The increase was to be paid for by increased American, Japanese, and Scandinavian contributions to the UN Fund for Population Activities [UNFPA], as well as by cutbacks in UN-sponsored education, health care, industrial development, and disaster relief.)

Still, it was the philosophical shift embedded in the Cairo draft document that marked a sea change in the debate. For the draft document's view of the human condition and the human prospect was rooted in that concept of the radically autonomous individual with which Americans have become all too familiar through the sexual revolution, the deconstructionist decay of the American academy, and the philosophical musings of several Supreme Court justices. "Choice," the mantra of U.S. proponents of abortion-on-demand (along with "gay rights," "alternative forms of marriage," and all the rest of it), became the antiphon of the draft Cairo document produced by Prep-Com III. The results, to put it gently, were striking.

"Marriage" was the dog that didn't bark in the Cairo draft document. In fact, the only time the word "marriage" appeared in the draft document's chapter on "the family" was in a passage deploring "coercion and discrimination in policies and practices related to marriage." But this was hardly surprising, in that the draft document, while frequently noting the importance of "the family in its various forms," said absolutely nothing about the importance of families rooted in stable marriages for the physical and mental well-being of children. Nor did the draft document have much else to say about the natural and moral bond between parents and children and its importance for achieving many of the document's laudable goals, such as improved health care and education for youngsters. Indeed, the document sundered the moral relationship between parents and teenage children by treating sexual activity after puberty as a "right" to be exercised at will, and by suggesting that state population and "reproductive health care" agencies be the primary interlocutors of young men and women coming to grips with their sexuality.

The Cairo draft document also proposed establishing a new category of internationally recognized human rights, viz., "reproductive rights," of which the right to abortion-on-demand was, not surprisingly, the centerpiece. Indeed, it seemed at times as if the codification of an

internationally recognized (and, presumably, enforced) "right to abortion" was the primary goal of the Clinton Administration for Cairo. Shortly before Prep-Com III, on March 16, 1994, Secretary of State Warren Christopher had sent a cable to all U.S. diplomatic stations abroad, stating that "the U.S. believes that access to safe, legal, and voluntary abortion is a fundamental right of all women," and emphasizing that the U.S. objective at Cairo was to get "stronger language on the importance" of "abortion services" into the conference final report. Christopher's cable, for all its ignorance of the state of the abortion debate in the U.S., at least had the merit of intelligibility; the draft Cairo document followed the familiar UN pattern of Orwellian euphemism, in which coercive family planning policies became "fertility regulation," and abortion-on-demand was transmuted into "safe motherhood" and "reproductive rights."

In a contradiction familiar to U.S. veterans of the abortion wars, the Cairo draft document then married the philosophy of the imperial autonomous self to a program of large-scale state coercion in the service of "reproductive rights," "gender equity," and, of course, population control. Further, the draft document mandated states to override parental prerogatives (known, in UN-speak, as "social barriers to sexual and reproductive health information and care") in the matter of adolescent sexual education. The draft document also called for state intrusion into the doctor-patient relationship: after warning that "health care providers" must not "restrict the access of adolescents to the services and information they need," the document required states to ensure that those "providers" have the proper "attitudes" toward their teenage patients. One need not doubt that the "attitudes" to be enforced here were those of Dr. Joycelyn Elders. (Undersecretary Wirth seemed particularly exercised on the subject of teenage sexuality. At the conclusion of one session with a senior Vatican official prior to the Cairo conference, Wirth is said to have summed up his case in these pellucid terms: "Young people have to know about their bodies.")

The draft document produced by Prep-Com III also had a nasty totalitarian edge to it. In a striking passage that reflected the affinity between the Kultur of Oprah Winfrey, Phil Donahue, and Linda Bloodworth-Thomasson, on the one hand, and the agenda of Bella Abzug and International Planned Parenthood, on the other, governments were instructed to "use the entertainment media, including radio and television soap operas and

drama, folk theater, and other traditional media" to proselytize for the draft document's ideology and "program of action." And in order to insure that the usual male reprobates got the word, the draft document instructed governments to get the message of "reproductive rights" and "gender equity" out by instituting programs that "reach men in their workplaces, at home, and where they gather for recreation," while adolescent boys should be "reached through schools, youth organizations, or wherever they congregate." In sum, there was to be no area of life-home, workplace, gym, ballpark-into which state-sponsored propaganda on "reproductive rights and reproductive health" did not intrude.

Those of us who had thought that this approach to public policy had been consigned to the trash heap of history in 1989 had evidently been mistaken.

### III

Given their success at Prep-Com III, the smugness and even arrogance displayed by the UN and Clinton Administration planners of the Cairo conference was, if not exactly admirable, quite understandable. They seemed to have perfected a modus operandi that would enable them to steamroller Cairo in the same way (an expectation that was doubtless further enhanced by the fact that more than sixty representatives of International Planned Parenthood would be coming to Cairo as official delegates from many countries). Not only would Cairo "go beyond Mexico City"; it would adopt the radicals' lifestyle agenda without too much fuss and bother. Critics like the Holy See could easily be brushed aside, as they had been in New York.

Yet even before the Cairo conference convened on Labor Day 1994, some cracks in the coalition that the conference planners were counting on began to show. In the United States-and most especially in the higher altitudes of the Clinton Administration-it is simply assumed that the "empowerment of women," abortion-on-demand, the libertine mores of the sexual revolution, and government propaganda (even coercion) on family planning go hand-in-glove. However, that is not necessarily the way things work in other parts of the world, or even, for that matter, among the truly radical radicals in the

West. Thus, in the wake of Prep-Com III, certain feminist organizations, of a far more belligerent kidney than, say, the National Organization for Women, began planning mock trials, to take place in Cairo, of the World Bank, International Planned Parenthood, and the UNFPA, charging them with oppressing women through coercive governmental birth control programs. As it was to turn out, the feminist sans-culotterie could not win; but they were harbingers of an unanticipated irony in the outcome of the conference.

In any case, the most consequential thing that the planners of the Cairo conference had failed to take into account was the moral power of Pope John Paul II. That the Cairo conference did not adopt, but in fact rejected, key aspects of its planners' agenda was the result of a variety of factors: nervousness in Latin America, resistance from Islamic societies, and resentment in certain African countries of what they saw as Western cultural imperialism. But the sine qua non of the defeat suffered by the international advocates of the sexual revolution was the public campaign of opposition to the Cairo draft document mounted throughout the summer of 1994 by John Paul II.

This was not a voluble campaign; in its public (as distinguished from private, i.e., diplomatic) dimension, it consisted of a series of twelve ten-minute reflections that the Pope offered at his public audiences during June, July, and August 1994. But by identifying the fundamental ethical errors of the draft document's approach, and by defining a compelling moral alternative to UN-sponsored libertinism, John Paul II set in motion a resistance movement with considerable potency.

In these reflections, the Pope emphasized that the right to life is the basic human right, "written in human nature," and the foundation of any meaningful scheme of "human rights"; spoke of the family as the "primary cell" of society and as a "natural institution" with rights that any just state must respect; defined marriage "as a stable union of a man and a woman who are committed to the reciprocal gift of self and open to creating new life, [which] is not only a Christian value, but an original value of creation"; defended the equal human dignity of women, insisted that women must not be reduced to being objects of male pleasure, and argued that "perfection for woman is not to be like man, making herself masculine to the point of losing her specific qualities as a woman"; noted that sexuality has a

"language of its own at the service of love and cannot be lived at the purely instinctual level"; argued that stable marriages were essential for the welfare of children; pointed out that the Church does not support an "ideology of fertility at all costs," but rather proposes a marital ethic in which the decision "whether or not to have a child" is not "motivated by selfishness or carelessness, but by a prudent, conscious generosity that weighs the possibilities and circumstances, and especially gives priority to the welfare of the unborn child"; rejected coercive or "authoritarian" family planning programs as a violation of the married couple's basic human rights and argued that the foundations of justice in a state are undermined when it does not recognize the unborn child's moral claim to protection; declared that discrimination against women in "workplace, culture, and politics" must be eliminated in the name of an "authentic emancipation" that does not "deprive woman herself of what is primarily or exclusively hers"; and argued that radical individualism is inhuman, as is a "sexuality apart from ethical references."

Throughout the summer of 1994, Undersecretary Wirth continued to insist that "we have no fight with the Vatican." Nonetheless, an argument of considerable amperage had clearly been engaged. In the wake of the confrontation with the Holy See's delegation at Prep-Com III, Wirth himself began a tour of the American hierarchy, focusing on the resident U.S. cardinals. It would not be unrealistic to suggest that in addition to explaining the Administration's position, the Undersecretary was searching for a weak link in the chain of American Catholic episcopal support for John Paul II and the Holy See. He did not find it. Instead, a letter to President Clinton from the then six resident U.S. cardinals (Hickey of Washington, Bernardin of Chicago, Law of Boston, O'Connor of New York, Bevilacqua of Philadelphia, Mahony of Los Angeles), joined as a co-signatory by the president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore, was hand-delivered to the White House. The letter expressed the prelates' grave concern over "your Administration's promotion of abortion, contraception, sterilization, and the redefinition of the family" and urged the President to reverse the Administration's "destructive" agenda for Cairo. In addition, the NCCB unanimously adopted a statement in which the bishops, as "religious leaders and as U.S. citizens," declared themselves "outraged that our government is leading the effort to foster global acceptance of abortion." And lest it be thought that worries over Cairo were exclusively Catholic, it

should be noted that eleven evangelical leaders, including Charles Colson, James Dobson, Charles Swindoll, Billy Melvin, and Bill Bright, cosigned a letter of their own urging the President "not to make the United States an exporter of violence and death."

By the end of the summer, the Pope's decisive clarification of the moral issues at stake in Cairo had not only put the impending conference on the front pages of the prestige press, it had also had a powerful political effect. Undersecretary Wirth, by now a somewhat improbable figure, continued to plead, against all the evidence, that the administration had "no fight with the Vatican." But his superiors evidently disagreed, and were even more evidently worried; for on August 25, Vice President Al Gore, who was to lead the U.S. delegation in the early days of the Cairo conference, gave a speech at the National Press Club in Washington in which he stated that "the U.S. has not sought, does not seek, and will not seek to establish any international right to abortion." Any attempt to suggest otherwise was a "red herring." Yet, as the Holy See's press spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, pointed out at a press conference in Rome a few days later, Gore's statement did not square with the draft document, whose definition of "reproductive health care" as including "pregnancy termination" had been a U.S. initiative. (Navarro-Valls, in what was perhaps an exercise of charity, did not point out that Gore's Press Club speech was also inconsistent with the Christopher cable of March 16, with the Administration's domestic policy, and with its foreign aid programs.)

There is some reason to believe that the Vice President was misinformed, rather than deliberately disingenuous, on these matters. And no doubt the Vice President was genuinely concerned about charges of administration anti-Catholicism, reignited when a Reuters story of August 19 quoted Faith Mitchell, the State Department's population coordinator, as blaming Vatican disagreement with the Cairo draft document on "the fact that the conference is really calling for a new role for women, calling for girls' education and improving the status of women."\* But whatever else it clarified or obscured, the Gore/Navarro-Valls exchange made it unmistakably clear that a great battle loomed in Cairo, where the "private sector advisers" to the U.S. delegation included Pamela Maraldo, president of Planned Parenthood of America and, in what the Administration may inexplicably have thought was a concession to religious concerns, the Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of

## Churches.

Perhaps the less ideological and more politically astute members of the U.S. delegation hoped that the moral issues could somehow be finessed. But on the very first day of the conference, any such hopes were dashed: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan-unmistakably a woman, unmistakably Harvard-educated, and unmistakably a major political figure-took to the rostrum, defended the "sanctity of life" on religious grounds, and condemned the Cairo draft document for trying to "impose adultery, sex education . . . and abortion" on all countries. Predictably, the media gave more attention to distaff Norwegian prime minister Brundtland's defense of "choice" as the essence of the moral issue of abortion. But Bhutto's impassioned rejection of abortion-on-demand, featured on page one of both the New York Times and the Washington Post and accompanied by pictures of the Pakistani and Norwegian leaders, easily won the battle of feminist iconography-and should have rebutted, once and for all, the charge that the Vatican was holding up consensus on the Cairo document for narrow sectarian reasons.

The opening day statements were followed by five days of negotiating impasse on the document's abortion language, its discussion of the family, and its approach to adolescent sexuality. During that first week, anti-Catholic sentiment and decidedly undiplomatic criticism of the Holy See were freely vented by NGO activists and official delegates alike. Nicolaas Biegan, the Dutch conference vice chairman, complained after four days that "all we read [about] is abortion, abortion, abortion. I deeply regret it. I think it's a pity." Columbia University's Allan Rosenfield, who represented the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, opined that "the Catholic women of the world do not buy into statements from the elderly celibate clergy." Another expert in ecclesiology, Alexander Sanger, president of Planned Parenthood of New York City, told the *New York Times* that "there are two churches, one where the hierarchy talks to the presidents of countries, and then there's the church of the people. The people are picking and choosing what parts of Catholicism they want to carry over to their personal lives." Colombia's Miguel Trias, who heads a government-sponsored family planning organization, fretted that "these Latin American countries are trying to make the Vatican happy. But in 2,000 years the Vatican has never been happy."

Nor was this kind of unpleasantness limited to press conferences. Gail Quinn, a member of the Holy See delegation and executive director of the U.S. bishops' Pro-Life Secretariat, was booed and hissed in a formal session of the conference when she rose to explain the Vatican's objections to some abortion language in the proposed final report; the delegate from Benin had to admonish the chair, the ubiquitous Dr. Sai, that free speech was supposed to be sacrosanct in UN deliberations. Later, while walking past two American representatives in a "delegates- only" area of the conference Center, Quinn heard one of the Americans say to another, in a deliberately audible stage whisper, "There goes that bitch."

All of which should have suggested, at least to the knowledgeable, that the Holy See's delegation was having a considerable impact at Cairo. As, indeed, it was. For contrary to reports in the Times and elsewhere that the Holy See had suffered a significant setback, by the end of the first week of the Cairo conference, the Vatican had in fact achieved a great deal. The final report now stated, unambiguously, that "in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning." The notion of enshrining abortion-on-demand as an internationally recognized basic human right-the centerpiece of the Wirth approach to Cairo-had been abandoned by its proponents, who tacitly conceded that there was no international consensus supporting the claim. The rights and responsibilities of parents in respect of their teenage children had been reaffirmed, and the worst of the euphemistic language about the structure of the family had been changed, so that the Cairo document could not credibly be appealed to on behalf of "gay marriage" and other innovations.

The last major sticking point involved the "safety" of abortions-an important question for the Holy See, which believes that no abortion can be "safe" since, by definition, it results in the death of an innocent human being. The language in dispute stated that "in circumstances where abortion is legal, such abortion should be safe." At the level of moral principle, this was clearly unacceptable to the Vatican, being as it was the equivalent of saying that "in circumstances where female circumcision is legal, it should be performed with novocaine." The language was finally altered to read, "in circumstances where abortion is not against the law, such abortion should be safe"-on the surface a minor change, but one that holds out the prospect of legal reform and that does not concede the rectitude of permissive abortion laws.

The *New York Times* insisted on reporting these debates as a matter of "the Vatican and its few remaining allies" obstructing the course of human progress. But there were other dynamics at work at Cairo, as at Budapest and Mexico City, and it seemed possible that they could frustrate the more ambitious plans of both population controllers and lifestyle radicals in the future. The controllers' agenda (one of whose historic roots is, frankly, a set of eugenic phobias about "those kind of people") continues to cause serious concern in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, where political leaders understand that it is their populations, not that of, say, Norway, which are to be brought "under control." The resistance of Islamic, Latin American, and some African countries to the libertinism enshrined in the Cairo draft document was also of significance for the future. One need not admire many aspects of life in those societies to applaud their recognition that the sexual revolution's promises of a permissive cornucopia (in Zbigniew Brzezinski's telling phrase) are a snare and a delusion. And, as that recognition becomes increasingly widespread in an America struggling with unprecedented levels of illegitimacy, welfare dependency, and spousal and child abuse, we may also see a dramatic change in our domestic politics. For as the Clinton Administration's defeat at Cairo graphically illustrates, you cannot have it both ways: you cannot strengthen the family and the serious moral commitments necessary to sustain the family by treating the community of father, mother, and children as one option in a limitless menu of "lifestyle alternatives."

Over the long haul, though, the most significant development at the Cairo conference may have been that of a shift in controlling paradigms: from "population control" to "the empowerment of women." As one Indonesian delegate put it toward the end of the meeting, "We have stopped calling women the receptors of contraceptives. We now call them agents of change." Americans long familiar with the alliance between feminism and libertinism may instinctively regard this shift, with reason, as simply an amplification of the moral crisis of modernity. But at Cairo there were interesting suggestions that, in different cultural and historical contexts, the issue of "empowerment" may not cut the way it does in Western Europe and in some parts of the United States.

Benazir Bhutto's speech was one example of that intriguing possibility. For Bhutto's very presence at Cairo, coupled with the content of her remarks,

posed a sharp question: why should the "empowerment of women" be necessarily linked to the codification in international law (and national statutes) of the sexual revolution? Who says "A" does not necessarily have to say "B"-at least in non-Western cultures and traditional societies. (Indeed, it is worth remembering that American and Western European pro-life feminists, the vast majority of whom are deeply committed Christians, have resolutely declined to say "B.") Perhaps the question can be pressed even further, though: in the developing world, why shouldn't "the empowerment of women"-meaning that women should be educated, healthy, and no longer treated as property for purposes of marriage-serve to strengthen the roles of women as wives, mothers, and primary educators of their children? Might "the empowerment of women," in cultures whose women would regard Bella Abzug and Pamela Maraldo as something like aliens from Alpha Centauri, lead to a revitalization of the traditional family and a reaffirmation of the distinctively maternal power of women?

Joan Dunlop, president of the International Women's Health Coalition, found it "really extraordinary that in an international UN forum we are talking about sexual and reproductive health and the empowerment of women. These are things that many people of different cultures can understand." Indeed. But the question is, how? The travail of the conference translators at Cairo suggests the volatility of this "empowerment" language (and the rest of the armamentarium of fem-speak) and the difficulty of predicting precisely how it will shape lives in radically different societies and cultures.

French translators had to resuscitate a nineteenth-century term (*sante genesique*) in the effort to render "reproductive health" in their language. "Family leave" had almost everybody but the Americans stumped; the Arabic translation refers to parents leaving each other after a birth, while the Russian translation spoke of the entire family taking a vacation together. The Chinese thought "sexual exploitation" was an easy one, for they could rely on Chairman Mao's critique of capitalists. (They could also have used his doctor's memoirs, in which the chairman is remembered as an unregenerate sexual predator who ingested ground elks' horns as an antidote to impotence.) But the Arabs were caught between American buzz words and their own religious sensibilities. "Sexually active unmarried individuals"-who are committing criminal acts under Islamic law-thus became "sexually active as-yet-to-be married individuals." The Russians

couldn't figure out how to translate "unwanted pregnancies" so that the phrase did not denote "undesirable pregnancies"; and that was relatively mild, compared to the Russian translation of "reproductive health," which comes out as "health that reproduces itself again and again" (the Arabic cuts even closer to the bone of the abortion issue, as "reproductive health" becomes "health concerning the begetting of children").

One veteran population activist, Jason Finkle of the University of Michigan, worried that "all kinds of things have now been packed into the trunk of population: women's and children's health, female literacy, women's labor rights. I'm fearful that we've gotten away from the focus on population size and growth." It does not seem, after Cairo, an entirely unreasonable expectation. But some will regard this as something less to be feared than to be-very cautiously-celebrated.

## IV

Some things that ought to have happened at Cairo didn't. There was no concerted challenge to the ideologically charged concept of "overpopulation," although the work of Nicholas Eberstadt, Julian Simon, Karl Zinsmeister, and others has made clear that the term itself has no credible scientific meaning. This intellectual failure, combined with the clash of moral visions at Cairo, produced a somewhat schizoid final document, which endorses voluntary measures of population control but then sets population targets whose achievement would seem to require coercive governmental intervention in family planning. The resolution of that tension will, over the next decade, tell us much about the future of population policy (and politics) at both the international and national levels.

The conference also failed to confront the UN's continuing fixation on Third World development as essentially a matter of massive resource transfers from the developed to the developing world. The Holy See did heroic work at Cairo, and in the months between Prep-Com III and the September conference. But it would have added even more to the debate had its representatives taken up the question of governmental criminality and its relationship to the despoilation of the Third World; materials for such a

challenge were ready to hand in the 1987 encyclical of John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, in which the Pope had urged developing nations to "reform certain unjust structures, and in particular their political institutions, in order to replace corrupt, dictatorial, and authoritarian governments with democratic and participatory ones." The Holy See might also have taken a leaf from John Paul's 1991 social encyclical *Centesimus Annus* and boldly urged the view that human beings are the basic resource for development, because the source of wealth in the modern world is human creativity.

At the grassroots level, it will be a while before the paradigm shift from "population control" to "empowerment of women" takes effect. Meanwhile, huge amounts of money will continue to be poured into family planning programs, many of which are either subtly or overtly coercive. Remedial action on this front will require extreme vigilance over foreign aid budgets, and careful attention will have to be paid to the Clinton Administration as it tries to square its adherence to an international agreement that flatly rejects abortion as a means of family planning with its commitment to huge increases in U.S. aid funding to organizations that actively promote precisely that evil.

So the Battle of Cairo will continue, in other venues. And it will remain, at bottom, a moral struggle: about the dignity and value of human beings, about the rights and responsibilities of women and men, about the relationship between marriage, sexuality, and the rearing of children. Thanks to John Paul II's refusal to concede the Holy See's irrelevance in accordance with the prepared media script, the unavoidable moral core of the population argument was forced onto center stage at Cairo. And there it became clear, to those with eyes to see, that the mores of Hollywood, Manhattan's Upper West Side, and Copenhagen are not universally shared, admired, or sought.

That, in itself, was no mean accomplishment. And it might, just might, presage a more morally and empirically serious population and development debate in the future.

\*In the same Reuters report in which Ms. Mitchell suggested that the Church wanted to deny women an education, State Department spokesman Mike McCurry warned the Vatican against negotiating with Iran. A week

later, in Cairo, American delegates were seen openly negotiating compromise language on abortion and "reproductive rights" with Iranian delegates.

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