Background:
- In 2014, the United Nations’ Population Fund gathered leadership from across religious traditions for a conference on the intersection of religion and women’s health and rights. It aimed to “reflect” on the links between the UN goal of securing universal reproductive rights and religious practices.
- Since 1983, the Catholic Church views abortion (beyond medically-necessary cases) as punishable by excommunication. However, the Church’s implementation of this rule varies greatly in the United States, even across similarly-principled states.

Key sources include:
- Theological perspectives, legal documents, academic analyses of historical and theological perspectives, and scholarly frameworks for international healthcare systems.

Research Questions:
- In the cases of South Africa and the United States, why does the Catholic Church take such a wide variety of stances on abortion, even in normatively-alike countries?
- How does this phenomenon affect the growing international healthcare system?

The United States: Conforming as a “Model Minority”
- In less than a century, American Catholics achieved enormous social mobility, moving from the uneducated, migrant class to the model religious minority.
- Catholics originated the mainstream anti-abortion movement in the United States, following Canon Law.
- In recent decades, the Church distanced itself from the U.S. anti-abortion movement, due to rising instances of violence, but still bears the brunt of the pro-abortion (or pro-choice) movement’s ire.

South Africa: The Most Powerful Refugees
- Catholics migrated to South Africa in order to escape religious conflicts in Europe.
- The Afrikaner Nationalist movement identified with Protestantism’s Calvinist sect, which therefore set the group at odds with the Catholic Church.
- The Church aligned itself with “the struggle” against Apartheid and by extension, a sociopolitical movement that accepts the right to abortion as articulated by the stances of leading groups such as the ANC and PNC.

“Not in our name should any mother die while giving birth … Sexual and reproductive health care are part of human rights.”
-United Nations Populations Fund 2014 Conference Report