

CONSCIENCE

INSIDE

Editorial 1
by Frances Kissling

Catholic Options on the
Abortion Debate 2
by Daniel C. Maguire, Ph.D.
*"Probabilism" legitimates Catholic
dissent.*

How Do Catholics Vote?
Not as Pawns of the
Church 5
by Andrew M. Greeley
*Despite press assumptions to the
contrary, Church leadership cannot
deliver the votes of most Catholics on
abortion or any other issue.*

Catholic Attitudes
Toward Abortion 6
by Tom W. Smith, Ph.D.
*Polls show only a small minority of
Catholics follow Church hierarchy's
absolutist position.*

Statement... 8
From the President of the
National Conference of Catholic
Bishops.

Catholic Statment on
Pluralism and Abortion 9
*Signed by over 50 well-known Catholic
professionals.*

Catholic Theologians
and the Abortion Debate 12
by J. Giles Milhaven, S.T.L., Ph.D.
*A Catholic theologian reports a long-
time plurality of opinion on abortion
among his colleagues.*

Conscience Visits
Congresswoman
Geraldine Ferraro 14
by Anne Sears Mooney
*The Congresswoman discusses religion,
family, and women's rights.*

News 14
CFPC Launches Special Media
Education Project

The Bishops And Abortion

by Frances Kissling

Something strange is happening in American politics. Catholic bishops and some Catholic legislators are engaging in a vigorous public theological debate. Stranger yet, the legislators' theology, not the bishops', is correct.

Last week, Bishop James W. Malone, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said, "With regard to immorality of the direct taking of innocent human life (by abortion or by direct attack on noncombatants in war) our views... are a direct affirmation of the constant moral teaching of the Catholic Church."

The assumption that the fetus is a person, currently a matter of lively debate in Catholic theological journals, is by no means a constant moral teaching. Even the Vatican Declaration on Procured Abortion, published in 1974, states that "there is not a unanimous tradition on this point, and authors are as yet not in agreement."

In the eyes of the church, this is a religious matter, for the declaration also states that "it is not up to biological sciences to make a definitive judgment on questions which are properly philosophical and moral such as the moment when a human person is constituted."

But with such a key religious point undecided, it is difficult to understand the bishops' vigor in claiming that it is not "logically tenable" for Catholic politicians to say "their personal views should not influence their political decisions."

continued on page 16



Catholic Attitudes Toward Abortion

by Tom W. Smith, Ph.D.

Attitudes toward abortion in the 1980s seem to have reached a liberal plateau, much more favored than in the 1960s or earlier, but no longer moving in a liberal direction. Support for abortion grew rapidly from the early 1960s to the early 1970s. Support for abortions when there was a "strong chance of serious defect in the baby" increased from about 55 percent in 1962 to 83 percent in 1974. Likewise, support for abortion when a married woman "does not want any more children" moved from 15 percent in 1965 to 45 percent in 1974. Since 1974 there has been almost no change in attitudes toward abortion. (See Figure 1.)

This pattern is not unique to the issue of abortion. Attitudes in such diverse areas as civil liberties for deviant groups such as Communists or atheists, women's rights, sexual permissiveness and race relations show similar patterns—liberal shifts from the 1950s to the early 1970s and then either a leveling-off or at least a marked reduction in the rate of liberal movement. While this leveling-off in the early seventies after a decade or more of liberal advance represents a significant shift in the social and political culture, it is far from being a conservative tide sweeping back liberal growth. Attitudes toward abortion and most other social issues have *not* moved in a conservative direction; rather they have stopped moving in the liberal direction.

Catholic attitudes basically have followed the same trend. Traditionally Catholic support has

been slightly lower than Protestant, and both are less inclined to support abortion than Jews or the nonreligious. During the seventies support among non-black Catholics averaged about ten percentage points below non-black Protestants. Blacks tend to be anti-abortion and thereby lower support among Protestants as a whole. A comparison of Protestants and Catholics of both races shows fewer religious difference—about seven percentage points. There are some indications that this gap may be closing. In 1982, for the first time, support for abortions for social reasons, such as poverty, not wanting to get married or not wanting more children, was as high among Catholics as among Protestants. One of the factors contributing to this narrowing gap has been the higher level of support for abortion among younger Catholics. Protestants show little variation on abortion attitudes, with those over age 65 being slightly less supportive. Among Catholics, however, support drops rapidly with age. This appears to represent a difference between Catholic birth cohorts. As the younger, more liberal cohorts grow in size and the older Catholic cohorts account for a declining share of the population, support among all Catholics will tend to rise and the gap between Protestants and Catholics will decrease. Increased political activism by Protestant fundamentalist groups on this issue will also tend to reduce the difference between Protestants and Catholics.

This moderate and perhaps vanishing difference

If you are

A Catholic legislator who believes the law in a pluralistic society should not be written to enforce the teachings of one church against the moral principles of other churches and individuals....

If you are a Ph.D. in religion who has studied the history of the Church and concluded that the Church has never formulated an infallible or consistent teaching against abortion....

If you are a priest or nun who believes the Catholic hierarchy is trapped in an outdated and authoritarian denial of full equality to women and regards sex as evil....

If you need guidance—or just plain company—in your decision or that of someone close to you to have an abortion....

If you oppose abortion yourself but have witnessed the harmful effects of illegal abortion....

Then one or more of these booklets was written for you.

CFFC offers a comprehensive and vital series of publications that address the issues of reproductive rights and the abortion option from ethical, political, religious, historical, and personal points of view:

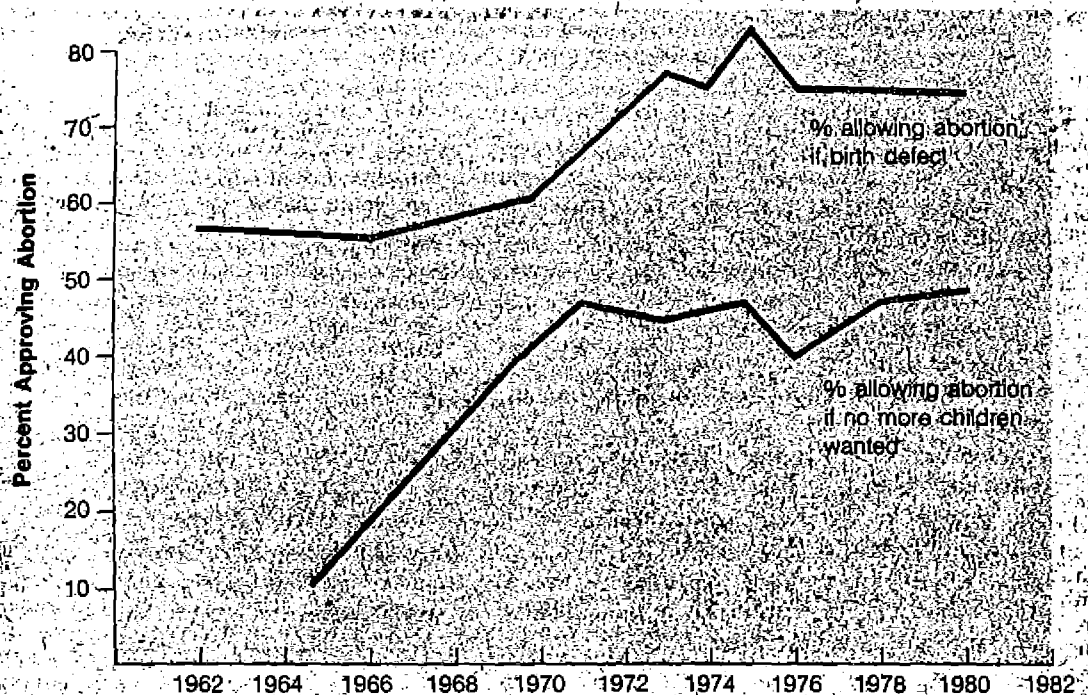
CFFC PUBLICATIONS	QTY	AMOUNT
ABORTION IN GOOD FAITH \$1.00 each		
"We Are the Mainstream"		
"The Church in a Democracy"		
"The History of Abortion in the Catholic Church"		
"My Conscience Speaks"		
"I Support You But I Can't Sign My Name"		
"An Ethical Inquiry"		
SPECIAL REPORTS		
"Abortion: A Guide to Making Ethical Choices"—\$3.00		
"Catholic Women and Abortion: A Research Study"—\$3.00		
CFFC BROCHURES		
1 copy—25¢; 10 for \$2.00; 100 for \$10		
"I Am Here to Say..." Prominent Pro-Choice Catholics Speak Out		
"We Are No Longer Silent..."		
English		
Spanish		
PUBLICATIONS SAMPLER—\$6.00		
CONSCIENCE: CFCC's bimonthly newsletter. (One year's subscription free with membership.)		
One year's subscription—\$10.00		
Bulk Subscription Rates:		
50 copies (at \$8 per issue), postage included—\$48		
100 copies (at \$12 per issue), postage included—\$72		
GRAND TOTAL ENCLOSED		\$

Please make checks payable to CFCC

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY, STATE, ZIP _____
 Order from CFCC, 2008 17th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009.



Figure 1. Trends in Abortion Attitudes (1962-1982)



between Catholics and Protestants contrasts sharply with the official positions of their respective churches. The Catholic Church takes an absolute moral position against abortion, while most Protestant churches take no doctrinaire position on abortion. Several, such as the Unitarians and Episcopalians, lean toward a pro-choice position as a matter of social policy, though fundamentalist sects take strong anti-abortion stances. Few Catholics agree with their church's absolutist anti-abortion position. When asked about allowing abortions under seven specific conditions—danger to mother's health, rape, birth defect, poverty, unwillingness to marry, not wanting any more children, or for any reason—only 10-12 percent of Catholics agree with the church's position and categorically oppose abortion. This number is only slightly above the 5-7 percent of Protestants who also oppose abortion under each condition. On the other hand, a rising proportion of Catholics—from 20 percent in 1977 to 33 in 1982—approved of abortion for all seven reasons, on a level comparable to that of Protestants. Absolute pro-choice Catholics thus outnumber anti-abortion Catholics by 2 or 3 to 1. Of course most Catholics reject either a complete pro- or anti-abortion stance. In 1982, 56 percent favored abortion in some circumstances and not in others. Thus to most Catholics abortion is situational matter, allowable in certain but not all circumstances.

The big split on abortion comes between what are sometimes referred to as the "hard" abortion reasons—mother's health endangered, serious defect in fetus, rape or incest. Support among Catholics for "hard" reasons ranges from about 80-88 percent. Abortion for social reasons such as poverty or not wanting additional children ranges from 35-50 percent, about half the support level for the "hard" reasons.

Catholic support for abortion also varies by geographical region, community type (rural/suburban/urban), and ethnic group. Support tends to

be strongest in the Northeast, in large cities, and among descendants of immigrants from Italy, Eastern Europe and France. Support is weakest among Catholics in the Southwest, in small towns or rural areas, and among the Irish and Hispanics, especially Mexican-American. These differences can be rather large. For example, support for abortion when no more children are wanted is at 22 percent in the Southwest but 45 percent in the Northeast. Similarly, in rural counties support is at 32 percent while in large central cities it stands at 51 percent. Regional or rural differences tend to be greater than ethnic differences. Catholic attitudes on abortion, like Protestant attitudes, are not uniform across other cultural variables such as region, community type and ethnicity.

What are the political implications of Catholic abortion attitudes? Among Catholics, many factors cause opinion to deviate from the national average. If we look at rural Catholics of Mexican ancestry in the Southwest, we find a constituency that opposes abortion for most reasons. On the other hand in the large cities of the Northeast a majority of Italian and Polish Catholics support abortions for both medical and social reasons.

A second major political implication is the comparative dedication or commitment of supporters and opponents. Opinion surveys by Harris, the Survey Research Center, and NORC all show that opponents of abortion feel more strongly about the issue than those supporting abortion rights. Only 16 percent of Catholics who supported abortion for all seven reasons thought it was one of the most important issues, while 43 percent of those opposed to abortion for all seven reasons rated it so. Catholic opponents say they are better informed and less likely to change than Catholic proponents of abortion.

In 1982, Harris tried to measure the electoral impact of this difference by twice asking whether a person would be less likely to vote for a Con-

continued on page 10

Catholic Attitudes

continued from page 7

gressional candidate who disagreed with the respondent's own stance on a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion. Supporters of the anti-abortion amendment said they were more likely to vote against a Congressional candidate who opposed the amendment, while opponents of an abortion ban indicated they were less likely to oppose a candidate solely because his or her position on abortion differed from that of the correspondent. However, since opponents of the ban outnumber supporters 2-to-1, the net effect

membership were Catholic; 70 percent of the Right-to-Life members were Catholics. The small minority of Catholics who follow, the church's absolutist position are much more politically involved than the majority of Catholics who approve of abortion for some or all reasons, and these Catholic anti-abortion activists make up a majority of anti-abortion activists.

Can this small, but active and organized segment of Catholics swing elections? Probably not often. Abortion has not been and does not seem likely to become a deciding factor like inflation, unemployment or social security. Analysis of election returns in 1978 in particular failed to

Catholic/Protestant Support for Legal Abortion: 1972-1982

		Percent Supporting Abortion if Strong Chance of Defect in Fetus								
Religion	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982	
Catholic	71.5	73.9	79.4	76.9	76.5	80.1	74.4	77.2	79.9	
Protestant	85.2	88.6	88.3	86.4	87.7	89.4	85.7	86.6	87.2	
		Percent Supporting Abortion if Married But Wants No More Children								
Religion	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982	
Catholic	29.6	33.9	37.8	37.2	39.6	35.8	31.1	35.4	47.9	
Protestant	40.7	50.7	48.5	45.3	44.6	46.7	38.3	47.6	45.1	
		Percent Supporting Abortion if Woman's Health is Seriously Endangered								
Religion	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982	
Catholic	83.2	89.5	87.0	85.6	86.1	84.9	84.4	83.6	86.2	
Protestant	91.4	94.9	94.0	92.6	92.9	94.3	93.3	93.7	93.4	
		Percent Supporting Abortion if Family Has Low Income and Cannot Afford Children								
Religion	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982	
Catholic	37.9	39.7	46.6	43.9	46.4	44.3	39.3	41.0	48.3	
Protestant	51.1	57.2	55.6	53.7	52.8	54.6	46.9	51.6	47.9	
		Percent Supporting Abortion if Pregnancy Results from Rape								
Religion	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982	
Catholic	75.8	78.2	82.0	78.6	77.2	77.1	76.8	79.5	83.3	
Protestant	83.6	87.2	88.6	86.0	87.0	88.0	87.2	85.2	88.7	
		Percent Supporting Abortion if Woman Not Married and Does Not Want to Marry								
Religion	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982	
Catholic	33.4	36.0	42.9	42.3	42.7	39.4	30.7	40.7	46.1	
Protestant	45.6	54.1	51.4	47.4	50.9	52.0	40.5	47.7	47.2	
		Percent Supporting Abortion if Woman Wants for Any Reason								
Religion	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982	
Catholic	—	—	—	—	—	31.2	25.1	31.8	39.2	
Protestant	—	—	—	—	—	36.8	30.0	40.9	37.3	

was that candidates who opposed the ban could expect to increase their vote by seven percentage points. This Harris analysis is limited, however, by its failure to consider the impact of organized action. The University of Michigan has found that while only 7 percent of abortion supporters have written a letter or given money in support of abortion rights, 19.5 percent of opponents to abortion have acted on their convictions. There are more supporters than opponents, though among activists 60 percent are anti-abortion vs. 40 percent pro-abortion. There are also some pronounced religious differences in the membership of activist groups. David Granberg surveyed members of the National Abortion Rights Action League and the National Right to Life Committee. While only 4 percent of the Abortion Rights

demonstrate any measurable anti-abortion vote. Of course that does not mean that in a particular constituency it could not be made a serious issue, but on average the group of active, single issue voters is too small to matter. In most constituencies efforts to make abortion a major campaign issue have and will fail. In fact, in many areas such a campaign would tend to be counterproductive since it would awaken the less involved and less active pro-abortion majority. The result would probably be a net gain for a candidate taking a liberal position on abortion.

DR. TOM W. SMITH is a Research Associate, Cultural Pluralism Center, National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago.

