WE will write about a polarizing measure that is now pending in Philippine Congress and is the subject of heated and contentious national debate that has been dividing Filipinos between those who are in favor and those who are against the proposed measure.

Popularly known as RH bill, it means Reproductive Health bill, which aims “to guarantee universal access to methods and information on birth control and maternal care.”

The bill mandates the Philippine Government to “promote, without bias, all effective natural and modern methods of family planning that are medically safe and legal.”

The RH bill has been introduced in both Houses of Philippine Congress in the midst of fast rising population in the native country which is now placed at 98 million.

At a birth rate of 1.97 percent, the Philippine population could reach 100 million by the end of next year.

A study says 44 percent or 43 million Filipinos live on less than $2 (P86) a day.
With that demographic backdrop, which places the Philippines as 12th most populous nation in the world, and studies which "show that rapid population growth exacerbates poverty while poverty spawns rapid population growth," a Reproductive Health bill has been introduced in the native country’s Legislature.

The RH bill, if it becomes law, aims for improved quality of life through a “consistent and coherent national population policy” with the end-goal of controlling the exploding Philippine population.

The Aquino Administration, some big names in Congress like Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago and Rep. Edcel Lagman and the civil society led by former President Fidel V. Ramos together with popular singer Lea Salonga and former Health Secretary Esperanza Cabral are in favor of the RH bill.

The Catholic Church, on the other hand, led by the influential Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) are sticking by the church doctrine on the sanctity of life.

One fundamental difference between the opposing groups is the “beginning of life” concept.

The Catholic Church believes that life formation begins the moment a male egg meets a female egg in the womb.

Hence, anything or any method that would stop such life formation process, like contraceptive, IUD, condom, abortion, etc., is a big NO, NO, and violates its doctrines.

The bishops have declared an “all-out-war” in opposing the RH bill by refusing to hold talks with President Benigno Aquino III, and by using the pulpits.

At this writing, the debate has turned sour and nasty.
The bishops threatened to rally its followers to stage civil disobedience.

The government retorted with threats of arrest and imprisonment.

One Filipino priest sadly wrote, “...(there is) sadness due to the realization that the official Church no longer stands with a united people but with one part of a nation divided...”

Rep. Manny Pacquiao has joined the debate upon his arrival in Manila last weekend when prodded by a priest during a mass in Quiapo church to say he was against the RH bill because “it was against the teachings of God.”

Sen. Santiago jokingly challenged boxing champ Manny P. to a fist fight because of the latter’s anti-RH position.

Even some members of the Catholic-based Couples for Christ in the United States have, on their own initiative, launched an Internet petition against the RH bill.

The position of the Church is contained in a pastoral letter issued recently by the CBCP. We want to quote parts of that letter below, which enumerate the arguments and specific objections and opinions of the bishops against the RH bill.

“Advocates contend that the RH bill promotes reproductive health. The RH bill certainly does not. It does not protect the health of the sacred human life that is being formed or born. The very name "contraceptive" already reveals the anti-life nature of the means that the RH bill promotes.

These artificial means are fatal to human life, either preventing it from fruition or actually destroying it...
“Advocates also say that the RH bill will reduce abortion rates. But many scientific analysts themselves wonder why prevalent contraceptive use sometimes raises the abortion rate. In truth, contraceptives provide a false sense of security that takes away the inhibition to sexual activity...

“Advocates moreover say that the RH bill will prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. This goes against the grain of many available scientific data. In some countries where condom use is prevalent, HIV/AIDS continues to spread. Condoms provide a false security that strongly entices individuals towards increased sexual activity, increasing likewise the incidence of HIV/AIDS...

“Advocates also assert that the RH bill empowers women with ownership of their own bodies. This is in line with the post-modern spirit declaring that women have power over their own bodies without the dictation of any religion. How misguided this so-called “new truth” is! For, indeed, as created by God our bodies are given to us to keep and nourish...

“Advocates also say that the RH bill is necessary to stop overpopulation and to escape from poverty. Our own government statistical office has concluded that there is no overpopulation in the Philippines but only the over-concentration of population in a number of urban centers...we must also consider the findings of a significant group of renowned economic scholars, including economic Nobel laureates, who have found no direct correlation between population and poverty. In fact, many Filipino scholars have concluded that population is not the cause of our poverty. The causes of our poverty are: flawed philosophies of development, misguided economic policies, greed, corruption, social inequities, lack of access to education, poor economic and social services, poor infrastructures, etc....”

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In light of all the above, we feel that both parties should sit down and conduct a continuing dialogue.

Each side should open itself to compromises.
Stubbornness, rigidity and tough talk are counterproductive.

The issues at hand are so important and critical to the future of the native country and its people, especially the poor and the faithful.

mcaball241@aol.com