
Book Review

'On Human Life' after 25 years: Paul VI's most ecumenical legacy?

by Nora Hamerman

Paul VI: The First Modern Pope

by Peter Hebblethwaite

Paulist Press, Mahwah, N.J., 1993

715 pages, hardbound, \$29.95

The years 1993-94 are bringing to a head, for our era, the debate around the foremost issue confronting any society: the growth of human population. This year marks the 25th anniversaries of two crucial moments in the debate, the promulgation of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in July 1968 by Pope Paul VI, the subject of this new biography, which defended the indissoluble link between marital relations and human life; and the founding of the oligarchist anti-natalist organization, the Club of Rome, whose diatribe, *Limits to Growth*, presented the perverse argument that human population growth is the greatest threat to humanity.

Next year will be the occasion of a major United Nations-sponsored conference on population. In anticipation of it, the Pontifical Congregation on the Family, whose prefect is Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, has issued strong statements opposing the view that population growth is the cause of misery, and criticizing powerful financial institutions for their oppressive intervention to force birth control on Third World countries. The latest encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, anchors the church's teachings on sexual morality in principles of moral theology.

In contrast, the United Nations "nomenklatura" regards the scenario in which human population will *fall* during the course of the next century, as the desired objective. Indeed, the latest report of the U.N. Population Division asserts: "The perception that slower population growth, and even no growth, is associated with faster development, is not now seriously challenged." This is a lie. As Lyndon LaRouche, author of the most complete critique of the Club of Rome, the 1982 book *There Are No Limits to Growth*, and his associates

have repeatedly demonstrated, this perception *is* seriously challenged—by the entirety of human history. Today, the collapse of fertility in the industrial countries long preceded the current worldwide economic depression, and came from the spread of cultural pessimism ("New Age") and labor-force trends breaking up the family. We are now careening toward a situation in which death rates will exceed birth rates, and as *EIR* has reported, the worldwide collapse of population growth, if not checked, will doom our civilization.

This is why, when all the dust is settled and the rhetoric forgotten, and a century from now an objective appraisal can be made of the pontificate of Giovanni Battista Montini as Pope Paul VI from 1963 to 1978, it may turn out that his least-understood and most-maligned encyclical *Humanae Vitae* will be reckoned as the single act by him which had the most positive effect on mankind, including multitudes of non-Catholics, making it exactly what its critics vehemently insist it is not—a truly ecumenical document. This is especially true because *Humanae Vitae* came only one year after Paul VI's social encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, which had formulated that "the new name for peace is development."

Populorum Progressio relentlessly condemned the debt looting carried out by international financial institutions in poor countries in 1967. One year later, in 1968, Paul VI followed it up with a refutation of the duplicitous ideology used to justify the depopulation campaigns which, as he knew well, were being forcibly imposed by the same financial institutions and oligarchical elite families.

Violent reactions

As is well known, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (*On Human Life*), issued in the heyday of contraceptive pills which had opened the door for millions to "sex without babies," reiterated traditional Catholic teachings forbidding artificial contraception. In a subtle and compassionate way, the pope developed the argument that the "unitive" and "procre-

ative” aspects of conjugal love may not be divided without the greatest peril to the human race. Paul VI’s encyclical was (and is) widely defied within the church, especially in the United States and Europe. The epidemic of sexual promiscuity which resulted in part from that defiance did not merely lower the birth rate to dangerous levels, but had other, unforeseen consequences. It escalated the spread of painful new diseases like herpes, and the catastrophe of AIDS. Moreover, it could well be argued that the cancerous spread of the acceptance of the taking of innocent life, via the twin evils of abortion and euthanasia, has been a result of the dehumanizing splitting of the “unitive” and “procreative.”

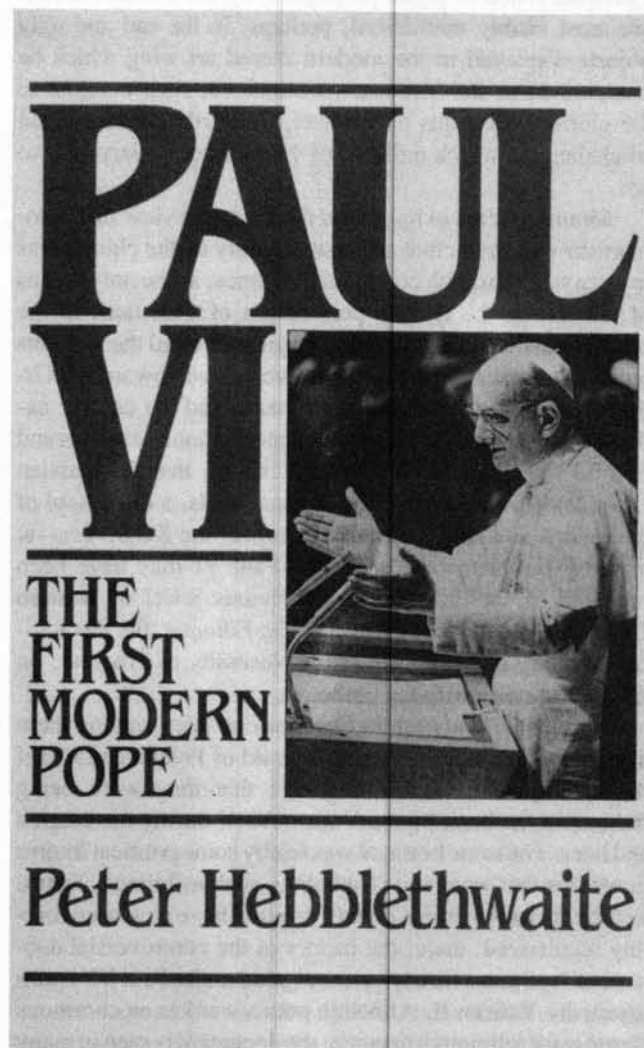
Humanae Vitae stunned many in the German and American Catholic churches, who had permitted years of infiltration with the alluring propaganda of the eugenics/birth control lobby of Margaret Sanger, the John D. Rockefellers, and the Draper family. As Peter Hebblethwaite reports with dismay, Paul VI ignored—as if he had never bothered to read them—the voluminous arguments of his own Papal Commission which had been set up to study the issue, and which were all designed to force a historic shift in the church’s attitude toward birth control.

The reactions were violent. In the same year of *Humanae Vitae*, the so-called Club of Rome was founded, reasserting the ancient, pagan Roman imperial practices of infanticide and abortion out of alleged concerns for the threat of a population explosion. The battlelines were thus drawn, as it were, between Pagan Rome and Christian Rome. Within the church, especially in the industrial countries, the programmed response to *Humanae Vitae* as “divisive,” was so intense that Paul VI was intimidated into never writing another encyclical in the remaining decade of his pontificate, and backed down from holding a Synod on the theme of marriage and the family proposed by Polish Bishop Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II.

Did he break profile?

The British author of the book under review here holds a view opposite to the one I have just presented. His slant is visible at once in the book’s dedication to the memory of a man whom he styles as “a casualty of *Humanae Vitae*.” Hebblethwaite’s voluminous account suggests that in writing *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI broke profile from many of the other actions he undertook or permitted, during and after the Vatican II Council.

Hebblethwaite, a journalist who writes for the *National Catholic Reporter*, makes no secret of his sympathy for the liberal agenda which Paul VI otherwise did much to further. Key influences on the pope, according to the book, were Belgian Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens (who failed to block *Humanae Vitae*), the Viennese Cardinal Franz Koenig, the German Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (who later became one of the most determined saboteurs of the teachings of



Humanae Vitae) and a group of French Catholic intellectuals around Jacques Maritain. Although it was his predecessor Pope John XXIII who opened Vatican relations with the United Nations and had sent Cardinal Suenens there in 1962 to present his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, it was Paul VI who personally went to the United Nations to speak in 1965, signaling a new era in Vatican diplomacy. (Yet even there, in a paragraph Hebblethwaite labels as a “contemptuous dismissal of the population problem,” Pope Montini courageously called for “respect for life, in regard to the great problem of natality,” and charged the U.N.: “Your task is so to improve food production that there will be enough for all the tables of mankind, and not press for an artificial control of births, which would be irrational, so as to cut down the number of guests at the banquet of life.”)

The reflections of Paul VI’s compromise with the anti-

Christian vision of peace propagated by the United Nations are most visibly manifested, perhaps, in the sad and ugly objects displayed in the modern sacred art wing which he inaugurated in the Vatican museums—in such contrast to the glorious creations of Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo which millions of visitors flock every year to see.

Montini seems to have held the mistaken view that communism was invincible and that the duty of the church was to open relations with communist regimes, as the only means of alleviating the terrible persecution of Christians in the communist dictatorships. This pessimism flawed the furthest-reaching of his ecumenical initiatives, those toward the Orthodox churches. In the case of Russia and the captive nations, it was notorious, especially among Catholic priests and faithful living under the Soviet jackboot, that the Russian Orthodox Church was, at the highest levels, a direct tool of the regime and its dreaded secret police, the KGB. Yet—at least by Hebblethwaite's report—Paul VI may have been prepared to sacrifice the most precious jewel of western Christian doctrinal contributions, the *Filioque*, the theological corollary of the notion of the Necessity of Progress, on the altar of unity with the Orthodox.

No wonder that eastern European prelates, among them the heroic Cardinals Stefan Wyszyński of Poland and József Mindszenty of Hungary, believed that they were being stabbed in the back by the Vatican itself during the council and later. The same betrayal was felt by some political figures in nations that were once Catholic—such as Ireland, Spain, and the Ibero-American countries—and have now been forcibly secularized, under the banner of the controversial doctrine of “religious liberty” promulgated under Paul VI's pontificate by Vatican II. Although put forward as an enormous step toward religious tolerance, the document is seen in many quarters as a license for outright error—an explicit acceptance of the relativistic outlook of the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution against the notion that absolute truth does exist, which had always been vigorously defended by the church.

The bitter harvest of this reversal is reflected in the fact that today it is a Spaniard, Ricardo Díez-Hochleitner, formerly state secretary for education in the de-Christianized government of Spain and editor of the influential Madrid daily *El País*, who is president of the satanic Club of Rome. Italy, also another formerly Catholic nation, has the lowest birth rate in Europe, and is heading toward a demographic profile which primes it for the siren song of the euthanasia lobby.

The historical context

Despite these costly mistakes, Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae*. To grasp the importance of this encyclical requires some historical perspective. The encyclical upheld the position enunciated in 1930 by Pius XI in the encyclical *Casti Connubii*, which was issued partly in response to the first

crack in the united front of all mainstream Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant, against artificial birth control: the statement issued by the Anglican Bishops of England in 1930, that birth control was permitted to married couples under certain circumstances.

In June 1931, the proto-Nazi eugenicist Margaret Sanger had penned her formal response to *Casti Connubii*. As the excerpts below show, it was remarkably similar to the arguments of the population-control lobby today, except in two respects. One, there is no overt endorsement of abortion, because Sanger's Birth Control League was still pretending that contraception was the preventive alternative to abortion, which they claimed to regard as bad. Two, few among today's “planned parenthood” (the postwar euphemism) advocates would dare to so overtly proclaim the eugenic goals of their program, since Nazis slaughtered millions of “unfit” on such grounds. Otherwise, the Sanger document, which began by sneering that Pius XI was a bachelor who based on himself on the arguments of another bachelor, St. Augustine, is a template for the tirades later issued against Paul VI and today, against Pope John Paul II. Sanger ranted:

“The pope made it perfectly plain that Catholics are expected to give up health, happiness, and life itself while making every other conceivable sacrifice rather than to have dominion over nature's processes of creation. His letter denies any claims of poverty, sickness, or other hindrances to proper rearing of children that are valid reasons for the scientific limitation of offspring. As for the breeding of criminal, diseased, feeble-minded, and insane classes, the pope opposes every method of control except that of suggesting to these unfortunate people to please not do it any more.

“One must deplore the fact that Pope Pius should have chosen this time of the world's distress from unemployment, poverty and economic maladjustment to advertise doctrines and advise conduct which can only tend to aggravate that distress.

“Assume for the sake of argument that God does want an increasing number of worshipers of the Catholic faith, does he want the throng to include an increasing number of feeble-minded, insane, criminal and diseased worshipers?” (These three paragraphs are by Margaret Sanger, “Birth Control Advances: A Reply to the Pope,” June 1931, as quoted by R. Marshall and C. Donovan, *Blessed Are the Barren*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1991, p. 136.)

Observe that Sanger and company pretended in 1931, as their heirs still do today, that the pope and other foes of “birth control” are unconcerned about remedying the misery of poor women and their offspring. Contrary to this hysterical lie, Sanger's chief opponents in the 1930s were among the strongest advocates of child labor laws and other legislation to promote social and economic justice. In the 1960s, it was Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* which enunciated the imperative of economic justice, a commitment reemphasized by John Paul II in such encyclicals as *Laborem Exercens* and

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis.

It may well be that Montini's memories of fighting Nazism and Fascism played a role in his resistance to the overwhelming pressures of the eugenics lobby in 1968. As a priest in the Roman Curia, Hebblethwaite recounts, the young Giovanni Battista Montini had locked horns with the Mussolini regime and with those forces inside the Vatican, who for opportunistic or other reasons, chose to accommodate to Fascism. In 1964, the newly elected Pope Paul VI, who had long been the top aide to Pius XII, vigorously defended his mentor against the charges of Rudolf Hochhuth that he had failed to defend the Jews from the Nazi persecutions.

Peter Hebblethwaite's book, while exhaustive, and exhausting, is not honest, because ideas play no role in it. Rather, as a classic British liberal, he portrays Giovanni Battista Montini's life as merely a tussle between "progressive" and "conservative" personalities. The conflict is like a soap opera; the former are always described positively as warm, sparkling, and brimming with intellectual verve, while the latter are painted as drab bureaucrats or caricatures of the Grand Inquisitor. Although the biographer frequently reports on Montini's retreat into study, prayer, and contemplation, drawing a portrait of a holy man, yet the fruits of his colloquies with God are hardly treated as if they had any impact on his actions (especially not on those of which Hebblethwaite disapproves, because they do not fit the "modernizers" agenda). Paul's special devotion to the writings of St. Augustine, the key figure in Christian Platonism, is mentioned but never probed, although it certainly would have been key for *Humanae Vitae*.

The progressives, in Hebblethwaite's gossipy account, were determined to bring the church into the modern world so it would not become irrelevant. The conservatives were merely the self-interested defenders of the church as an institution, nitpicking over minor details (but how minor were they, if he dismisses the *Filioque* upon which the Christian Renaissance ideal of progress was based, with an offhand phrase?), bitter, rigid, absorbed in their grandeur, and obsessed (*nota bene*) with their fear of the Freemasonry.

Everything Paul VI did to defend the teaching authority of the church is, in Hebblethwaite's mirror, the result of his "Hamlet-like" concessions to the old Roman Curia, especially the Italian cardinals like Siri and Ottaviani, and to the French Catholic right wing. Special vitriol is reserved for those who thwarted the union with the Anglican Church, to which Montini, first as archbishop of Milan and later as pope, had made sweeping overtures, and which was especially active in the campaign to undermine papal policy on sexuality and the family.

Paul VI is also presented as being subjected to heavy pressure from the secretive Opus Dei organization, alleged to be the main opposition to his overhaul of the liturgy (a reform so epochal that it led to, among other things, the

introduction of the ear-splitting "folk mass") and to "collegiality," the change in ecclesiastical structure which led to a series of runaway national bishops' conferences, which felt licensed to defy Vatican teachings when they did not coincide with their government's foreign policy (e.g., the Vietnam and Gulf wars) or popular trends in morality (sexual liberation). Opus Dei, although mistrusted by Montini, held clout because it was in a position to bail out the scandal-ridden Vatican finances, one of the greatest headaches of his pontificate. Yet, could it possibly have all been so simple, with all the nice guys on one side and all the nasties on the other? And are we to believe that the Opus Dei bankers (misrepresented by Hebblethwaite as the embodiment of the Franco regime in Spain, when in fact Opus Dei only infiltrated it late in Generalissimo Franco's life) and the militantly disobedient Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre were the only opponents of the excesses of Vatican II "renewal"?

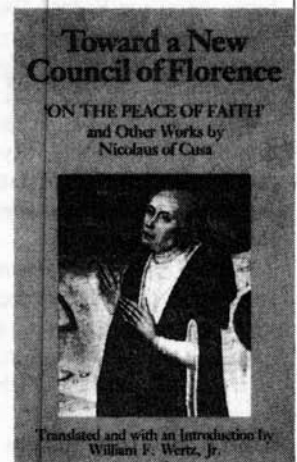
After 700-plus pages, one is left with the feeling that the true story of Giovanni Battista Montini and his pontificate has yet to be told. The problem is not, it seems, a lack of information, but the lack of the standpoint of universal history from which the right information would be selected and presented. Despite its enthusiastic defense of him, one suspects that even Pope Paul VI would not have liked this biography much.

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