

Written by Gov. Ben Sanchez

Thursday, 07 October 2010 16:30 - Last Updated Thursday, 07 October 2010 16:43

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By Former BOI Gov. Conrado (Ben) Sanchez, Jr.

The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* headliner “Noy bucks Church, backs birth control” (28 September 2010 ) reported that Fr. Melvin Castro, for unknown reasons, unfairly “linked Aquino’s statement (on family planning) to the U.S. grant of \$434 million financial assistance to the Philippines .”

Fr. Castro is the executive director of the Episcopal Commission on Family and Life.

In a burst of over-zealous religiosity, the priest added, “Apparently for that measly sum of money in the name of fighting poverty, here we go again, selling out the Filipino soul.” With half-wit spokesmen like Fr. Castro, do our bishops anticipate that discerning, church-going Filipino Catholics can be won over to oppose family planning?

I cannot, in conscience, be against President Aquino’s family planning program before a few questions are cleared up in my mind. It also came to mind, airing these questions may also provide focus on important issues in the current debate.

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Speaking to a secular priest, I asked him what he says to a woman who confesses that she took a contraceptive pill. If he is satisfied that taking the pill was due to economic reasons the priest tells the lady that taking the pill is not a sin. However, if a prostitute confesses that she has been taking contraceptive pills, the priest acknowledged the act to be sinful. The priest explained that taking contraceptive pills is not per se a sin. What he said seemed sensible on the face of it. But, does the priest's declaration square with the Moral Law or whatever rules the Vatican set up concerning the definition of what a sin is?

Another priest took a sterner stance which is strange for one who is a member of the Society of Jesus. In a column he wrote for the *Inquirer*, he stated that it is a sin for poor couples to have more children than they can support in human dignity as prescribed by God.

Since 1946, Fr. John J. Carroll, SJ has been in the Philippines and has spent practically all of his time working among the poor in the service of the Jesuit social apostolate. He has witnessed severe human degradation among poverty stricken families. The sight of bare-footed, ill-clothed, non-educated and sick children who survive on only one meal a day appalled the good priest.

Fr. Carroll's statement makes sense. If the bishops have any kind of family-planning program, shouldn't parish priests be proclaiming Fr. Carroll's message all over the country? Sadly, no formal family-planning program appears to be in the works. Archbishop Oscar Cruz told a TV reporter that "more people are good for the Philippine economy."

In 1968, Pope Paul VI proclaimed his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* condemning the use of artificial contraception. However, in the encyclical, the Pope was careful to point out his concern about how world population was growing more rapidly than available resources and, how difficult it was to provide food, shelter and education to impoverished large families – especially those in

developing countries.

In business management there is the principle that says it is easier to be administrative than to be promotional. It is easier to pull a string than to push it, as the metaphor goes. The “rhythm method” and abstinence are the only means Catholics spouses are allowed to control family size. In the spirit enunciated by Pope Paul in the encyclical, how active and how successful have the parishes been to reduce family size by reaching out and telling poor couples how to practice these methods?

As far as I know, no secular priest or member of a religious order in this country has dared raise a voice publicly opposing the Vatican’s official policy on birth control. I wondered why because Catholic theologians, even bishops, in the U.S. and Germany  
any

had voiced vigorous protests against

*Humanae Vitae*

for years. Reading a 1993 article in the Catholic News Reporter provided a clue. Let me just quote one sentence from that article:

The Vatican has made adherence to

*Humanae Vitae*

and no public objection to it a necessary condition for anyone to be made a bishop in the church.”

Eye-opener of a Statement

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One should not readily accept this eye-opener of a statement even though the article appeared in a Catholic paper. The article was written by a Catholic priest who was teaching at the Catholic University of America. The author led a group of 600 theologians to issue, in 1968, a public statement announcing that “after evaluating the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the group disagreed with the specific ethical conclusions about birth control.”

Should we not turn to the CBCP for validation? If the CBCP is unsure, may I ask: if they know if any bishop or priest who advised the cardinals during Vatican II council meetings was elevated to the College of Cardinals? I believe the Catholic laity has the right to know whether the Vatican is packing the collegial body with ultra-conservatives for this portends what the Vatican's teachings will be in the future and the theological leanings of the next elected Pope.

And this leads to another question: Was any Catholic cleric excommunicated because he continuously criticized *Humanae Vitae* on ethical grounds?

At a dinner one evening, conversation turned to the R.H. bill. I sensed that most of the guests were against the passage of the bill.

I turned to a Jesuit priest who was present. “Was the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* issued ex-cathedra? He answered in the negative.

“Therefore, I said, “Does it mean that the encyclical is not an infallible document?”

The priest agreed and added that he did not believe that the encyclical is part of Catholic dogma.

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If the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* is not infallible, don't Catholics have the right to dissent from a non-infallible church teaching? If the answer is "yes", does it not follow that Catholic spouses could responsibly decide in certain circumstances to use artificial contraception?

I have no further questions, reverend bishops. # # #

**E ditor's Notes:** Conrado Sanchez, Jr., 82, is a product of De La Salle Manila. He holds an M.A/ degree in Economics from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. For a complete profile of Governor Sanchez, please read this October 2007 article,

[Meet the Newest MabuhayRadio.com Columnist, Ben Sanchez](#)

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# Don't Catholics Have the Right to Dissent from Authoritative, Non-infallible Church Teaching? - MabuhayF

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