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Famous Catholic birth control ban has hit the poor hardest

- **Pope Paul VI did not accept recommendations of his own Commission**
- **Nearly a third of Kenyan health services provided by Church**
- **'The human body cannot tolerate multiple sexual partners' - Catholic family planning leader**

Fifty years ago, just 11 years after the first contraceptive pill was made publicly available, billions of women experienced a reverse effect. When Pope Paul VI published his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* ("*Of Human Life"*) in late July 1968, Catholic women in the Vatican, Italy, and beyond said goodbye to birth control.

That document would impact global birth control policy for the next half-century, with no end in sight.

The 1968 papal text sent to all bishops was a turning point for the Catholic Church. It definitively laid out Catholic opposition to contraception and recreational sex without procreation, forming the groundwork for half a century of global birth control restrictions.

Humanae Vitae stipulated that artificial contraception was morally wrong: there were no exceptions. It read: "The Church ... teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life."

It was politically controversial at the time — Pope Paul went against his own birth control commission which had voted against the ban, and the document started a "serious crisis" in the Catholic Church (*New Yorker*). But *Humanae Vitae* has proved durable, and guides legislators even today, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the United States, parts of South America, the Philippines, and the Republic of Ireland.

Working class, sub-Saharan Africa, most compliant

Scores of women worldwide who want to control or avoid pregnancy do not have access to contraception because of the lasting legacy of *Humanae Vitae*, according to a new report published by advocacy group Catholics for Choice. The group endorses the use of birth control while still practising Catholic faith.

Religious influencers have yielded power over birth control access and have even pushed birth control restrictions into legislation, with working class women and women in poverty most affected, Cynthia Romero, Catholics for Choice's communications director, told *WikiTribune.*

14 Talk Comments

5 Contributors

Activity

(diff) .. 2018-07-26 06:43:49. . Jimmy Wales (talk | contributions) (Action → per suggestion on talk page)

****** Latest version ******

(diff) .. 2018-07-25 13:44:09. . Ed Upright (talk | contributions) (Action → save from pending status)

(diff) .. 2018-07-25 13:16:45. . Lydia Morrish (talk | contributions) (Action → approving edits)

(diff) .. 2018-07-25 13:00:31. . Jennifer Pryor-Summers (talk | contributions | unblock) (Action → replace pejorative "appease" by actual words used)

(diff) .. 2018-07-25 12:39:07. . Jennifer Pryor-Summers (talk | contributions | unblock) (Action → reworded to remove suggestion that objections were somehow a "guise")

(diff) .. 2018-07-25 12:25:37. . Lydia Morrish (talk | contributions) (Action → fixing misspelled tag)

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(diff) .. 2018-07-25 11:28:22. . Angela Long (talk | contributions | block) (Action → trimming X-heads)

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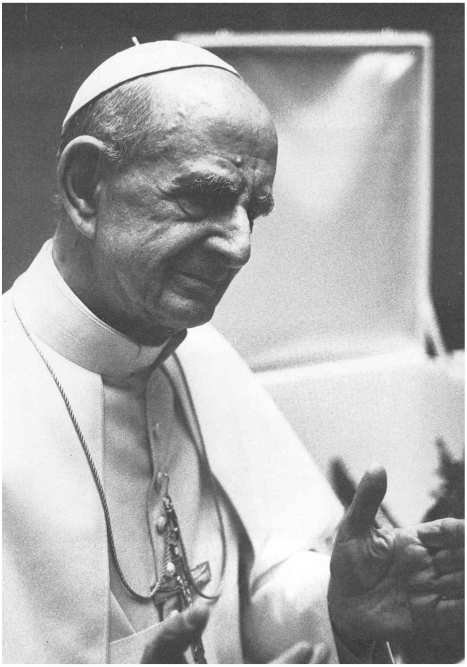

Pope Paul VI signed Humanae vitae on 25 July 1968. Photo by: Ambrosius007 via Wikimedia Commons. License: CC-BY-SA 3.0

The problem is particularly acute in sub-Saharan African countries like Uganda (population 44 million), Nigeria (192m) and Kenya (50m), where need for contraception is persistently unmet, according to Catholics for Choice.

"Ultimately, the most vulnerable are those in sub-Saharan Africa where the hand of the Hierarchy is felt very strongly," said Romero.

"We have many instances in those countries where the governments have tried to make progress and they face incredible pressure from the Catholic Hierarchy (the "holy ordering" of the Church), particularly at the national levels," said Romero.

> If the Bishop calls the health minister or someone in the health ministry and wants to block access to family planning, they can do that. – Cynthia Romero

"The Hierarchy has resources, they have access to people, and if they call, if the Bishop calls the health minister or someone in the health ministry and wants to block access to family planning, they can do that."

While more affluent women in urban or developed areas are more likely to be able to access family planning services, those in the developing world where the Catholic hierarchy exerts power over governments often cannot, says Romero. And the results can be life-changing.

"It's hard for a woman to thrive economically, it's hard for her to participate politically, it's hard for her to have a voice if she can't control how many children she has … It's hard for women to be economically and politically empowered if they don't have access to birth control."

'Outdated decree'

The Catholics for Choice report found birth control bans and taboos influenced by *Humanae Vitae* lead to high rates of unwanted pregnancies. It also discovered the Church has influenced restrictions on condoms which reduce the risk of HIV infection by 85 percent, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) have been particularly far-reaching.

In 2003, a senior Vatican figure declared that condoms didn't protect against the HIV virus in order to influence condom-use in countries stricken by an HIV/AIDS pandemic. WHO condemned the advice. The current pope, Francis, although hailed at times as progressive, told Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* in 2014 that he supported *Humanae Vitae*, and Paul VI "had the courage to go against the majority to defend the moral discipline" (*National Catholic Register*).

The encyclical might not be recognised, but its effect is felt. In Kenya, 63 percent of Catholics polled by Catholics for Choice had not heard of *Humanae Vitae.* Despite this, it has had lasting impact on Kenyan family planning.

Women cannot freely access contraception in Kenya, says John Nyamu, the director of the Reproductive and Maternal Health Consortium in Kenya, which promotes maternal healthcare and the prevention of unsafe abortion and HIV there.

He told *WikiTribune* that Humanae Vitae is outdated and Kenya faces new healthcare problems that need to be prioritized, such as an ongoing HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The Kenyan government does not recognize Humanae Vitae but Catholic institutions there do not provide family planning unless it is "natural," said Nyamu.

"The church contributes over 30 percent of all health facilities in Kenya and they have an impact as these women Catholics cannot freely access contraception."

Faith-based facilities provide healthcare services to more than 40 percent of the Kenyan population, according to Kenyan newspaper *Standard Digital*. A 2012 study by global health professors at University of California San Francisco found 28 percent of Kenyan hospitals and 12.5 percent of healthcare facilities were provided by faith-based organizations.

Trump presidency rolled back contraceptive access

The needs of vulnerable women in developed countries are also neglected.

In 2017 in the United States, where the influence of religion on politics is historic, President Donald J. Trump signed off reforms to the Affordable Care Act 2014 (ACA) that would remove the requirement to provide no-cost contraception where an employer, insurance plan, school, or individual has religious or moral objections. Reuters reported the move, a campaign pledge, would please Trump's Christian supporters.

FRI
SAT
SUN
MON
TUE
Take

all colored pills before taking any white pills
(norgestimate and ethinyl estradiol tablets USP, 0.250 mg/0.035 mg)
28 Day

A 28 day cyclic oral contraceptive packet. Photo by: Mg39913201 via Wikimedia Commons. License: CC-BY-SA 4.0

Family planning organizations Planned Parenthood and the National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association sued the Trump Administration in March 2018 for what it said were reforms that are "arbitrary and capricious" and violate the law.

The Catholics for Choice report says *Humanae Vitae* has influenced the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops efforts to block contraceptive methods in the ACA.

The Guttmacher Institute, a research and policy organization focused on reproductive health, said evidence suggests that the most disadvantaged U.S. women already miss out on the benefits of contraception such as social and economic advancement.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, 10 percent of women in the United States at risk of unintended pregnancy are not using any birth control. This group has a sizable cohort of 15 to 19-year-olds (18 percent).

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom, international development secretary Penny Mourdant urged the Pope to relax the ban. She said 800 women and girls die every day because of pregnancy or childbirth complications (*The Telegraph*).

'Ignorant' to say Humanae Vitae is harmful

Therese Notare, the assistant director of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Natural Family Planning Program, told *WikiTribune* that it is, "absolutely incorrect thinking, even ignorant thinking to say that a papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, would cause harm to people."

She said critics are not properly looking at the teachings in *Humanae Vitae* and that the "de-linking of procreation from sexual intercourse" has caused more harm than a ban on birth control.

> Absolutely incorrect thinking, even ignorant thinking to say that a papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, would cause harm – Therese Notare

The increase in couples having children without getting married, having multiple sexual partners, and using contraception has led to decreased populations and more adolescents living in "broken homes," said Notare.

She added: "There's a contraceptive mentality that has sort of leaked into the minds of people who once used to value family and value children, and so Europe is a mess regarding population rates. They're imploding."

According to Notare, negative physical effects of contraception, such as the contraceptive pill, cause harm to women's bodies and their fertility. Observational studies consistently provide evidence that suggest a link between hormonal oral contraceptives and an increased risk of breast and cervical cancer. Others show a reduced risk of ovarian, endometrial, and colorectal cancer when using oral contraceptives.

But there is no definitive data on the risk of cancer. On the other hand, sources including the World Health Organization warn of health complications associated with pregnancy. Family planning organization Planned Parenthood says that pregnancy is more likely to cause serious health problems than the pill.

But record levels of sexually transmitted infections in the U.S. and an epidemic in parts of Africa show that there are consequences to the sexual revolution, Notare said.

"The human body doesn't lie. The human body cannot tolerate multiple sexual partners. No matter how many condoms you want to keep using, you're eventually going to get disease."

"It's not *Humanae Vitae* that has caused any problems here. It's the modern sexual revolution that has caused problems and has broken a lot of hearts."

Many Catholics disregard ban

Despite *Humanae Vitae*'s lasting legacy, support for birth control among Catholics in the general public is increasing. Most educated Catholics over the last half-century have ignored *Humanae Vitae*'s teachings and used birth control. Even when Humanae Vitae was first written, millions of women worldwide immediately disregarded it (*The Guardian*).

According to polls by Catholics for Choice, published alongside the organization's report in time for *Humanae Vitae's* 50th anniversary, support for access to birth control is high in Catholic populations.

The poll finds most Catholics in five countries with considerable Catholic populations – United States, Ireland, Colombia, Kenya, and the Philippines – disagree with the encyclical's birth control ban.

Similarly, a 2014 Univision poll of more than 12,000 Catholics in 12 countries found that large majorities of self-identified Catholics in strongholds of the faith supported the use of contraceptives: 93 percent in Brazil, 84 percent in Italy and 68 percent in the Philippines.

Today, there is almost no difference between the birth control practices of Catholics and non-Catholics in the U.S. (*The Conversation*). Eighty nine percent of sexually-active Catholic women in the U.S. use a form of contraception (Guttmacher).

Cynthia Romero of Catholics for Choice thinks that despite Catholic teachings, women are increasingly taking control of their reproductive systems.

She said: "Women, when and if given the option, will use birth control. They understand how empowering that could be for their future trajectory, for their ability to thrive economically or politically or any other way in life, so I think we'll continue to see women who disregard the ban on birth control."

WikiTribune is awaiting an interview with Helen Alvare of the Catholic Women's Forum.

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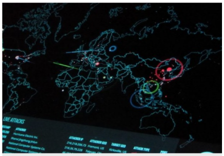

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