

Pastor's Page

By Fr. George Welzbacher

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Several of you have asked for a copy of the homily that I preached at all of the Masses this past weekend in observance of the fortieth anniversary of the publication of *Humanae Vitae (Of Human Life)*, the encyclical issued by Pope Paul VI on July 25th, 1968. *Humanae Vitae* was a countercultural document, a manifesto in defense of the moral law that governs the proper use of the sexual power, the unitive power that helps to make husband and wife "one heart and soul"--Pope Paul's salute-and that is the sacred source of human life. While I have tried over the years to devote whatever time my competing obligations will allow for the organization of my thoughts for my weekend homilies, I have never written a word-for-word script for the homilies I have preached. Thus I have no copies of last weekend's homily to hand out. But since the fortieth anniversary of so important an encyclical as *Humanae Vitae* deserves better than to be passed over in silence in parish bulletins-and even though I already made an anticipatory comment on *Humanae Vitae* a couple of months ago in this column-I will do what I can to recapitulate here for those who have expressed an interest in the matter the essence of my remarks from the pulpit last weekend.

Back in 1968 when Pope Paul the Sixth issued his encyclical he knew very well that the world would react with derision and contempt to his reaffirmation of the age-old teaching of the Catholic Church that *contraception is an intrinsic evil, a grave disorder that violates God's plan for human cooperation in the creation of human life*. He may even have anticipated *that he would be charged by some with "a crime against humanity"* for encouraging the birth of children, given the hysteria that prevailed at the time about the "imminent" prospect of worldwide famine which supposedly was to begin as early as the next decade. *"In the 1970's and '80's millions will starve to death"-such, was the grim prediction of entomologist Paul Ehrlich in his best-selling propaganda tract The Population Bomb*, published in that very same year of 1968. A pseudo-scientific dogma widely accepted at the time held that planet Earth simply lacked the resources to provide sufficient food for the burgeoning population of the world and that in consequence radical measures were urgently needed to cap population at existing levels. *Contraception was thus promoted as the key to the world's survival*. China and to a lesser degree India enacted legislation that reflected that fear, while in the Western World contraception was promoted by opinion-shapers as each individual's importunate duty. Athelstan Spilhaus, dean of the University of Minnesota's prestigious School of Technology, went so far as to accuse Pope Paul of subverting the future well-being of humanity, and Dean Spilhaus' judgment resonated widely throughout this country and beyond. As I recall, officials both of the United Nations' World Health Organization and the highly regarded Club of Rome, a coalition of public figures whose recommendations ranked high in the estimation of the world's *intelligentsia*, condemned the pope's head-in-the-sand resistance, as they saw it, to the true interests of mankind. *All of this was utterly predictable.*

But what may have taken the gentle and saintly Pope Paul by surprise was the outright defiance of his teaching on the part of the clergy, by far too many priests and even by some bishops, and by a mixed bag of dissident theologians, sociologists, Catholic journalists and sundry other hangers on. Among those who come easily to mind are Charles Curran, Andy Greeley and Richard McCormick together with the mockers of papal authority who produced a daily serving of faith-corroding acid in the brand-new newspaper The National Catholic Reporter.

Pope Paul's unambiguous and courageous re-affirmation of the Church's age-old moral teaching was depicted as disloyalty to "the Spirit of Vatican II". Implicit in this theological revolt was the repudiation of the Holy Spirit's unerring guidance of Christ's Church "to the truth

forever" in accord with Christ's promise at the Last Supper (John, chapters 14, 15 and 16 passim). After all, it's logically impossible to hold at one and the same time that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, guides the Church and preserves it from error in whatever pertains to salvation while, without batting an eye, one denounces as erroneous the teaching proclaimed by the Church down through the ages that contraception is a grave disorder and that practicing contraception is a mortal sin, a sin, that is to say, that places the soul in danger of damnation.

(It's interesting to note, by the way, that the **16th century Protestant Reformers**, even as they were rejecting so much of Catholic doctrine, **insisted on retaining the Church's condemnation of contraception**. It was only fairly recently, beginning with the approval of contraception in 1930 by the Church of England and its Anglican offshoots, that the Protestant Churches began one by one to throw overboard what they previously had taught.)

In the late 1950's a new form of contraception became available: "The Pill." (In the U.S.A. its distribution had just become legal in 1960, shortly before the opening of the Second Vatican Council). With the emergence of this new phenomenon certain new questions arose. Precisely what was it that the Pill did? And was its interaction with a woman's hormonal system an intrinsically evil thing? After all, the Pill reportedly could be taken in order to regularize a woman's irregular cycle, which was judged by some to equate its use with that of other legitimate medications. Or did it simply offer a more subtle means of avoiding conception and was thus to be judged by the same moral standards that had always applied to traditional methods of artificial birth control? Proceeding with appropriate caution Pope Paul made the decision to listen to all sides in this new debate, while reserving **final** judgment to the authority that **he** possessed as Peter's Successor and thus the divinely confirmed guardian of the Church's doctrine. He appointed an international committee, drawn principally from the laity, to study this matter carefully with a view to proposing a recommendation (a non-binding recommendation, needless to say), while Pope Paul himself, in consultation with what today is known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, spent many, many hours in prayerful reflection on this new problematic. **After months of discussion and debate a majority of the committee voted to recommend approval of the Pill. Studying the rationale presented by the majority in justification of their proposal, Pope Paul found their reasoning logically unconvincing, and after yet further prayer he at last promulgated on July 25th, 1968 his own final judgment, accompanied by a statement of the reasons for that judgment, in the encyclical Humanae Vitae.**

Liberal members of the clergy who had taken Pope Paul's long pause before making his pronouncement as a sign that the Pill would be approved and had accordingly "jumped the gun" in assuring the laity that such approval was forthcoming, only to be contradicted when the judgment came, reacted with defiance, **publicly proclaiming their refusal to accept the judgment and urging the laity to follow them in open rebellion against papal authority. Large numbers of the laity heeded the rebels' call.** And with that began what quickly turned into a Second (and vastly more radical) Reformation, one in which **the rebels this time tried to stay WITHIN the Church while seeking to hollow out its doctrines FROM WITHIN.** For those who bought into their program the whole supernatural dimension of the Church would ultimately be jettisoned. in the interests of transforming the Church into an agency devoted mainly to the building of a better world.

The product of this rebellion is on display today in what describes itself as "progressive" Catholicism. "Progressive" Catholics may even go so far as to kiss the Pope's ring, but they pay little heed to what he says.

The consequences of the rejection of Humanae Vitae by multitudes of the world's once faithful Catholics are now everywhere to be seen. Europeans, by and large, or at least those living in the continent's most prosperous nations, have all but stopped having children. (Ireland and Poland are a case apart). Therefore to find workers in numbers sufficient to maintain their economy, they have had to open their doors to a flood of immigrants coming mostly from neighboring Muslim countries.

A few decades into the 21st century, unless native Europeans come to their senses, Europe's churches will be transformed into mosques. What Suleiman the Magnificent could not achieve by force of arms will take place, it seems, courtesy of the Pill.

Yet other effects subversive of the Common Good are equally visible, forty years on from 1968. *Divorce* is a fifty-fifty likelihood for marriages in our country today-though the divorce rate for couples using *natural* family planning is *vastly lower*-and this is not surprising. The habitual practice of contraception basically involves treating one's spouse as a means to one's own ends, as an instrument for one's own gratification, which means that one's spouse soon comes to be *perceived* as an *object rather than as a person to be revered and deeply loved*, to whom one gives one's entire self, including one's fertility, with nothing held back. In the Christian scheme marriage is a union of two *persons*, each of whom must accordingly be regarded as an end in his or her own right. When a spouse feels that he or she is being treated habitually as an object, it is difficult for love to survive. And when love dies, it usually isn't long before one or the other partner will start looking for an escape.

The spiral whirls on. As the divorce rate rises, more and more of our young adults, growing fearful of making a commitment from which it would be legally vexatious later on to withdraw, turn to the option of *cohabitation*. particularly when, thanks to the Pill, all the restrictions on one's freedom that having children imposes can easily be avoided. And when children do happen for whatever reason to come into the picture, in so precarious an arrangement as is cohabitation they will lack that sense of security to which they have a right and that can only be found when father and mother have committed themselves to each other for life by vows taken before Almighty God. And too often today, when cohabiting couples *have* children and then one of the parents, usually the boyfriend, walks out, the children left behind are abused and mistreated, sometimes savagely mistreated, by their mother's next live-in -"friend".

Unsurprisingly, too, *once the anti-child mindset has become deeply rooted through the habitual practice of contraception, when contraception unexpectedly fails, as it sometimes does, the resolve not to be encumbered by children moves on to the next level: abortion*. The dreadful plague of abortion has by now reached staggering proportions. *In the U.S.A. alone the blood of nearly fifty million innocent children has been spilled. That's the equivalent of roughly sixteen cities, each of them the size of the Greater Twin Cities. (Our metro area numbers some 2.8 million souls). And for many Americans this incredible blood-bath seems to be utterly untroubling, no "big deal" at all. Add the deadening of the social conscience to the list.*

Yet another consequence of the contraceptive mind is *the rampant rise of homosexuality throughout the Western world. Again this should be no surprise. There are after all no rational grounds for disapproval of homosexual behavior once one has endorsed contraception, since in endorsing contraception one must necessarily concede that the sexual power may habitually be used as an end in itself for the sake of the pleasure attached to its use with explicit repudiation of its procreative function*. Once one makes that concession, how can one argue convincingly that homosexuality is wrong? *And as sexual pleasure comes to be generally perceived as a goal to be pursued with no limitations of any kind* other than those imposed by one's own particular bent-many at least would still draw the line at rape (though even rape is now treated by certain media types as an appropriate subject for television comedy)--the sexualization of an entire culture will stimulate a hunger for more extreme gratifications in the world of fantasy, with ubiquitous *pornography*, vicious and unashamed, as this society's new hallmark.

But in terms of the eternal salvation of souls, ultimately what is worst of all is that the rejection of *Humanae Vitae* has led to a *calamitous erosion of faith, faith in the Gospel of Christ as well as in Christ's Church. Belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is one of the earliest casualties in a contraceptive culture*. There too, no surprise. If you have decided to do habitually what the Church has declared to be a mortal sin, and if, misled by the counsel of false prophets, you

nevertheless insist on presenting yourself for Holy Communion, the lingering reproaches of a vestigially Catholic conscience are most easily allayed by a denial that Christ is really there. ***And one after another the articles of a creed once cherished will begin to seem unreal. The supernatural virtue of faith, no longer nourished by a life lived habitually in the state of grace will begin to wither and ultimately will die. Massive apostasy follows on the heels of the widespread practice of contraception.***

"By their fruits you shall know them." The fruits of the contraceptive revolution point persuasively to the conclusion that Pope Paul the Sixth was right and the world was wrong when he warned in ***Humanae Vitae*** that evil is evil and will bring forth further evil, which forty years later is what has come to pass.