

'Humanae Vitae'

50 years on

This is what Pope Paul VI stated in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, published on July 25th 1968 in section 17:

'With the advent of artificial contraception, people should first consider how easy it will be for many to justify behaviour leading to marital infidelity or to a gradual weakening in the discipline of morals. Not much experience is needed to understand human weakness and to comprehend that human beings, especially the young, are so susceptible to temptation that they need to be encouraged to keep the moral law. It is wrong to make it easy for them to violate this law. Indeed it is to be feared that husbands who become accustomed to contraceptive practices will lose respect for their wives. They may come to disregard their wife's psychological and physical equilibrium and use their wives as instruments for serving their own desires. Consequently they will no longer view their wives as companions who should be treated with attentiveness and love.'

What is the key to this state of affairs that Saint Paul VI prophesied in 1968 and which we are seeing today? It is contraception, of course. Pope Paul VI saw this happening within marriage but we can see that in the present time more people are having a sexual relationship outside of marriage and that the institute of marriage itself is more under threat than ever before.

What is contraception? The oral contraceptive pill came on to the market in the 60's and was widely embraced as the answer to growing population, particularly in the third world countries and indeed aid to these countries is still given in conjunction with an aggressive policy on population control. IPPF - International Planned Parenthood Federation is given huge grants of taxpayer's money to promote condom use, abortion and sterilisation in countries who receive aid. The pill was also seen as a way to enable women to be less tied to the home and have the freedom to have fewer children and return to work. So what does the pill do?

Basically it mimics through artificial hormones the woman's menstrual cycle. It makes the woman's body think it is already pregnant, hence the side effects of increased irritability and depression, weight gain.

I've never seen the leaflet in the packet but I understand it has all the side effects listed including danger of blood clots, high blood pressure. It is designed to suppress ovulation and is a highly effective form of contraception – 99% method effective, 95% use effective. If there is ovulation, and the woman takes the contraceptive pill, her hormones are affected in such a way as to make the womb hostile, so that there can't be implantation But what it also does is to switch off the brain so that when a couple want a baby the brain doesn't always switch back on again and they are left with reduced fertility. That's becoming a growing problem and the wide use of the contraceptive is part of the problem. All cigarette packets these days carry a health warning. The same should apply to 'contraceptive packets'. Putting it bluntly, the contraceptive pill is hostile to a woman's reproductive system.

Dr Janet Smith writes:

'It was not until 1930 that the Anglican Church went on record as saying that contraception was permissible, for grave reasons, within marriage. Catholic Church has been "clear and constant" in its position on contraception, throughout its whole history. In the early sixties there were perceptions of a population problem and growing sentiments that it would be inhumane for the Church to continue with a "policy" that promoted large families. Feminists argued that not having children — would enhance access to careers. When 'Humanae Vitae' was released in July, 1968, it went off like a bomb. Soon theologians and eventually lay people were dissenting not only about contraception but also about homosexuality, masturbation, adultery, divorce and many other issues. The Church continually reiterates its opposition to contraception as a great moral wrong. I think the experience of the last many decades has revealed that the Church has been very wise on opposing contraception. Contraception facilitates the sexual revolution which leads to much unwanted pregnancy and abortion. It has made women much more open to sexual exploitation by men. The millions of abortions over the last decade and the phenomenal spread of AIDS alone indicate that we have serious problems with sexuality. In the 1930's Pope Pius XI stated in Casti Connubii: No reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose, sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.'

There is an unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the conjugal act, and both are inherent in the conjugal act. Sex is for babies and for bonding; if people are not ready for babies or bonding they ought not to be engaging in acts of sexual intercourse. The modern age tends to treat babies as burdens and not as gifts. We speak about "accidental pregnancies" as if getting pregnant were like getting hit by a car — some terrible accident has happened to us. But the truth is that if a pregnancy results from an act of sexual intercourse, this means that something has gone right, not that something has gone wrong. Babies are treated as an unwelcome intrusion on the sexual act. Women now take a "pill" to thwart their fertility, as if fertility were a disease against which we need a cure. Contraception treats the woman's body as if there were something wrong with it. The use of contraception suggests that God made a mistake in the way that He designed the body and that we must correct His error. Let us not fail to mention that many forms of contraception are abortifacients; The sexual act is meant to be an act of total self-giving and that in withholding their fertility from one another spouses are not giving totally of themselves. St John Paul 11 said 'that the ultimate reason for the contraceptive anti-life mentality is the absence of God in people's hearts'. They have lied with their bodies. One of the most certain ways to distinguish simple sexual attraction from love is to think about whether all you want from another person is sexual pleasure, or whether you would like to have a baby with him or her'.

"There are other devices and methods which have also been developed with contraception in mind: condoms, depo-provera injection – 1st introduced for those who couldn't be relied on to take their pills such as those with learning difficulties and now increasingly being used, especially those who have had an abortion already. So a contraceptive is something which works against conception, literally it translates 'against the beginning'. Do we have sympathy with the desire to limit the number of children in a family, as a woman to have the opportunity to go out to work? Of course. Freedom of choice is not confined to only certain members of society. In *Humanae Vitae* it is stated that it is the responsibility of the parents to choose and decide on the size of their family. But the Christian view differs from our culture's point of view, because we don't decide this alone, it is in prayerful union with our God that the Christian couple decides.