

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



Birth pains: a reflection

The Vatican issued a document last week on birth technology, condemning a variety of medical procedures designed to alter the creation of human life.

The document is already stirring great controversy within the Church, particularly in the United States. In considering a response to the Vatican statement, Catholics might want to consider the following points.

Church responsibility: It is certainly within the realm of the Church's responsibility to respond to moral issues of all kinds. Indeed, not only Christians of all denominations, but people from all over the world look to Rome and the Catholic Church for guidance on moral matters. The recent document on birth technology represents but another example of how the Church exercises its vocation to protect the sacred dignity of life, including the lives of the unborn.

American overreaction: It has often been said that Americans tend to visualize and interpret everything within a democratic framework. Traditionally, when Americans disagree with something, they often resort to the legitimate exercise of their constitutional rights through voting, the courts, and even through protest. Americans therefore tend to overreact to statements from Rome, such as this recent one, which may appear overly dogmatic. We may overreact because we feel that there exists no legitimate vehicle for expressing disagreement.

Not a papal encyclical: While this latest Vatican statement on birth technology is considered a major document, it does not carry the weight of a solemn papal decree, nor of a papal declaration on faith and morals or an encyclical. We must further remember that, to date, the Church "has never spoken infallibly on moral issues," to use the words of moral theologian

Father Timothy E. O'Connell. In particular, this means simply that matters of birth technology are not permanently closed to discussion. It will be possible in the future for the Church to alter its opinions on birth technology, if it sees fit.

Conscience: While the document on birth technology states that "recourse to the conscience of each individual... cannot be sufficient for insuring respect for personal rights and public order," we must not forget earlier Church statements on the primacy of conscience. Vatican II stated that no one should be forced to act in a way that would violate the inner dictates of his or her conscience. To balance this, of course, we must hold the individual responsible for informing his or her conscience according to divine law. Cardinal Newman took this point even further. He said that anyone who intends to prevail against the pope "must follow upon serious thought, prayer, and all available means of arriving at a right judgment on the matter in question."

There is little within the Vatican's recent statement on birth technology with which I personally disagree. In fact, I support not only the right of but the necessity for the Church to make such statements on these matters. The document, however, reminds me of Pope Paul's VI's 1968 *Humanae Vitae* condemning artificial birth control. While the two documents differ greatly, they both prescribe moral guidelines for behavior. It is well known that *Humanae Vitae* failed to change significantly the ways in which Catholics regulate having children. Polls indicate that 68 percent of American Catholics favor birth control. I cannot help wondering whether this recent pronouncement on birth technology will fall victim to a similar fate.

Neighbors



Forty Southern Tier-area teenagers became the first youths in the Diocese of Rochester to participate in a Teens Encounter Christ weekend, presented in January at the Watson Homestead, a retreat center north of Corning. Teens Encounter Christ is based on a similar program for prison inmates, known as Residents Encounter Christ. During the encounter, speakers presented talks on issues ranging from the influence of rock music to piety and the Paschal Mystery. Participants joined in celebrating two Masses and renewed their baptismal vows, receiving white stoles as remembrances of the occasion. Based on the success of the first TEC weekend, organizer Tony Rocchi is already planning another.

Sylvester "Sy" Mandell has retired after serving more than 40 years as director of maintenance at St. Joseph's Villa and St. Patrick's Home for Girls, one of the agencies that predated the villa.

More than 200 colleagues, friends and family members gathered to wish him well during a retirement celebration last month.

During his tenure at St. Joseph's Villa, Mandell's responsibilities expanded as the agency grew and its services changed. Prior to his retirement, he maintained 15 buildings at the Dewey Avenue campus in Greece, as well as five group homes and two other program sites.

Mandell and his wife, Alethea, live in Rochester.

Flowers and food were the tokens of esteem Parents Association members at Aquinas presented to educators at the school on Teacher Appreciation Day earlier this month.

Association President Carol Bentivegna (right) presented English teacher Eileen Park with one of the many corsages she distributed. Kitty Schrader also organized a special luncheon for teachers.

Two eighth-grade students from Corpus Christi School in Rochester have earned scholarships to Catholic high schools.

Paula Miller, the daughter of Rochester resident Mary Miller, will attend Nazareth Academy next year. Felix Medero, the son of Felix and Natalia Medero of Rochester, will study at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

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