

THE POPE'S OPPOSITION TO CONTRACEPTION

It's not going to be easy. When I stand within, & on behalf of, the biosphere, that doctrine--vigorously defended by il Pappa as recently as Humanae Vitae--is an instance of good become evil. "New occasions teach new duties," & rising environmental degradation (e.g., already 1/3rd of humanity not having potable water) is the new occasion teaching the new duty of putting brakes on runaway populations, instead of letting "nature" do it (e.g., by the old controls [Rev.18: pestilence, famine, fire, war] & by the new controls [overcrowding, water-earth-air pollution, soil-&-subsoil depletion]). ("Nature" is an ungentle population-controller for flora & fauna [including us].)....But (1) biospheric projections are inherently iffy, & (2) the biosphere is not the only place I must stand within to view the Roman Catholic Church's official denunciation of "unnatural" (= anything other than the rhythm method) contraception (=conception control, intervening to prevent conception).

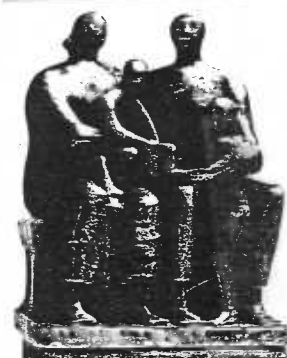
1 "Sin is anything extended far enough in a straight line" (chap.17 of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT). So is evil. The good command to "multiply...and have dominion" (Gn.1.28) has been so well obeyed that its consequences, by the law of unintended **natural** consequences, are having an entropic effect on the living world of nature: good is having an increasing backflow of evil. In the wide-angle perspective of the biosphere, the Roman Church is "call[ing] evil good" & accusing us contraception-pushers of calling "good evil" (Is.5.20).

2 But consider the matter in the perspective of revelation: what about the law of unintended **theological** consequences? In a 1½p Thinksheet I can't spell out the doctrinal reverberations of unnatural (mechanical/chemical) intervention to prevent life, the procreative process. But I can make enough remarks to suggest the apologetic & polemic values in the Pope's position.

3 In contrast to the Catholic past's, this Pope's position is **seamlessly pro-life**--a position of simplicity, clarity, & power in a world so split between life & death & so evidently, in many places & forms of power, pro-death. I would vote for him as this closing century's #1 obeyer of the divine command to "Choose life!" (Deut.30.19). With my vote goes my personal refusal (1) to laugh at him for pushing something his own people pay no more attention to than do people of other churches (in the U.S., Catholics practice contraception as much as do Protestants), or (2) even to denounce him unreservedly for preaching his now-become-evil doctrine.

4 His doctrine is good--& here I speak a good word for it--in **transcending person-centeredness**, which means experience-centeredness, which means **egocentrism** (in either of its 20th-c. forms, viz. totalitarianism & narcissism). The Pope (meaning, in this Thinksheet, anti-contraception) is for life against people, or rather he's for people by being more fundamentally for life. (Irony parallel: I am for the biosphere against people, or rather for people by being more fundamentally for people-sustainable nature-controls). This Henry Moore sculpture (1944, "Family Group") does not say "four persons." It says "family-of-four-persons." The family members are *almost faceless*, yet the bodies are distinct, yet the bodies exist in touching relationships proclaiming family unity transcending personalities in conformity to "natural law."

5 Every thinker's thinking-base is some explicit or implicit **ontological claim**, some assumption/conviction about the nature of nature, the reality real. Every such claim is imperial in the Kantian categorical-imperative sense (roughly: if it's best for me, it's best for everybody). But nobody, on this shrinking planet, has the right to impose any ontological claim on anybody (says libertarian Willis). My Protestant forebears rightly feared Rome's former claim to the right, even the duty, to coerce compliance with Rome's "natural law" ontological claim, the Church's official understanding of God's-will-in-nature (as readable there [e.g., Ro.1]). The afterglow of that claim is in Catholic theological arrogance (on the decline, as in my friend Avery Dulles), & also in my residual fear of Rome.



6 Rome's natural-law argument here would be stronger if all forms of earliest intervention were proscribed, including the rhythm method--which, however, in practice is so inefficient that if Catholics had faithfully used only that since Roe v. Wade, the number of U.S. abortions (actually, only ca.35 million) would have been far higher, effective contraception being the best pro-life (i.e., anti-abortion) action. No good word I could say about "the Pope" could contravene the illogic of suppressing the world's #1 suppressant of abortion....The late-14th-c. Vatican MALLEUS MALEFICARUM, however, puts contraception above abortion in the list of women's sins.

7 While distressing, the Pope's position is for me also refreshing. In pandering to what people want, my church, the UCC, is at the opposite pole from Rome's "natural law" (meaning what-God-wants-as-visible-in-nature). People want to stretch "sex" to include nonmarital intercourse? OK. "Family" to include some social reality other than we see in the Moore sculpture? OK. "Marriage" to include same-sex alliances? OK. "Gender equality" to include redesigning Christianity's language for God (esp. dumping its pronouns)? OK. This pile-up of OKs helps explain the theological attenuation, the brain drain, & the blood drain (loss of membership). In the liberal churches, "justice" has come to mean conformity to anybody's "rights"-claims, regardless of Scripture, tradition, the world church, even cultural anthropology.

8 But the appeal to **personal experience**, rooted in the romanticism of the Renaissance (e.g., Dante's "La Vita Nuova" [19: "I have not any language to explain" love]), has become the primary definer of "values" & "rights" & therefore also of "equality" & "justice." To communicate the gospel now, we must say a persuasive yes & a persuasive no to "personal experience," which easily becomes its own gospel of individual self-expression/fulfilment, subjectivism, privatism, relativism, multiculturalism, pluralism, with no foundation in the fundamental constants of human nature --of "natural law," or (the Protestant version) the divinely instituted orders of creation....Personal insecurity & social disintegration are unintended consequences of the personal-experience gospel, as is theological corruption among liberal-church conformists to it. But the Christian ethical tradition has resources for addressing this new chaotic society, & strengthening the Christian witness, without dreaming of restorationist authoritarianism.

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 Lake Elizabeth Drive
Craigville MA 02632

