

March 21, 2006

Nicaraguan Bishops Fight Back Against UN Radicals

By Douglas A. Sylva

The thought police at the UN are easy to dismiss here in America where they have little power. But for the developing world in need of international aid, ignoring the UN's agenda comes with a steep price. When faced with evidence of the UN's desire to impose radical social change upon the world, American conservatives can claim that the messenger cries wolf, not because there is no wolf, but because the wolf has no teeth. They can feel this way because they belong to a political system in which both major parties are reluctant to ratify international treaties – yes, even the Democrats – and because they belong to a society with an economy that feeds, rather than feeds from, the UN's international wealth-redistribution trough.

Things are very different in the developing world, where the UN possesses the admittedly "soft," but incredibly powerful inducement of international development aid. Many governments in the developing world will impose radical social change upon their own societies in order to keep the UN checks coming.

Observers in the developing world are coming to understand this; the Catholic bishops of Nicaragua understand. They oppose a new "Law of Equality" because they know where it comes from and what its goals are. It is, they say, "designed to impose the radical gender ideology promoted by the United Nations and other international organizations . . . The 'Law of Equality,' like the foreign ideology of gender, is designed to achieve woman's equality by granting her 'new' special rights, such as the right to abortion, lesbianism, and obligatory quotas to guarantee her 'equality' in positions of power . . . This legislation contains a new misleading vocabulary. The terms 'sexual health' and 'reproductive health' are internationally recognized as euphemisms for induced abortion and the promotion of homosexuality."

The Law of Equality derives from mandates issued by what is called the CEDAW Compliance Committee, a UN committee that has ultimate authority to interpret CEDAW, the UN women's rights treaty. The last time Nicaragua went before the Committee, back in 2001, the UN recorded the Committee's concerns: "Several experts asked questions regarding the Catholic church, which had enormous influence in Nicaragua. Was Nicaragua a secular country? . . . How was the Catholic church's approach to birth control and reproductive rights reflected in the policies of the country? . . . It was the Government's obligation to educate the people, and the concept of equality needed to be incorporated in the relevant legislation in order to overcome the stereotypical concepts . . . Questions were also asked about abortions, [and] the contents of sex education programmes . . . In view of the fact that Nicaragua was a Catholic country, were condoms in use and distributed freely among vulnerable populations, or had the Church opposed their use." According to the Committee, then, Nicaragua risks falling out of compliance with CEDAW because it is Catholic, pro-life and pro-family.

The bishops of Argentina also understand. Right now, the Argentine Chamber of Deputies is set to vote on a CEDAW "Optional Protocol," which would expand the Compliance Committee's power even further. The bishops want a "no" vote, because the Compliance Committee's demands for abortion rights "reflect the neocolonialist characteristics that some international organizations try to impose on our country and the whole of Latin America . . . Our commitment in favor of women's rights cannot depend on agreements and recommendations that endeavor to guarantee the practice of safe abortion as a public service . . . For this reason we draw the attention particularly of our lawmakers to the danger of cultural dependence that the imminent ratification of the CEDAW's Optional Protocol would entail . . . We encourage all not to let themselves be deceived by arguments and statistics never proved,

which support abortifacient tendencies. Induced death cannot be the way to solve our problems. Let us defend life, let us take care of life, let us always bet on life."

I would not bet on the bishops being victorious in either country. The governments know what the CEDAW Committee wants to hear, and they prepare accordingly. In its last report to the Committee, Nicaragua made sure to play to its anti-Catholic bias, insisting that, "The Church publishes messages reinforcing attitudes and values that make women subordinate to men and discriminate against women. Even when abused by her husband, a wife is obliged to live with him 'until death parts them.'"

The government of Nicaragua, desperate to stay in the good graces of the UN, and therefore worthy of its charity, will stoop so low as to imply that the Church of eighty percent of its people condones husbands beating wives.