

# **National Report (Philippines): Catholic fundamentalism's impact on Reproductive Health**

Sunday 5 November 2017, by [Likhaan Center for Women's Health](#) (Date first published: 2016).

## **National Report on Building New Constituencies for Women's SRHR: Interlinkages Between Religion and SRHR.**

### **Executive Summary**

The Catholic Church has established and sustained significant power over Philippine politics and society in the past—through Spanish rule from the 16 century towards the end of the 19 century, and in 1986 and 2001 during the ouster of two Presidents—until the present as manifested in the country's moral values, way of life and behavior in social and public activities. Conservative Catholic teachings instilled into state policies and governance deprive the enjoyment of basic human rights. The Philippines, in effect, remains a Catholic state in practice despite being a secular state by proclamation.

This report focuses on both Catholic Fundamentalism and its opposition to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) policies, especially the Reproductive Health (RH) Law, and the alternative and more liberal views of Catholic Progressives, including their strongest purveyors. Catholic Fundamentalism is defined as the use of the Catholic Church's political power to impose on and inject Catholic doctrines into state policies and governance. This report is the result of a research on the Catholic Church's official teachings related to RH and rights and its personages/ blocs; assessments of their impact on RH policies, especially the RH Bill and Law, the Supreme Court decision on the Law and its implications; and interviews with various pro-RH expert practitioners in their respective sector, including a Muslim academic who provided a counterpoint to the Catholic views.

Fundamentalist Catholic teachings, believed to be immutable and universal, limit a woman's role to motherhood and family; confine sexual intimacy only to marriage and to result only in procreation; and subject young people to their parents' decisions. Progressive Catholic views, marked as more flexible and liberal, challenge these beliefs and even cite equally authoritative teachings as references. While fundamentalist Catholics assert that teachings on RH are evil, more than a hundred respected Catholic university faculty members, among others, affirmed that Catholics could support RH in good conscience. Similar statements of support to the Bill came out from groups in other Catholic schools. Contrary to Fundamentalist Catholics ensuring obedience to the "natural law" as a Catholic duty, Progressive Catholics are exercising dissent, which is included in the Catechism (doctrinal manuals) of the Catholic Church and is deemed allowed on non-infallible papal teachings, such as contraception and homosexuality. Catholic moral theology advises that in a disputed moral issue, a Catholic may, in good conscience, follow a position, even though it is

espoused only by a minority of reputable moral theologians (concept of probabilism).

Public health policies are affected by fundamentalist Catholic teachings, such as the 1987 Constitution which enshrines the protection of the unborn from the moment of conception and also declares the separation of Church and State; the Natural Family Planning Only policy and banning of the emergency pill, Postinor, by the Department of Health under President Arroyo's administration; the banning of artificial contraceptives and condoms from 2000 to 2011 by local government officials in the executive and legislative branches based on "Pro-Life" values and teachings; and the Supreme Court's 2014 ruling on the "Pro-Life" challenge to the RH Law which altered the Law further to restrict contraceptive services to adolescents, allow the requirement of spousal consent and expand the meaning of "abortifacient" and "conscientious objection."

Catholic fundamentalist teachings negatively affected women and their families through the denial of RH information, commodities, and services—particularly family planning, condoms, post-abortion care, and safe abortion.

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*Read the full report here:*

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