

Saint Thomas Aquinas

Cathedral

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Artificial Contraception

Recently, the blogosphere has been ablaze with discussion, even by non-Catholics, of the trenchant observations that Pope Paul VI made in his 1968 encyclical *Humanae vitae*. Although it would be too much to hope that recent interest would lead to a general critique of artificial contraception, recent developments represent a remarkable shift of thought, considering the extreme ridicule to which the Church's teaching on birth control has been subjected over the years since *Humanae vitae* was promulgated. Everyone has heard the demeaning jokes directed against the Roman Pontiffs: "You no play-a da game, you make-a da rules!" and the bullying of Catholics who take this teaching seriously: "What do you call a woman who practices natural family planning? – Mommy." But

the Church knows perfectly well that its sacred and certain doctrine *is not* popular and *is* correct. The simple truth is that you cannot detach human sexual intimacy from the discipline of childbearing and childrearing without creating catastrophic social conditions that end up degrading humanity as a whole.

Pope Paul VI articulated four concerns about the use of artificial contraception: (1) a general lowering of moral standards throughout society; (2) a rise in infidelity; (3) a lessening of respect for women by men; (4) and the coercive use of reproductive technologies by governments."

In the course of the last decades, the prognosis embodied in these papal teachings has been largely corroborated in sociological research. In 2008, Mary

Eberstadt, of Stanford's Hoover Institute, pointed out that, while it is Catholic thinkers who have connected the latest empirical evidence to the defense of *Humanae Vitae's* predictions, during those same forty years most of the experts actually producing the empirical data have been social scientists operating in the secular realm. As sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox, of the University of Virginia, emphasized in a 2005 essay: "The leading scholars who have tackled these topics are not Christians, and most of them are not political or social conservatives. They are, rather, honest social scientists willing to follow the data wherever it may lead." Clearly, there's a lot here for Catholics and the world at large in 2012 to consider.

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