

FROM WASHINGTON OFFICE
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Population Control And The American Political Scene

(Note: The Roman Catholic bishops of the United States on Nov. 25 issued a pronouncement on birth control, which statement carried grave implications for American foreign policy and religious liberty, and which injected the "religious issue" into the national political scene. Since the pronouncement, a lively discussion has been taking place throughout the nation in the newspapers both by public officials, prospective presidential candidates, and by political columnists. In the comments below C. Emanuel Carlson, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, points out some of the issues that are involved in the bishops' statement and in the discussions that have followed.)

By C. Emanuel Carlson*

Is the bishops' statement on birth control to be interpreted as political maneuver, international policy, abstract moral philosophy, or as long range church strategy? This is the question faced by all who attempt comment on it.

The 200 Roman Catholic cardinals, archbishops and bishops are not ordinarily known for political naivete. When they undertook to speak for "American Catholics" on political positions regarding birth control and foreign aid they must have been aware of the implications for Senator John Kennedy and for other Catholic presidential hopefuls. The Senator carefully straddled the fence. The bishops had put him in an uncomfortable position and they may have deprived him of a chance at the Democratic candidacy.

It is altogether possible that the hierarchy prefer the present balance of power situation in which parties and leaders vie with one another to appeal to the "Catholic vote." The bishops apparently did not worry about the political fortunes of their "favorite sons."

From a political viewpoint a very interesting contradiction appears between the Roman Catholic political prognosticators who deny the existence of a "Catholic vote" and the crassness of the bishops' assumption that they can speak for Roman Catholics in the United States. In the stream of comments and correspondence few if any of the church's faithful have questioned the ability of the bishops to bind the activities of their people. On the contrary, a leading Roman Catholic theologian writing for America speculates as to whether a Roman Catholic president could sign a bill which sponsors a birth control program, and leans to the position that signing such a bill would amount to approving it. He says that, "all of this adds up to the conclusion that a Catholic candidate for president still presents a unique problem to his non-Catholic brethren." Apparently Baptists are not so "bigoted" after all.

Viewing the situation as a problem in church-state relations one could respect the conscience of the Roman Catholic taxpayer who might resist being taxed for the advancement of a moral philosophy with which he disagrees. But these spokesmen were not the taxpayers and there was no question of anybody being coerced into such tax payments. The government departments involved say they have not used a penny for such purposes and have no plans for doing so.

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We wish they could say as much regarding expenditures in which other taxpayers have conscience problems, such as public aid for sectarian educational and welfare institutions.

Baptists would certainly want to be the last to challenge the freedom of the bishops to express their moral philosophy, regardless how truncated that philosophy may appear. The right of a group of ecclesiastical leaders to try to use the influence of a large institution to keep other people scientifically ignorant, thereby denying them the freedom to exercise moral judgments and to make responsible decisions, is another question. The morality that is based on conscience and conviction is of a different variety from that based on ignorance. Such expressions must come from Catholic fathers and mothers who are in a more convincing position to speak on this subject.

Actually many moral values are involved in the pronouncement. These cannot easily be sorted out by one simple formula for all cases. Physical and mental health, a standard of living which gives the children proper opportunities, the protection of monogamous moral patterns, respect for personal competence and worth, respect for the freedom of women to bear or not to bear children, are but a few of the values which must be weighed against the clergymen's interpretation of "natural law." Some careful studies of the effects of the "moral philosophy" in areas where it has been dominantly advanced are in order. Reports from Spain, Italy, and Latin America are not encouraging as illustrations of this approach to morality.

The bishops' statement may have been thought through more carefully from the viewpoint of institutional strategy. Present day Roman Catholic strength in the United States is largely a result of immigration. That church has demonstrated a constant interest in this subject, and it studies population trends and movements carefully. Southern and eastern Europe and Latin American countries have been of special interest. They remind us that 60 million immigrated to the United States in 150 years. For instance, presently Mexico has a birth rate of 46 per thousand and a death rate of 13. In 20 years Mexico's 30 million will become 60 million at the present rates. For a leadership which is wont to think in terms of centuries this is easy arithmetic. Whether they have considered all the factors the centuries will tell.

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* Dr. Carlson is the executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Washington, D. C.

Bishops Put Skids Under
Catholic Candidates

(12-4-59)

WASHINGTON--(BP)--A prominent Baptist leader here has agreed with many political columnists that the Roman Catholic bishops of the United States may have effectively put the presidential skids under Catholic candidates.

Referring to their pronouncement on birth control and foreign aid issued Nov. 25, C. Emanuel Carlson, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, said that "the 200 Roman Catholic cardinals, archbishops and bishops are not ordinarily known for political naivete."

"When they undertook to speak for American Catholics on political positions regarding birth control and foreign aid," he continued, "they must have been aware of the implications for Senator John Kennedy and for other Catholic presidential hopefuls....They may have deprived him of a chance at the Democratic candidacy."

The bishops declared that American Catholics "will not support any public assistance, either at home or abroad, to promote artificial birth prevention, abortion or sterilization whether through direct aid or by means of international organizations."

The public press and political columnists throughout the nation immediately saw the relevance of the Catholic position to the course of action that might be followed by a Roman Catholic president. Thus the bishops kicked off the most extensive discussion of the possibilities of a Catholic president since the Al Smith campaign in 1928.

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Carlson points out that a leading Roman Catholic theologian, discussing the Catholic position in America magazine concludes that "all of this adds up to the conclusion that a Catholic candidate for president still presents a unique problem to his non-Catholic brethren."

"Apparently Baptists are not so bigoted after all," Carlson observes.

In his comments on the bishops' statement, Carlson asserts the freedom of the bishops to express their moral philosophy "regardless of how truncated that philosophy may appear." But he also appealed for similar freedom on the part of other people to exercise their religion.

More issues than birth control are involved in the bishops' statement, Carlson says. Problems of religious liberty, physical and mental health, protection of high moral standards, proper opportunities for children, and respect for personal competence and worth need to be considered, he concluded.

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Duncan Named Editor
Of D. C. Baptist Paper

(12-4-59)

WASHINGTON--(BP)--James O. Duncan has been elected editor of the "Capital Baptist," official publication of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, according to M. Chandler Stith, executive secretary. He will assume his new duties January 1.

Duncan, pastor of the Hillandale Baptist Church in the Maryland suburbs of the District of Columbia, in 1954 was asked to devote part time to the promotion activities of the D. C. Convention. As part of his work he began a news service for the D. C. churches. This developed from a mimeographed sheet issued twice a month to a full blown Baptist state paper printed weekly, demanding the attention of a full time editor.

In addition to his editorial duties Duncan will serve as the Director of the Department of Stewardship and Promotion for the D. C. Convention. He will also be the public relations representative for the convention.

A native of North Carolina, Duncan attended the University of North Carolina and graduated from American University in Washington, D. C. He graduated from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., with the Bachelor of Divinity degree.

Duncan has been active in Southern Baptist Convention affairs, having served on the Committee on Committees in 1957, and is now the D. C. member of the Sunday School Board. He has been pastor of the Hillandale church since 1952.

Duncan is married to the former Dorothy Way of Washington, D. C. They have two children, Sarah Susanne (13) and James, Jr. (6).

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William Reynolds Named To Coordinate
Music at Baptist World Congress, Rio

(12-4-59)

WASHINGTON--(BP)--William J. Reynolds, music editor of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, has been named to coordinate music at the Tenth Baptist World Congress in Rio de Janeiro next June 26-July 3.

Reynolds directed music at the Fifth Baptist Youth World Conference in Toronto, Canada, in 1958.

Announcement of his appointment was made by Dr. Arnold T. Ohrn, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance. He said that Reynolds will be coordinator of musical features, working with other specialists and the directors of various choirs which will appear.

Highlighting Congress music, according to Dr. Ohrn, will be a 3,000-voice Brazilian choir which already is conducting rehearsals in scattered parts of Brazil. Sub-directors in various cities are drilling sections of the choir from those areas in special songs which have been selected -- thus preparing them for mass singing at the time of the Congress.

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