

The Prophets

By John Kippley | March 25, 2008

When Pope Paul VI issued his landmark 1968 encyclical on marital chastity, *Humanae Vitae*, he predicted dire consequences from the growing acceptance of unnatural methods of birth control. He was widely ridiculed at the time by those who dissented from *Humanae Vitae*, but today nobody is laughing. In fact, each passing year more and more people proclaim him as a great prophet. That he was, but he was not the first to predict the unhappy consequences of contraception.

In this column I will mention some of those who preceded him.

In my February post, I noted that the Sexual Revolution had started in the 1820s with the Neo-Malthusian promotion of contraception. Nearly a century later, this retrogressive revolution received a boost from Margaret Sanger, who started to promote contraception in an organized way just before World War I. During the Roaring Twenties, immorality was not only widely practiced but it was also discussed. Commenting on the sexual discussion that was going on in the 1920s, pundit Walter Lippmann wrote in 1929:

“. . . Whether or not birth control is eugenic, hygienic, and economic, it is the most revolutionary practice in the history of sexual morals” (*A Preface to Morals*, Macmillan: 1929, Transaction edition: 1982, 291).

In this debate, various names were given to the revolutionary new lifestyle. According to Lippmann, “The actual proposals go by a great variety of fancy names such as free love, trial marriage, companionate marriage. When these proposals are examined it is evident they all take birth control as their major premise, and then deduce from it some part or all of the logical consequences” (298). Lippmann, a secular humanist, concluded: “In the discussion which has ensued since birth control became generally feasible, the central confusion has been that the reformers have tried to fix their sexual ideals in accordance with the logic of birth control instead of the logic of human nature” (306).

Essentially, the 20th century “reformers” of the Teens and Twenties were saying this: “Marry, contracept, and divorce when you get bored with each other. Then start over again. However, if you happen to have a baby, then stay together for the benefit of the child.”

Eighty years later, the culture no longer talks about divorce and remarriage as a great social advance, but it also no longer encourages couples to stay together for the benefit of the child. Instead, sex outside of marriage is almost taken for granted, and unwanted babies are killed before they are born.

The next “prophet” in my chronological list is Anglican Bishop Charles Gore. In the 1920s debate about what the Anglicans rightly called “unnatural forms of birth control,” Bishop Gore led the fight against contraception within the Anglican Communion. He and

others pointed out that accepting contraception would open a Pandora's box of all sorts of other evils that none of them would want to see—including the acceptance of homosexual sodomy. How right he was has been proved by the events within his own ecclesial community.

Our third “prophet” is an unnamed editorial writer for the *Washington Post*. Here’s a brief chronology to put things in perspective: On August 14, 1930, the Anglican bishops issued a statement accepting unnatural forms of birth control for hardship cases. On December 31, 1930, Pope Pius XI responded with his encyclical *Casti Connubii*, in which he strongly reaffirmed the previously unbroken Christian teaching against marital contraception. On March 21, 1931, a committee of the Federal Council of Churches accepted the “careful and restrained use” of contraception. The very next day, an editorial in the *Post* strongly criticized this action. “Carried to its logical conclusion, the committee’s report, if carried into effect, would sound the death-knell of marriage as a holy institution by establishing degrading practices which would encourage indiscriminate immorality. The suggestion that the use of legalized contraceptives would be ‘careful and restrained’ is preposterous.” Prophetic indeed!

Nor was the battle against contraception confined to Christians. In the 1920s Mahatma Gandhi was already fighting it, saying things such as “artificial measures are like putting a premium on vice,” and “nature is relentless and will have full revenge for any such violations of her laws. Moral results can only be produced by moral restraints.”

Let us conclude with the quotation from Paul VI in section 17 of *Humanae Vitae* in which he predicts four tragic consequences from the widespread acceptance of contraception. I have inserted the numbers:

“Upright men can even better convince themselves of the solid grounds on which the teaching of the Church in this field is based if they care to reflect upon the consequences of methods of artificial birth control. Let them consider, first of all, how wide and easy a road would thus be opened up towards [1] conjugal infidelity and [2] the general lowering of morality. Not much experience is needed in order to know human weakness, and to understand that men—especially the young, who are so vulnerable on the point—have need of encouragement to be faithful to the moral law, so that they must not be offered some easy means of eluding its observance. [3] It is also to be feared that the man, growing used to the employment of contraceptive practices, may finally lose respect for the woman and, no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.

[4] “Let it be considered also that a dangerous weapon would thus be placed in the hands of those public authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies . . . Who will stop rulers from favoring, from even imposing upon their peoples . . . the method of contraception which they judge to be most efficacious?”

A secular humanist, an Anglican bishop, an editorial writer, and a Pope all foretold that the acceptance of marital contraception would lead to moral and social chaos. When will the men and women of the Western culture start listening?

For a more complete analysis of the sexual revolution and some ideas about what can be done to foster a rebirth of chastity, visit the website www.nfpandmore.org and search for Sexual Revolution.