

## THE HOLY FATHER AND THE REGULATION OF BIRTH \*

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Since the moment when His Holiness Paul VI had promised on June 23, 1964 to provide a definitive statement on the Church doctrine on the regulation of birth, the whole world, and not only those who glory in the name "Christian," was pregnant with all kinds of expectations. As the years dragged by, the patient expectations have developed into painful anxieties until these erupted into a vociferous accusation of feet-dragging on the part of the Holy Father, or that His Holiness simply had no backbone. Worse,—the Pope was accused of having led the children of God into a state of confusion by too much dilly-dallying.

On the other hand, as soon as his encyclical finally came out on the 27th of July 1968, the Pope was immediately accused of reckless imprudence, of culpable untimeliness; and many others found it inexplicable that he had to come out at all with such a document.

In short, the Holy Father did not have any escape at all. Silence on his part would have spelled cut for Mother Church a spineless leadership. But precisely because he has chosen to speak out sans any ambiguity, the same Pope is now being branded as arbitrary, cruel; and that his encyclical is one of the most disastrous examples of papal weakness.

Worse still, had the Holy Father spoken in favor of artificial birth control, an avalanche of hilarious jubilation of even more people would have been inevitable. Those people would have been very eager to

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pounce upon the Pope, depicting him as a Church supreme leader that had collapsed from the sheer weight of public pressure at the expense of the traditional doctrine of Mother Church. From then on, how else can the faithful firmly believe what any Pope solemnly teaches and proclaims to be the doctrine on faith and morals? If one Pope can contradict another on the same doctrine through no less an instrument than an encyclical letter, then it was a most painful joke upon those Christians who kept the teachings of an encyclical with utmost reverence even until the recent past.

Going along the contention of many, the main issue is the intrinsic value and weight of an encyclical letter. Normally, the primary object of an encyclical is not to define a dogma or the faith of the Catholic Church. This is the proper object of what is technically called the "extraordinary magisterium of the Church." This extraordinary teaching of the Church enjoys, without any reservation, the grace of infallibility. Namely, the ecumenical council and/or when the Pope speaks "ex cathedra."

The proper object of the "ordinary magisterium" of the Church is to restate, diffuse, defend or apply the *infallible teachings* of the "extraordinary magisterium". The encyclical letters are the usual means and the highest expression by which the Popes exercise the "ordinary magisterium" of the Church.

To the extent, therefore, that an encyclical letter restates the infallible teachings of the Church, that particular portion of the letter enjoys definitely the grace of infallibility. On the other hand, to the extent that other portions of an encyclical explain, develop, apply to the problems of the day, or use them as a sure criterion in the condemnation of errors, such portions of an encyclical enjoy at least the special assistance of the Holy Spirit in which the supernatural gift of prudence plays a decisive part.

In short, an encyclical letter can by no means be considered an expression of mere personal opinion that can be held or rejected at will by any Catholic. Thus, even when not binding as to faith in all its entirety, the teachings of an encyclical are all directly or indirectly related to faith or morals by the supreme teaching authority and to reject them

can make any Catholic guilty of grave temerity—which, of course, is sinful. A Catholic must give internal assent to such statements of the Church and external obedience. Mere silence is not enough.

Referring to the encyclical "Humanæ Vitæ," some theologians argue against its teaching on birth regulation by the contention that the document itself is not clothed with infallibility. They seem to ignore the fact that the main teaching in this encyclical is clearly a restatement of the solemn pronouncement of the Second pastoral constitution of the Church in the Modern World, regarding the nature of marriage and conjugal love.

The same encyclical merely brings into clear focus the solemn pronouncement of Vatican II when it states that while "the parents themselves, and no one else, should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God," it continues to say emphatically that "in their manner of acting, the spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel." (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50). And again, Vatican II solemnly teaches that the "sons of the Church may not undertake methods of birth control which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of the divine law." (*Idem*, no. 51)

At any rate, it would be interesting to know how these same theologians would have reacted had the Holy Father clearly spoken "ex cathedra" regarding the same subject matter. But it would not be hard to guess this, should we consider that the number is increasing of those theologians who now downgrade even some dogmatic teachings of the Church.

It is alarming to take note of those sons of God who seemingly desire that the great progress of science and knowledge must replace the extraordinary and ordinary Magisterium of the Church, as well as its supreme teaching authority on matters of faith and morals vested in the Holy Father by Christ Himself.

Other theologians even question the veracity of the doctrine enunciated by the Pope in the said encyclical. Would they want us to believe

that God has suddenly shifted into a splinter group of theologians the sure and authentic guidance for the faithful towards the fountain of truth and morals? I hope they do not yet claim infallibility for themselves! Then, why the temerity of guiding the flock against the teaching of the Holy Father, when, after all, the opposing opinion they are espousing might also be a mistake? Is this not tantamount to the blind leading the blind?

Why complain of imprudence and arrogance on the part of the Pope, as is being done when he is said to have espoused a doctrine beyond the sphere of infallibility, while in the same breath we arrogate unto ourselves the espousal of an opposite doctrine about which we cannot claim infallibility?

Verily, should we allow this trend of thought, necessarily there shall be as many popes as there are theologians of diverse thinking.

Indeed, the painful pinings and lamentations of some of our beloved brethren against the insistence of Mother Church on her traditional teachings are an eloquent proof that religious freedom and individual conscience without a supreme visible head and teaching authority can only lead to anarchy and utter confusion.

In vain shall one try to bring to naught the prayer of Christ, "that all may be one." (Jn 13; 17). This prayer inexorably shall come true, as it has already, at least in the sense that in so far as the genuine sons of God are concerned, "in the field of morals as well as in dogma, all should attend to the Magisterium of the Church, and all should speak the same language." (*Humanae Vitae*, n. 28).

Going back to the specific doctrine of the said encyclical, the Pope simply explains without any ambiguity, among other teachings, the following:

1. "The problem of birth... is to be considered, beyond partial perspectives — whether of the biological or psychological, demographic or sociological orders — in the light of an integral vision of man and of his vocation, not only his natural and earthly, but also his supernatural and eternal vocation."

For "what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, only to lose his own soul?" After all, "not by bread alone can man live."

2. The true characteristics of genuine conjugal love, namely, that it must be fully human, total, faithful and exclusive, as well as fecund.
3. The exact meaning of "responsible parenthood" and its relationship towards God, towards the spouses themselves, towards the family and towards society, "in a correct hierarchy of values."
4. The two inseparable meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning.
5. The illicit ways of regulating birth, to wit: direct interruption of the generative process already begun; directly willed and procured abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons; direct sterilization, whether perpetual or temporary, whether of the man or of the woman; finally, "every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible."
6. The licit means of birth regulation; namely, the "therapeutic means truly necessary to cure diseases of the organism," and the recourse to the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions.

We shall not be honest should we omit the most commonly recalled objections to the papal encyclical, namely, that it offers no solution to the problem of population explosion, nor to the poverty of the vast masses who simply cannot afford the bringing up and education of their children.

With regard to the first objection, namely, the population explosion, I beg to deny its complete validity. In the first place, there are eminent scientists as well who maintain that the world's birth rate is bound to level off with the death rate in the not distant future. In fact, too, several members of the United Nations Population Commission, in their February 1959 meeting at Geneva, have stressed the opinion that because population situations and trends vary a great deal, even from a purely demographic point of view, "predictions cannot be made safely for more than ten or fifteen years ahead."

Thus, no less than a Harvard University professor, Edward M. East, predicted in 1923 that the United States population by 1964 would

be 214,000,000, a population "beyond the maximum agricultural possibilities set by the calculations made a few pages before." (Prof. John T. Noonan, Jr. — *Contraception*, p. 486)

It is easy to get a false impression if we consider only the black spots of the world population. The same can be true if density population or purely mathematical projections be our sole yardstick.

Thus, when in 1965 I was in Bombay, India, one would not have failed to see how the countless of its 4 million teeming population who were living in sub-human conditions, could not have dismayed the stoutest of heart. And yet, a mere twenty minutes auto ride outside the city will bring one into vast tracks of land, practically uncultivated and uninhabited.

As of 1963, India had a density population of 308 people per square mile; the Philippines, 205 people; and Japan, 627 people per square mile. But then, New York has 22,000 to the square mile, while Monaco bulges with a 40,000 per square mile. Yet, no one would shout "population explosion" within these two cities in the sense in which it is commonly understood. Conversely, no one would similarly scream before a square mile of desert with only one inhabitant, even if this one be dying of hunger. (A. McCormack, M.H.M., *The Population Explosion and World Hunger*) We might well add that there are only six persons per square mile in New Mexico!

Holland is only as big as our island of Samar; but the former's about 1 million population is among the healthiest and economically soundest in the whole world.

World renowned experts caution us from making extreme conclusions. World population should not be viewed solely through mathematical projections. People, space and food, as well as scientific advances, particularly in the industrial and agricultural fields, need be also considered, aside from social, psychological, cultural, political, regional and religious considerations.

With regard to the second objection, namely, that the encyclical is almost cynical about the poverty that weighs upon the masses of people, particularly in the developing countries, I beg to disagree.

Facing this problem squarely, Paul VI quotes no less than the famous "Mater et Magistra" of Pope John XXIII, f.m., saying that no solution to these difficulties is acceptable "which does violence to man's essential dignity" and is based only "on an unutterly materialistic conception of man himself and of his life. The only possible solution to this question is one which envisages the social and economic progress, both of individuals and of the whole of human society, and which respects and promotes true human values." Having recalled his equally famous encyclical "Populorum Progressio," Pope Paul VI continues: "Neither can one, without grave injustice, consider divine Providence to be responsible for that depends, instead, on a lack of wisdom in government, on an insufficient sense of social justice, on selfish monopolization, or again on blame-worthy indolence in confronting the efforts and the sacrifices necessary to ensure the raising of living standards of a people and of all its sons." (*Humanae Vitae*, no 23)

In short, the Holy Father suggests that poverty must be attacked through communal efforts, wisdom and sacrifices of individuals, of Governments, and of communities. It seems clear that we prefer an impoverished people provided it be rich at least and sound in its human dignity, just as our nationalists would prefer a Philippines rich in honor and dignity to a country that is beggarly and is bankrupt of sovereignty.

We also would like to point out what seems to be conveniently overlooked by many.

I refer to the propensity of many well-intentioned social crusaders, particularly those belonging to the upper class of society, the propensity, namely, of imposing or transplanting into the minds of the poor the anxieties and sophisticated concern of those people who, precisely, should not need birth control. In their great haste through high-powered propaganda of those means which are considered by the Church as illicit and immoral, I sincerely hope that my fear is farfetched that such noble crusaders might be unwittingly allowing themselves to become tools of instigation instead of genuine education, of upheaval, rather than of upliftment. There is no question here of riding on the crest of ignorance, nor of wilful hiding from the masses proper family education.

But let me hazard a safe guess that most of the poor who are genuine, albeit, simple Christians, find in their children true blessings of

God. Too, that they find their children to be means of comfort and consolation rather than unwelcome burdens. The under-privileged in the rural areas who cannot afford helpers and have no running water, electricity, gas stoves or farm equipment, will naturally find relief in their children, who, even at a tender age, already do all sorts of errands for their parents.

If through high-powered propaganda we shall hasten much too quickly general family limitation among the poor masses, they might realize too soon that we have robbed them of their ordinary means of security, while they burn with envy of those in urban areas who have all the conveniences of life.

Is it not significant that the countries that are most vocal against the papal encyclical happen to be the most affluent and sophisticated?

There seems to be a need of soul-searching among the highly educated and high-society people who frown upon the encyclical in behalf of the poor. Is it not possible that behind all this there lurks the desire of the rich to practice for themselves artificial birth control for worldly reasons?

There seems to be the conviction that artificial birth control through the "cafeteria system" of peddling all kinds of artificial means is the best and surest way to uplift the economy. Yet, eminent economists like Prof. Collin Clark, are just as emphatic in the assertion that the economy of a country will be adversely affected where birth control is universally practised. Social security conscious countries will soon enough be spending much more in pensions for the aged than the income expected from a drastically depleted younger generation.

Pills and IUDS are relatively young. Until the present the World Health Organization must have serious reasons for not having come out with any statement on them, so far. They have been extensively and intensively introduced into Puerto Rico only since 1963. They were approved for marketing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration only since 1960. Already there are rumblings about the ill-effects of such goods. A Canadian scientist has announced some findings among pill-takers of having become less womanly.

Obviously, it is too soon to sing the glories of such means. The devil might yet have his last laugh, to say the least. Certainly, prudence should be given more importance here.

But not to prolong this discourse, we kindly recall to memory the teaching of Vatican II as a reminder to all Sons of God, that holiness is a calling not only for the clergy and the religious, but for every baptized person. And the path to holiness and to one's salvation is not bedecked with all roses. The crown of eternal glory must be won through self-mastery and self-oblation. To the brave and only to those who persevere until the end, to them alone shall the gates of Heaven be opened.

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