

Explaining *Humanae Vitae*: The Argument from Science

by John F. Kippley September 25, 2007

My previous articles have illustrated how some of those who dissent from the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* have used arguments that would get them laughed out of town if they used them with any subject other than birth control.

This article illustrates another silly argument and then shows that what the Church allows (natural family planning) is truly in accord with the best of science and the scientific method. The following is taken almost verbatim from my book, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant*, pp. 286-87.

The argument is typically phrased along these lines: “Until recently man has not known about efficient means of contraception. New medical knowledge has given us extremely efficient means of contraception, especially the Pill. God gave man a brain to use it to control nature. Therefore God permits contraception, and intelligent man should use the means most efficient for him.”

The worth of the argument is easily seen by substituting another scientific discovery. “Until recently man has not known about efficient means of mass killing. New scientific knowledge has given us extremely efficient ways of mass killing, especially the hydrogen bomb. God gave man a brain to use it to control nature. Therefore God permits mass killing and intelligent man should use the means most efficient for him—in this case the H-bomb.”

No one, I hope, would subscribe to the “logic” of the second argument. Everybody, I hope, would say that the argument says nothing about the morality of mass killing and that use of our new scientific knowledge has to be evaluated according to moral principles. The fact that we know how to do something, even if it has taken the work of geniuses to discover it, does not mean that it is good to do it. And that is equally true about contraception, the use of the Pill, or any other device. Knowledge of newer and more efficient means of contraception, even though the work of brilliant scientists, is of itself no indication that it is good to practice contraception, either in the older forms such as the Onan’s spilling of the seed (Gen 38:6-10) or the newer forms such as the Pill. The argument from science is simply no argument.

On the other hand, both forms of natural family planning are in full accord with good science. Ecological breastfeeding encourages close mother-baby interaction. It is scientifically beyond question that mother’s milk is the best physical nutrition for infants and that full-time loving care from their mothers is the best emotional nurturing for infants and young children. It is scientifically well established that ecological breastfeeding spaces babies, on the average, about two years apart.

Systematic natural family planning makes use of our knowledge about human fertility, and the daily observation of the signs of fertility is a classic example of the scientific method—the systematic observation and recording of recurring events.

Please do what you can to let people know about Natural Family Planning so they will have what they need if and when they need it. Some couples need it very much in order to achieve pregnancy; others may need it for spacing, and almost everyone needs to know about ecological breastfeeding.