

Defending *Humanae Vitae*: The Argument from Sociology

by John F. Kippley October 25, 2007

The neo-Malthusian Paul Ehrlich predicted in his late-sixties' book, *The Population Bomb*, that by this time much of the world would be decimated by famine. In fact, he set some doomsday timetables well within the 20th century.

When his predictions repeatedly proved to be wrong, he refused to admit it; he just postponed his doomsday and sold more books. Now that informed people recognize that the real world population "problem" is the depopulation of First World countries, they know that doomsday scenarios are simply propaganda to decriminalize the anti-people abortion and contraception campaigns of the First World against developing countries. However, there are still many uninformed people, some quite pushy, and what follows may help you when you encounter them.

The sociological argument or rationalization runs something like this:

- (1) Today there are great sociological difficulties in our world.
- (2) The economy of the rich nations seems geared for a family of not over three children. The economy of poor nations leads many to starvation.
- (3) Man has a duty to better his whole world. He has created part of the problem by reducing the natural death rate.
- (4) He has the physical power to limit population through contraception.
- (5) Therefore it is permissible, perhaps even required, to practice contraception in the present sociological circumstances.

The argument is attractive to those who have been brainwashed by a neo-Malthusian media. Let us suppose that every statement up to the "Therefore" is true. The problem is that the conclusion is by no means contained in the preceding statements. The argument assumes what needs to be proved. That is, it assumes that contraception is a morally permissible way of expressing married love.

To prove to yourself the error of the "therefore" statement, simply substitute other means of population control in statement (4): "He has the physical power to limit population through _____." Fill in abortion, genocide, infanticide, the killing of the incurably sick, the killing of the old, the sterilization of non-contracepting parents, ethnic and racial cleansing, etc.—anything you regard as abhorrent. Such substitution enables you to see very clearly that the physical power to do something does NOT make it morally right to do so. The existence of sociological pressures does not make any particular method of population control morally permissible.

Those who parrot this sort of argument typically point to the change from a farm economy to huge cities. They point out that having a number of children is not the economic asset in the city that it was on the farm. That's true in the short run; we don't know about the long run even in First World countries with advanced social security systems. If the systems go bankrupt, it may once again be the case that children are the greatest economic assets of aging parents. And while it is true that there has been a mass migration from farms to cities in North America, it is also true that cities aren't exactly new. I suspect that even in the days of ancient Greece and Rome a large family was much more of an asset on the farm than in the city.

The point is this: When an argument describes only a problem and proposes a solution, such an argument says nothing at all about the moral worth of the solution. The end does not justify the means. An alleged population problem does not justify any particular means offered as a solution.