



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B- 29<sup>th</sup> July 2018 Wadebridge**

*Readings: 2 Kings 4:42-44, Psalm 144, Paul 4:1-6, John 6: 1-15*

This week sees the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Papal encyclical, 'Humanae Vitae'. Written by Blessed Pope Paul VI at the beginning of the moral confusion and sexual revolution that has continued to wreak havoc on our culture ever since, it rapidly became, to quote a conservative commentator, 'the most vilified act of the Magisterium in papal history'. It was the long awaited result of profound post-conciliar study on the value and transmission of human life. Ever since it has been caricatured as a ban on condoms and the Pill.

That it was received with surprise and disappointment in western culture can be seen, in the short term, by the instant disobedient response of some national episcopates and, in the long term, by the collapsing birthrate in many otherwise historically Catholic countries. It was widely condemned in the secular media as the counsel of perfection of an elderly celibate who could not hope to understand sexual relationships. Wounded by the savagery of the response, though he reigned a further ten years, the document would be the last encyclical of this quiet but remarkable pontiff.

Humanae Vitae is a remarkable document and is about much more than contraception. It dwells, at some length, on the nature of marriage. No

Christian teaching has ever approved intercourse outside of this sacramental bond. *Humanae Vitae* responds to Natural Law (a subject now exiled from many post-modern philosophy departments) in declaring marriage to be necessarily faithful, unitive and open to life, procreative. It defends the dignity of women and asserts the need for men to respect that God given gift. It sees the piecemeal detachment of these qualities as fraught with danger for the future of the family and society.

It is also worth remembering that Christian teaching on the subject of contraception had been consistent from earliest times. It was opposed. The first crack in the wall appeared at the Anglican Lambeth Conference in 1930 where the condemnations of 1917, describing contraception as 'demoralising to character and hostile to national welfare', morphed into limited permission according 'Christian principles' (not defined) but never for 'selfishness, luxury or convenience'.

The greatest enthusiasts were the eugenicists, like Marie Stopes, who wanted to improve the stock by stopping breeding by the unfit. (Stopes – the great family planning guru, disinherited her son for marrying a woman with poor eyesight.)

Paul VI saw considerable dangers in the radical detachment of marital intimacy from its primary (though not sole) purpose.

The contraceptive society would, he prophesied, have the following consequences:

- 1)The pretence that sexual intimacy could be inconsequential would lead to widespread marital infidelity. (Divorce has tripled since 1968. Almost half of all marriages now end in divorce. That is the tip of the iceberg. Among the unmarried, promiscuity is epidemic.)
- 2)The casual availability of contraceptives would lead to the corruption of the young. (A teacher cannot give your daughter a paracetamol for a

headache but a state operative can arrange an abortion for her behind your back. Many youth workers are expected to dispense condoms to their charges. Thus, under peer pressure, what 'self respecting' young man would want to be thought of as not needing them?)

3) 'A man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.'  
(That's a pretty accurate description of the rampant promiscuity that followed the sexual revolution and continues to haunt modern relationships. And of the burgeoning of the massive pornography industry. It's a paragraph that the 'Me too' movement might care to read.)

4)The use, by the state, of such methods to solve economic problems.  
(Who can forget the brutal tyranny of China's 'one child' policy or India's rewarding sterilisation of the poor with a transistor radio? The massive disjunction between male and female population, caused by selective abortion, in favour of male offspring can be a precursor to imperial expansion or war.)

5) While the Church warned of the dangers of abortion, the eugenicists argued that mass contraception would mean 'every child is a wanted child'. Fifty years on the facts are in. The abortion numbers are six times higher than the worst estimates of 1967 despite the total availability of contraceptives. The much heralded protection afforded by the condom (read the small print) depended on its 'proper use'. In circumstances that militate against considered rational behaviour.....the effectiveness falls to 80%.  
To put it bluntly you have better odds playing Russian roulette.

6) To cap it all, the great dream of the eugenicists has utterly failed. The poor have not stopped having babies. They like families. But the sophisticated, economically comfortable societies have. Convinced of a neo- Malthusian nightmare, stripped of religious hope, wedded to self gratification and averse to the sacrifice and joy of family life, much of our continent has entered a demographic winter. The catastrophically low birth rates in much of Europe are only sustained at all by the fecundity of immigrant families, God bless them. Without massive influxes to places like Germany there won't be enough workers to pay the pensions of the elderly natives. The UN projections up to 2050 are terrifying. The contraceptive society has failed.

There is much more - but this is enough.

In 1968 when Blessed Paul VI published *Humanae Vitae*, it was an uncomfortable document for many Christians, not just Catholics. Fifty years on we see how devastatingly accurate his analysis was, how deeply rooted in the tradition of the Faith. We see also the terrible price our family life, our communities, our nation and our continent have paid, in human lives, for our corporate and cavalier dismissal of the wisdom of the Church.