

Humanae vitae and Canada

Forty years later



Msgr Vincent Foy

Msgr. Vincent Foy of Toronto, now aged 92, concludes his lifelong championship of the papal position on birth control with a final article about the Pope Paul VI's great 1968 encyclical Humanae vitae and the reaction to it in Canada. Just recently Pope Benedict XVI declared the encyclical to be "as relevant as ever." "The truth expressed in 'Humanae vitae' does not change," he affirmed. "Quite the contrary, in the light of new scientific discoveries its teaching becomes more relevant and stimulates reflection on the intrinsic values it possesses."

Forty years have passed since Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) gave us the gift of the encyclical *Humanae vitae*. Signed on the Feast of St. James, July 25, 1968, it was published on July 29, 1968. It was addressed to Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops and all other local Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Holy See and all the Clergy and Faithful of the Catholic world, and to all Men of Good Will.

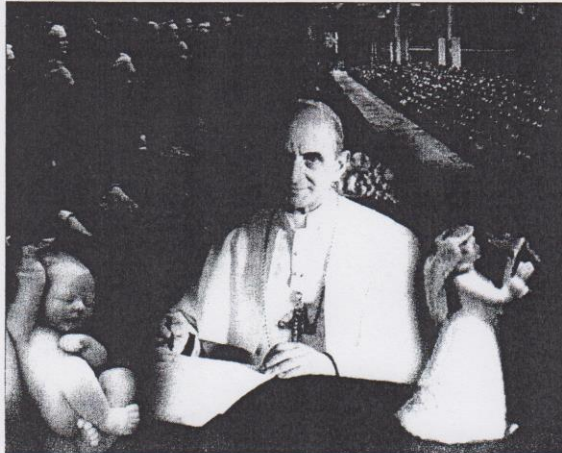
Three times in the encyclical the Holy Father invoked the Petrine or divine authority (n. 4, 6, and 31). He said that he intended to give his reply to the grave questions concerning the regulation of births "by virtue of the mandate entrusted to Us by Christ" (n. 6).

Tragically, the authority of Christ was not enough. For forty years rebellion has been widespread in Canada. For forty years we have experienced the deadly fruit of turning away from Christ in the most critical area of life and marital love.

This fortieth anniversary is a suitable time to reflect on how the rejection of *Humanae vitae* came about, to consider the malign results of that rejection and the way back to the Truth. Pope John Paul II called dissent from *Humanae vitae* the "Great Lie." This lie remains in Canada like a festering, cancerous wound. Can it be cured?

The slippery slope

It will help to discover the way back to the truth about love and life if we first look backwards.



All through the centuries the Church remained firm and constant in teaching that contraception was a grave attack on human life. In his encyclical on marriage of Dec. 31, 1930, Pope Pius XI referred to this teaching "which has been handed down from the beginning until now." He called contraception: "this abominable crime" and "this infamous stain."

During the depression of the 1930s, the majority of Catholics remained faithful to the Church's teaching. That teaching was confirmed universally by bishops, priests, theologians and teachers.

All that changed in the 1960s after the advent of the birth control Pill. Still there was no change in the Church's

teaching. Pope Pius XII condemned the contraceptive use of the Pill on Sept. 12, 1958. In Vatican Council II married people were taught that in their behaviour "They may not simply follow their own fancy but must be ruled by conscience and conscience ought to be conformed to the law of God in the light of the teaching authority of the Church" (*Gaudium et spes* n.50). Pope Paul VI confirmed the teaching of the Church in 1964 and 1966, calling it a time of study and not of doubt.

The tragedy began when many bishops were seduced into listening to errant theologians rather than the voice of Christ spoken to them through His Vicar. They evidently forgot that theology is not the Faith. Theology can seduce, betray and deceive, as it did through the mouths of many. Now we consider how the betrayal of Truth came about in Canada. We examine the highlights, or rather the lowlights, of that betrayal.

Cardinal Emile Leger (Archbishop of Montreal)

The Church in Canada was already heading down the slippery slope to dissent at Vatican II. Influenced by Cardinal Suenens, on Oct. 30, 1964 Cardinal Leger said: "Confessors are assailed by

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doubts. They no longer know what to answer." He also said "Fecundity is an obligation. But we should concentrate less on the fecundity of each sexual act and more on the totality of married life... We must affirm that the intimate union of the couple finds its legitimacy in itself when it is not directed toward procreation."

The book *Contraception and Holiness*

That same year, 1964, a book was published by Herder and Herder, which further underlined that all was not right in Canada. It is called *Contraception and Holiness* and called for a change in the Church's teaching on contraception. Among the contributors were three Canadian professors at St. Michael's College: Gregory Baum, OSA, Stanley Kutz, CSB, and Leslie Dewart.

The Toronto conference on the Theology of Renewal

A congress on the Theology of the Renewal of the Church was held in Toronto in 1967, in honour of Canada's centenary. It was heavily loaded with speakers who were agitating for change in the Church's teaching against contraception. Among these were Cardinal Emile Leger, Cardinal Leo Suenens, Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, Karl Rahner, SJ, Bernard Häring, CSsR, Bernard Lonergan, SJ, E n d a M c D o n a g h (called by some the "Maynooth Pope of Modernism"), and Elizabeth Anscombe (the title of her talk was "You can have sex without children: Christianity and the New Order"). Fr. Häring saw the teaching against contraception as coming from a pre-scientific mind appropriate to a former society. No speaker defended the Church's teaching against contraception

or sterilization. Thus again, Canada was being led down the slippery slope towards the contraceptive mentality.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB)

On Sept. 9, 1966, the CCCC B addressed a document *To the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and Welfare: on Change in the Law of Contraception*. The bishops said in part: "We consider Article 150, which forbids giving information about contraception, as well as the sale or distribution of contraception an inadequate law today... a large number of our fellow citizens believe that this law violates their rights to be informed and helped towards responsible parenthood in accordance with their personal beliefs."

They went so far as to say "We do not conceive it our duty to oppose appropriate changes in Article 150 of the Criminal Code. Indeed, we could easily envisage an active co-operation and even leadership on the part of lay Catholics to change a law which under present conditions they might well judge to be harmful to public order and the common good."

This incredible betrayal of Catholic teaching on the intrinsic evil of contraception was a factor in the passing of a bill by the Liberal government under Pierre Trudeau, legalizing contraception (June 27, 1969).

The Canadian Federation for Sexual Health commented: "Surprisingly, the Canadian Catholic Conference of the Roman Catholic Church did not

oppose the law, stating that Canada was a pluralistic society, but that Roman Catholics should not practise contraception." The CCCC B did not affirm that no one should practise contraception. In other words, they failed to affirm that the law against contraception was a divine

natural law binding all.

Archbishop Aurèle Plourde of Ottawa

In August of 1968, Archbishop Plourde of Ottawa issued a pastoral letter on *Humanae vitae*. He said that individuals have the right "to reach a judgement different from that of the Holy Father."

Gregory Baum

In the summer of 1968, Gregory Baum kept up his campaign against *Humanae vitae* through lectures, writings and interviews. He said Catholics could use contraception in good conscience. He attacked the Pope for going against "the Christian experience of vast numbers of Catholics and the witness of other Christian Churches."

Pressure groups

After *Humanae vitae*, pressure groups sprung up like mushrooms. Among these were the Western Conference of priests, (armed with a letter of support for dissent by Fr. Bernard Lonergan, SJ); the Catholic Physicians Guild of Manitoba; Catholics in Dialogue, the Canadian Institute of Theology and 58 "intellectuals" of St. Francis Xavier University ("the cream of Antigonish" their bishop said.) The chant of all was "Give us freedom of conscience."

Most significant and most disgraceful was that fifteen directors of the departments of the Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops betrayed their offices and signed what one could call a "Pre-Winnipeg" Statement. They asked for a "Vatican II approach." They said that a large number of Canadian priests were agonizing "in acute crises of conscience" because of the "apparent directives of *Humanae vitae*." In all my experience I never met a priest suffering from such an acute crisis of conscience.

So the stage was set for the great Winnipeg betrayal of the Catholics of Canada.

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The Winnipeg disaster

The slippery slope led down to the Winnipeg disaster of Friday Sept. 27, 1968. On that date the Canadian bishops, gathered in Winnipeg for their annual meeting, published a Statement on *Humanae vitae*. After denying the sufficiency of grace for some (n.17) the bishops embraced the error of allowing married couples to break God's law by the subterfuge of the subjective conscience. They said there were circumstances in which the couples "may be safely assured that whoever honestly chooses that course which seems right to him does so in good conscience" (n.26).

In 1969, Father John Flanagan, founder of the International Catholic Priests' Association, wrote a perceptive analysis of this device. He said "Among the many attempts to create a loophole through which the dissident cleric or lay person endeavours to escape from the moral obligation of accepting the Papal decision on birth control, recourse to (pseudo) conscience, is the most widespread and deceptive. It is an escape hatch through which bishops, priests, and lay folk still try to come to the top through their sunken hopes that the law against contraception would be changed." So it was and is in Canada.

The Moloch generation

In the book of *Leviticus* (18:21) we read "You shall not give any of your children to devour them by fire to Moloch, and so profane the Name of your God." In the same book (20:2) we read: "The Lord said to Moses: 'Say to the people of Israel: any man of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his children to Moloch shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones.'"

We do not know how many children were thrown into the fire to appease the pagan god Moloch. We do know that the number pales into insignificance beside the numbers now sacrificed to the god of lust, the new Moloch. Every year millions

are ripped apart in the womb or through the Pill or other abortifacient devices and sent to sewer tombs. It is a horror crying to Heaven for vengeance. "Where is your brother?" said God to Cain after he had slain his brother Abel. "Where are your brothers and sisters?" says God to us today. Can we not call this the Moloch Generation and is not Canada a fully qualified member?

The worshippers of the god of Lust have begotten a long list of illegitimate offspring. These are the fruits of which contraception is the root: fornication, adultery, homosexual conduct, broken marriages, divorce, degradation of women, abortion, pornography, lack of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, loss of Faith and many more. Moloch reigns!

Loss of the sense of sin

A characteristic of the Moloch Generation is a loss of the sense of sin. If one can absolve oneself of guilt in practising contraception, why not from other breaches of the moral law? Are such breaches not progeny of the same parent: sex without responsibility?

The contraceptive mentality brought with it a grave depreciation of the evil of killing or preventing offspring. Even in the past century contraception was sometimes a reserved sin; that is, a confessor had to apply to his bishop for the special faculty to absolve from it and for the penance to be imposed for what is a heinous crime.

Compare recent penances for contraceptive activity with that of past centuries. Note also that in former centuries the penances were often the same for contraception and abortion. Did they not both share a willingness to sacrifice a human person to lust? We know how seriously anti-life activity was considered when we

read ancient penitentials: books which contained suggested penances to be given by confessors. One Frankish Penitential (c.1067) recommends a ten-year fast for those who took potions to avoid conception or to procure abortion. Another penitential of about the same time suggests a

fast of two years on bread and water.

Another disastrous effect of self-absolution has been the virtual disappearance of the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation.

Before the prevalence of dissent most Catholics went to Confession frequently, often monthly or weekly. In the encyclical *Mystici corporis* of 1943, Pope Pius XII pointed out the many advantages of frequent confession of devotion; i.e., when there was no serious sin. Children were trained in frequent confession in all Catholic schools.

Now in Canada the majority of Catholics who practise contraception and still go to Mass also receive Holy Communion.

The way back

As Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote in a private letter: "It is very difficult to put right what was once put wrong." So it is with dissent from *Humanae vitae*. It is very difficult to replace the self-centred mentality of the Moloch generation with the self-giving mindset which leads to the truth about love and life. We have a guide in the third section of *Humanae vitae* called "Pastoral Directives." Reflecting on these directives one could suggest the following ways to resuscitate the dying Church in Canada.

Bishops

In *Humanae vitae*, n.30, there is an exhortation to bishops. There we read "Work ardently and incessantly for the safeguarding and holiness of marriage -

"It is very difficult to put right what was once put wrong." So it is with dissent from *Humanae vitae*."

-J.H. Newman

Consider this mission as one of your most urgent responsibilities at the present time."

This exhortation tells us that it is a most urgent responsibility of our Canadian bishops to seek to undo the betrayal of the Winnipeg Statement. Canadian Catholics have a right to ask their bishops for a revocation of that Statement which has led to what has been called a "madhouse of subjectivism."

In concrete terms it is not defiance of our bishops but love of the episcopacy which leads Catholics to ask our bishops to restore orthodoxy. This includes teaching in our schools and universities and seminaries. It includes correcting errors in marriage preparation courses. It includes stopping sterilization and prescription of contraceptive means in our Catholic hospitals. It includes working towards recall of intrinsically immoral civil legislation. It includes proper formation of confessors.

Great indeed would be the gratitude of Catholics if our bishops had the humility, courage and Faith to revoke the Winnipeg Statement. They would be following the bishops in the Philippines and the Austrian bishops. The latter announced on March 29, 1988, that they were recalling their Statement of 1968 and were in complete harmony with the teaching of *Humanae vitae* and the teaching of *Familiaris consortio* and the teaching on human life of Pope John Paul II.

Priests

Vital as auxiliaries of our bishops are our priests in the effort to find the way back. The Holy Father says to priests: "In performing your ministry you must give an example of the sincere obedience that must be given inwardly and outwardly to

the Magisterium of the Church" (H.V. n.28). He calls upon priests to teach the Church's doctrine on life without compromise. He reminds priests that "refusal to compromise anything concerning the

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saving doctrine of Christ is an outstanding act of charity to souls" (ibid. n.29).

From the pulpit, in the confessional, in marriage preparation, in instructions and joining in the apostolate of Priests for Life, by supporting all pro-life initiatives, priests can play a major part in the rescue of the precious sons and daughters of God.

The Laity

Essential to the way back is the part of the laity. To them, God has given the gift of marriage with its unitive and procreative nature. They have the evangelical vocation of restoring the Culture of Life.

Forty years after *Humanae vitae* more and more laity in Canada recognize the necessity of correcting the Winnipeg Statement. Among these dedicated labourers, too numerous to mention by name, are groups and individuals. Their prayers, petitions, articles, letters and lives will surely hasten the day when the truth about life is universally taught and generally practised in Canada.

The Pro-Life Movement

A major factor in the way back is the pro-life movement. As Dr. Charles Rice, professor of Notre Dame University in Grand Bend, IN, USA, said twenty years ago, the greatest mistake of the pro-life movement was to more or less ignore the contraceptive mentality. All the marches, conferences, books and articles of the pro-life apostolate are barren exercises unless the evil of contraception is confronted and overcome. This is not to say that the attack on abortion is to be neg-

lected but that the cause of abortion must be clearly recognized.

This does not mean that non-Catholics are to be excluded from the pro-life movement in Canada. It does mean that all pro-life fruitful members be opposed to contraception and sterilization. It must be recognized that contraception is not a Catholic evil but a universal evil, an intrinsic evil, and a violation of divine natural law to which all owe obedience. Abortion is a death-dealing symptom, the contraception mentality the cause. Death from the Pill or scalpel is the ultimate contraception. We note that *Humanae vitae* is not addressed only to Catholics but to all people of good will.

Spiritual means

"Without Me you can do nothing" Christ tells us. Grace is essential to find the way back. Bishops need grace to rightly shepherd, priests to preach and counsel, teachers to teach, laity to live the Way of Life.

Those in the death grip of the contraceptive practice need the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Through admission of guilt and confession souls can be diverted from the path of death to the path of life. Then comes Eucharistic devotion. This includes the Sacrifice of the Mass, Holy Communion and Eucharistic adoration.

As prayer is essential to salvation, it is essential for the return to grace from the murder and prevention of children. *Humanae vitae* says to spouses "let them implore divine assistance by persevering prayer" (n.25). Let them call upon the actual graces to which they are entitled by their entrance into matrimony. "Christian married couples... must remember that their Christian vocation, which began at baptism, is further specified and reinforced by the Sacrament of Matrimony" (ibid.).

Step by step, inch by inch, by prayer, the Sacrament of Penance, practised by more and more Canadians, Canada can

be brought to the glorious realisation of *Humanae vitae* loved and lived.

End notes

From dissent to disaster is the history of the rejection of *Humanae vitae* in Canada. The Church in Canada is positioned for spiritual ruin, bleeding from the killing and prevention of the young. It is written in the Old Testament record of idolatry to Moloch in *Psalms* 106: "They shed the blood of the innocent, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they offered to the idols of Canaan."

Yet there is hope on this 40th anniversary of *Humanae vitae*. God's

grace, always sufficient, will be given mercifully and generously if there are faithful bishops, priests, religious, and laity prayerful and ready to make the sacrifices required. Then more and more spouses will be of the good will necessary to receive the Truth. To such spouses the Lord "entrusts the mission of making manifest to Man the holiness and indeed sweetness of the law that unites their mutual love and generous service closely to the love of God, the Author of human life" (*Humanae vitae*, n.25).

We must remember that Moses did not take his own laws to God on the holy mountain—God gave His laws to man.

God does not say "You may do what seems right to you" but, out of loving concern: "Do this and you shall live in love forever."

In Rome, in the Church of Gesu there is an ancient fresco to Our Lady of the Way. We pray that Our Lady of the Way may help Canada find its way back to the truth about Life and Love. Dear Canadians, thank God for *Humanae vitae*.

For the complete text of the encyclical *Humanae vitae*, see our link http://catholicinsight.com/artman/exec/search.cgi?cat=13&template=index%2Fdefault_category.html&perpage=5&start=11

ADDENDUM BY JOHN-HENRY WESTEN

Cardinal Ouellet praises *Humanae vitae* *Abortion the consequence of the 'culture of contraception'*

Quebec City Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the Primate of Canada, in the midst of hosting a massive international gathering of Catholics that was five years in the making—the International Eucharistic Congress, took time to sit down with *LifeSiteNews.com* for an interview.

In keeping with the theme of the Congress, Cardinal Ouellet spoke of the link he sees between the Eucharist and respect for human life, noting the fact that the Eucharistic Congress occurs just a month before the 40th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's encyclical "*Humanae vitae*" ("On human life").

The controversial 1968 document was a restatement of the Church's official opposition to contraception, and a call for married couples to remain open to life. The document is now regarded as prophetic, having predicted with uncanny accuracy the progress of the Culture of Death and the devaluation of women that would follow the widespread acceptance of contraception.

Cardinal Ouellet said, "*Humanae vitae* was a great document...People should reread it carefully and see how beautiful the description of human love is in this document." "Openness to life," he said, "is the key of the document, that the act of mutual gift of the spouses must remain open to life..."

"The consequences of the culture of contraception," the Cardinal said, "are visible in the culture with abortion and with

the question of marriage." "I think we have to revisit (*Humanae vitae*) and reopen our hearts to the wisdom of this document." He noted that Pope John Paul II, with the development and preaching of his Theology of the Body, "further developed the inner logic" of *Humanae vitae*.



Cardinal Ouellet with French Cardinal Barbarin

Tying the issue back to the Eucharist, the Canadian prelate said, "Obviously the welcoming of the Risen Lord and the Gift of His Body calls for the respect of human life, and I think it will foster in the future more commitment for the respect of human life."

He concluded: "The anniversary of *Humanae vitae* is an opportunity to discover that the Church was wise to reaffirm the value of human love and its openness to life. We have not followed it, we have seen the consequences, but there is still time to recapture the fruit."

With this interview, Cardinal Ouellet is the second major Canadian prelate to speak out forcefully in support of *Humanae vitae*, on this 40th anniversary year. The first was Ottawa Archbishop Terrence Prendergast, who said, "The encyclical gives the Church a deeper understanding into the beauty of married love and responsible parenthood. It offers a clearer understanding of the harm of contraception and the great value of Natural Family Planning (NFP). Further, it challenges married couples, healthcare professionals and clergy to live and teach these profound truths about human sexuality and dignity." (*LifeSiteNews.com*, June 19/08) Ω

