



*Editor's note: July this year marks the 40th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's great 1968 encyclical, "Humanae Vitae" ("Of Human Life"). It also marks the 10th anniversary of Archbishop Chaput's 1998 pastoral letter on the same subject, "Of Human Life." Both of these important and very readable documents are available for download at www.archden.org. We also highly recommend Mary Eberstadt's article, "The Vindication of Humanae Vitae," in the August/September 2008 issue of *First Things*. The archbishop's column this week is adapted from his 1998 pastoral letter.*

In presenting his encyclical, "Humanae Vitae," Paul VI cautioned against four main problems that would arise if Catholic teaching on the regulation of births was ignored. First, he warned that the widespread use of contraception would lead to "conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality." Exactly this has happened. Few would deny that the rates of abortion, divorce, family breakdown, wife and child abuse, venereal disease and out of wedlock births have all massively increased since the mid-1960s. Obviously, the birth control pill has not been the only factor in this unraveling. But it has played a major role. In fact, the cultural revolution since 1968, driven at least in part by transformed attitudes toward sex, would not have been possible or sustainable without easy access to reliable contraception. In this, Paul VI was right.

Second, he also warned that man would lose respect for woman and "no longer [care] for her physical and psychological equilibrium," to the point that he would consider her "as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion." In other words, according to the pope, contraception might be marketed as liberating for women, but the real "beneficiaries" of birth control pills and devices would be men. [Four] decades later, exactly as Paul VI suggested, contraception has released males—to a historically unprecedented degree—from responsibility for their sexual aggression. In the process, one of the stranger ironies of the contraception debate of the past generation has been this: Many feminists have attacked the Catholic Church for her alleged disregard of women, but the Church in "Humanae Vitae" identified and rejected sexual exploitation of women years before that message entered the cultural mainstream. Again, Paul VI was right.

Third, the Holy Father also warned that widespread use of contraception would place a "dangerous weapon ... in the hands of those public authorities who take no

heed of moral exigencies.” As we have since discovered, eugenics didn’t disappear with Nazi racial theories in 1945. Population control policies are now an accepted part of nearly every foreign aid discussion. The massive export of contraceptives, abortion and sterilization by the developed world to developing countries—frequently as a prerequisite for aid dollars and often in direct contradiction to local moral traditions—is a thinly disguised form of population warfare and cultural re-engineering. Again, Paul VI was right.

Fourth, Pope Paul warned that contraception would mislead human beings into thinking they had unlimited dominion over their own bodies, relentlessly turning the human person into the object of his or her own intrusive power. Herein lies another irony: In fleeing into the false freedom provided by contraception and abortion, an exaggerated feminism has actively colluded in women’s dehumanization. A man and a woman participate uniquely in the glory of God by their ability to co-create new life with Him. At the heart of contraception, however, is the assumption that fertility is an infection which must be attacked and controlled, exactly as antibiotics attack bacteria. In this attitude, one can also see the organic link between contraception and abortion. If fertility can be misrepresented as an infection to be attacked, so too can new life. In either case, a defining element of woman’s identity—her potential for bearing new life—is recast as a weakness requiring vigilant distrust and “treatment.” Woman becomes the object of the tools she relies on to ensure her own liberation and defense, while man takes no share of the burden. Once again, Paul VI was right.

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