

“THE YEAR THAT SHOOK AMERICA”: LOOKING BEYOND THE CONTROVERSY

If you happen to be a fan of American muscle cars, **1968** was a **killer year** for Detroit: Chevy Camaro, Shelby Mustang GT 350, Dodge Charger and the Pontiac GTO all competed for attention among gearheads, each packing plenty of horses. Inveterate statistics buffs will recall that **Denny McLain** racked up **31 victories** for the Detroit Tigers in 1968. No pitcher has attained that mark since. Aviation aficionados surely rejoiced at the debut of the massive **747** jet. Still, most remember 1968 as a year that **shook America**. North Vietnam and the **Tet Offensive**, two assassinations—Rev. **Martin Luther King Jr.** (April 4) and Senator **Robert Kennedy** (June 5)—shocked the conscience of our nation. And the Church? Well, things were controversial here too. On this day—**July 25, 1968**—Pope Paul VI released his encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, and it too sent waves through the Church. Nearing my 5th birthday, I was blissfully **oblivious** to the controversies **simmering** beneath the surface.

To properly evaluate this moment in time, some distance is required to gain context. The intervening 53 years have not diminished the **controversy**, although the largest obstacle to the acceptance of the Church’s teaching may well be **ignorance of the teaching**, much more so than a summary judgment against it. As a component of our marriage preparation at the Cathedral (as in other parishes), we ask our couples to register and **complete** a course in **Natural Family Planning**. There is no other way to understand its meaning, value and rationale, other than to put in some time to **study it**. I urge all our married couples to avail themselves of the wisdom of this encyclical. Albeit relatively short, it is theologically dense. Still, it is well worth reading (click **here**) in a prayerful way, engaging its teaching.

The encyclical said little new, as Pope Paul VI reaffirmed traditional teaching, while providing a deeper rationale. The controversy stemmed from **heightened expectations** of a **change** in Church teaching. That change—anticipated (hoped for?) by theologians and some clergy alike—led to bitter disappointment when the text arrived. Years ago, a priest once lamented, “I was ordained in May and all hell broke loose in July.” That is how he described his “rookie” year of ministry—he was **thrust into controversy** almost immediately. In his last address (June 23, 1978) to the College of Cardinals before his death on August 6, 1978, Pope Paul VI acknowledged the **anguish** that the document’s writing had caused him, a rare papal admission in those days. Yet, the pope **stood by** the teaching, “after the confirmations had come of a more earnest science,” which sought to affirm the principle of “respect for the laws of nature and the principle of a conscious and ethically responsible paternity.” He even quoted Dante’s *Inferno*: “how nature follows—as she takes her course—the Divine Intellect and Divine Art.” *Inferno*, XI, vv. 99-100.

A week later, he delivered his last public homily (June 29), on the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. In what has been described as a last will and testament, the Holy Father reaffirmed his commitment to the defense of human life, saying: “The defense of human life must begin at the very source of human existence... We did no more than accept this charge when, 10 years ago, we published the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*... We have made these statements, motivated only by our **supreme responsibilities** as universal teacher and pastor, and for the **good of humanity**.” He believed that the moral law must be in accord with nature. Even when decisions are made “for the good of humanity,” many may still see things differently.

Pope Paul VI’s sanctity may well have been refined in the fire of this suffering. There is no more appropriate adjective to describe 1968 other than **tumultuous**—both for the Church and society. It is impossible to summarize this controversy in a single column; it may be valuable to address its

underlying issues in more detail in a future column. Still, the Church's responsibility is to teach the truth in season and out. The **radical separation** of sexual intimacy from marriage has only accelerated since 1968. It should surprise no one that the appreciation of **traditional teaching** with respect to artificial contraception has also been on the wane. Following the 1960's radical separation of sexual union from marriage, one now sees the separation of marriage from children. It is simply the next logical consequence.

What will it take to recover this sense of connection, and gain appreciation for the Church's teaching on marriage and family? It begins with a serious assessment of our current situation. When popular opinion **shifts**, it rapidly picks up steam and appears almost unstoppable. History is replete with seismic shifts in what were once almost universally accepted practices. You'd be shocked to jump in a car and ride **without a seatbelt**. It is a widely accepted safety measure. Or do you do a double take when watching old movies and see the sheer number of people who are smoking in films? Those are **societal** customs, but here we are speaking of the **perennial truths** of marriage. Let us pray for all engaged and married couples, that they may **discover the riches** of God's plan for married love and the transmission of life beautifully summarized in this prophetic encyclical.

- The U.S. House Appropriations Committee advanced a funding bill that for the first time, did **not include** restrictions of the bi-partisan **Hyde Amendment**, a long-standing prohibition on the use of taxpayer funds for elective abortions. Technically, the amendment is not a law, and as such needs to be attached each year to funding bills. New York's Cardinal Timothy Dolan called it "the most extreme pro-abortion appropriations bill that we have seen..."
- Last week's stunning papal Apostolic Letter *Traditionis Custodes* ("Guardian of Tradition") established an entirely **new set** of regulations regarding the celebration of the **Latin Mass** according to the **1962 Missal** (i.e. *Extraordinary Form*). Each local bishop oversees its celebration; his explicit permission is required. But the document directs that its celebration take place "not however in the parochial churches and without the erection of new personal parishes." It is unclear how this could even work in the USA since—unlike Europe—nearly all churches here are parish churches.
- Synodal (wrong) Way! In an unusual arrangement allowing its citizens to "remove" themselves from the Church's register, more than **220,000 Germans exited** the Catholic Church last year. The country has been hemorrhaging members for years. The arrangement has tax implications because if an individual is registered as Catholic, **8-9% of their income tax** goes to the Church. Not a good look!
- "I scream for ice cream!" **Mark your calendars**. In honor of the Solemnity of the Assumption, we will host an Ice Cream Social in the back courtyard **following the Sunday, August 15 10:00 a.m. Mass**. We'll have an ice cream truck for the kids and a few lawn games. More information is coming next week!
- In response to your feedback, we are adjusting the Dayton Ave. side protocols to ensure seating closer to the center of Church for those who desire **social distancing**. Holy Communion will be distributed in the hand only to those seated in **gold-corded** pews.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector