Pro-Life Leaders Reject “‘Heartless’” Policies, Urge Respect for Human Life

Christopher Manion, PhD / April 4, 2022

Last week PRI President Steven Mosher and I joined dozens of other pro-life leaders in decrying the Rockefeller Commission’s “Report on Population and the American Future.”

The Rockefeller Report was issued on March 27, 1972, at the height of the overpopulation hysteria. While the profound errors informing that hysteria have long since proven false, the document itself has nonetheless served as a template for anti-life abortion and population control programs worldwide for the past half-century.

In his statement of July 18, 1969 inaugurating the Commission, President Richard Nixon said, “one of the most serious challenges to human destiny in the last third of this century will be the growth of the population.”

At the time, there was little public opposition to this view. The population-control effort had broad, bipartisan support on Capitol Hill, notably from Congressman George H.W. Bush, a strong advocate, who represented the Seventh Congressional District of Texas at the time.

Support for the Commission’s work went far beyond Capitol Hill, and included many prominent Catholics. One of those distinguished leaders, Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C., President of the University of Notre Dame, had been a member of the Board of Directors of the pro-abortion Rockefeller Foundation since 1961.

In 1963, Father Hesburgh began hosting meetings on the population issue in the university’s Memorial Library, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Historian Donald Critchlow of Arizona State University candidly described the meetings as “a liberal forum to create an oppositional voice within the Catholic Church on the issue of family planning.”

Prompted by those conversations, in 1964 Father Hesburgh recommended to Pope Paul VI that he include Mrs. Patty Crowley, founder of the Christian Family Movement in Chicago,
to be a member of the Papal Birth Control Commission. The Commission had been formed to advise the Holy Father on the family planning methods at the dawn of the “sexual revolution” that had begun following the introduction of the contraceptive pill.

The majority of the Papal Commission’s members voted in 1966 to support a reversal of Catholic moral teaching, and its members were confident that Pope Paul would confirm their views. When Pope Paul surprised them with the promulgation of his encyclical Humane Vitae on July 25th, 1968, reaffirming the truths of the Natural Law and the timeless teaching of the Church, Father Hesburgh and Mrs. Crowley were both stunned.

While Father Hesburgh “never directly criticized Pope Paul” on the issue, Dr. Critchlow writes, Mrs. Crowley was more direct. A quarter of a century later she wrote, “I feel betrayed by the Church.”

Four years ago this month, Dr. Critchlow told an audience at Catholic University of America that his research had also found little resistance from the Catholic hierarchy to Federal taxpayer funding of domestic and international population programs since the 1960s. In fact, for the past fifty years the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has routinely lobbied for bills providing full funding of Federal “family planning” programs that provide contraceptives and other birth control methods, even including abortion during Democrat administrations, as part of broader “Great Society” programs at home and abroad (USCCB nonprofit agencies receive a generous share of that taxpayer funding).

The fruits of the flawed but fervent efforts of the population control movement are today more evident than ever. Millions of unborn children have died, and the drumbeat of “family planning” has been a mandatory ingredient in U.S. foreign aid projects for decades.

The message that these policies convey to Third World populations is clear: “There are just too many of you. If you want clean water, you will you will lose your aid if you won’t accept ‘family planning’ clinics too, or.”

Families all over the world have rejected that aid, and for over thirty years the Population Research Institute has helped them. We provide research and support to help pro-life groups and their allies at home and abroad. We also help families protect their unborn children from aggressive population controllers by providing them with pre- and post-natal care, aid for mothers in crisis pregnancies, and protection for mothers who are victims of forced-abortion policies that threaten their children.
Our pro-life statement follows:

A Declaration for a New American Future

50 years ago, the Rockefeller Commission on Population Growth and the American Future released a massive report calling for the United States to achieve zero population growth.

The March 27, 1972, report, requested by President Nixon and authorized by Congress, called for the legalization of abortion through the second trimester, taxpayer funding of abortion, and other policy initiatives to reduce the number of children conceived and born in the United States.

Based on a bleak worldview about humanity, the proposals represented a sharp departure from centuries of U.S. law safeguarding human life and supporting the family unit as a foundational building block of a healthy society. The proposals were also reflective of the alarmist views of the cultural and business elites of the late 1960s, as evidenced by Dr. Paul Ehrlich’s 1968 manifesto, *The Population Bomb*, which presented the next generation as the enemy.

That’s why we have issued this response to the horrors of the Rockefeller Commission report and a call for America to resume
policies which “embrace the worth of every human life and put supreme value on the sanctity of life and the preservation of institutions that safeguard it.”

The Declaration for a New American Future urges:

- The reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and other unconstitutional abortion decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court.
- The end of taxpayer funding of abortion, eugenics, and other programs that subvert respect for the equality of every human being under the law.
- The United States to reinstate international aid policies which exclude abortion, eugenics, and population control programs.
- Recognition that embracing abortion as a solution to population growth has contributed to sharply declining birth rates worldwide, including the U.S. fertility rate often dropping below replacement.
- A renewal of the historic American understanding that God is the source of our rights and blessings.
- An understanding that the historical impact of the Rockefeller Commission and America’s pro-abortion policies is pessimism and savage competition, which is both enormous and accelerating.

Charles A. “Chuck” Donovan, president of Charlotte Lozier Institute and former Deputy Director of Presidential Correspondence for President Ronald Reagan, said:

“As is plain for all to see on the 50th anniversary of the Rockefeller
Commission report, the apocalyptic predictions about future famine and disease caused by ‘overpopulation’ have proven to be false, but the damage to the fabric of American society has proven to be immense.

“When government promotes a policy of children as disposable, and when killing innocent children is promoted as a solution, we should not be surprised that the vulnerable of our society are mistreated, denied equal opportunity, and marginalized. This trend can and must be reversed, and it starts with a renewed emphasis on equal respect for every human under the law.”

Charter signers of the Declaration for a New American Future include:

- Marjorie Dannenfelser, President, Susan B. Anthony List
- Ambassador Sam Brownback, Chairman, National Committee for Religious Freedom
- Kevin Roberts, Ph.D., President, The Heritage Foundation
- Star Parker, President, Center for Urban Renewal and Education
- Benjamin S. Carson Sr., M.D., Chairman and Founder, American Cornerstone Institute
- Robert P. George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence, Princeton University
- Shea Bradley-Farrell, Ph.D., President, Counterpoint Institute for Policy, Research, and Education
- Michael P. Farris, President and CEO, Alliance Defending Freedom
- Gary L. Bauer, President, American Values
• Tony Perkins, President, Family Research Council
• John Stonestreet, President, Colson Center
• Gerard V. Bradley, Professor of Law, University of Notre Dame
• Susan Wills, Esq., Associate Scholar, Charlotte Lozier Institute
• Louis A. Brown, Jr., J.D., Executive Director, Christ Medicus Foundation
• Jeanne F. Mancini, Author and Pro-Life Leader
• Russ Vought, President, Center for Renewing America
• Penny Nance, President and CEO, Concerned Women for America
• Kristan Hawkins, President, Students for Life
• Frank Cannon, Founding President, American Principles Project
• Catherine Glenn Foster, President and CEO, Americans United for Life
• Christopher Manion, Ph.D., Director, Humanae Vitae Project, Population Research Institute
• Ryan Bomberger, Chief Creative Officer and Co-Founder, The Radiance Foundation
• Ryan Anderson, Ph.D., President, Ethics and Public Policy Center
• Brad Mattes, President, Life Issues Institute
• Chuck Donovan, President, Charlotte Lozier Institute
• Peter Wolfgang, Executive Director, Family Institute of Connecticut
• Austin Ruse, President, C-FAM
• Jessica Anderson, Executive Director, Heritage Action
• Steven Mosher, Ph.D., President, Population Research Institute
• Tami Fitzgerald, Executive Director, North Carolina Values
Coalition

Signers’ affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.