

The Vatican Body-Count

A study of the Holy See's share of responsibility
for excess mother, child, and other sickness and death

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David A. Willey & Jack Parsons assert their moral right
to be identified as the authors of this work

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Introduction

The lands ... you inhabit ... are too narrow for your large population ... they furnish scarcely enough food for their cultivators. Hence ... you devour one another and ... frequently you perish from mutual wounds.

Let ... hatred depart from among you; let your quarrels and wars cease ... Enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulchre; wrest the land ... which, as the Scripture says, 'floweth with milk and honey' ... from the wicked race and subject it to yourselves. (Pope Urban II, 1042-1099, in support of the Crusades. Quoted more fully in Parsons, 1971, p. 116, from Hutchinson, 1969, p.1)

WHEN DAVID WILLEY drafted the core* of this paper he had been battling against cancer for some time. Given his work load it is not surprising that he lacked the time to prove and publish it before he succumbed. Nevertheless, it is a powerful piece which we feel must be made more widely available and his wife, Yvette, is giving the project her full support. His premature death was a great loss to the small and struggling movement for population awareness and sustainable policy-making and we hope that, in due course, more of his contributions will be made available – possibly as 'collected works' on CD-ROM.

Some readers may be offended by the title I have adopted – to David's less blunt but still shocking original version** – even to the very idea of a venerable religious institution being weighed in the balance as a major source of human death and destruction. Sad to relate, however, there can be no substantive argument against the fact that the Roman Church – along with many (most?) other religions – has in the past been directly responsible for a great deal of human suffering including the taking of many lives – ie, acquiring a body-count.

Paradoxically, it was a stern admonition from the present Pope which convinced me that plain speaking was the right choice here. In the 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, he wrote:

We need now more than ever to have the courage to look truth in the eye and to call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception. (John Paul II, pp. 103-4. Itals. original)

Many religions have practised human sacrifice; some still do. The torso of a small black boy ('Adam') recently found in the Thames in London is thought to have been the victim of 'muti', an African form of religious rite. The Aztecs were particularly depraved; hacking open the chests of tens of thousands of living victims and tearing out the still-beating heart to hold up high to satisfy their bloodthirsty gods.

The major world religions have never quite attained these gory extremes but there can be no doubt that they all have substantial body-counts and the Roman Church is no exception. The question whether was settled centuries ago; the operational questions now are; *how many killings, why, when, where, and how* – and how to avoid them in the future?

In earlier days the Vatican was almost indistinguishable from other polities, scheming, aggrandising, invading, warring, torturing, executing prisoners, and so forth. As the 'eyebrow' to this Foreword shows, the Vatican strongly supported the bloodthirsty Crusades, ironically, largely on the ground of relieving serious local overpopulation. Possibly the most violent, shocking and degrading epoch in the church's long history was – from 1231 to 1834 – that of the Inquisition, during which time many thousands were fiendishly tortured and burned alive.

Although the Vatican long ago relinquished torture and killing in pursuit of allegedly spiritual goals, the great irony is that in this nominally enlightened age the body-counts stemming directly from present-day dogma and social control vastly outnumber those of earlier epochs.

The stranglehold which the reactionary senior echelons of the Vatican and the Roman Church in general exercise over the encouragement and provision of voluntary birth-planning and disease control services is an international outrage.

Not only does this seriously interfere with development plans to balance numbers and resources against each other – mainly by means of voluntary family-planning programme as an integral part of overall development packages – it also damages maternal and child-health measures, especially *vis-à-vis* HIV/AIDS.

One of the reasons why AIDS is causing such devastation in Africa is that in some countries – with the encouragement of both the local Church leaders and senior Vatican officials – Catholic activists are scouring retail and other outlets and commandeering or buying up as many condoms as they can for the sole purpose of destroying them, often on bonfires accompanied by joyful religious celebrations.

David Willey performed a considerable public service in tackling the sensitive subject of Vatican responsibility head-on. However, as the ms was not finally sent out for publication and the statistics had by now become slightly dated I have taken the liberty of lightly editing and updating it, and adding an Afterword. Nevertheless, I assure readers that the core of this publication is still very much the original David Willey monograph, the great bulk of the main text just as he set it down.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that – though edited and published by a Humanist – this document is not intended as a broadside against religion, against Catholicism in general, or against the great body of the faithful. I am sure that David did not intend this and it is clear to any reasonably open-minded observer that women and men of the highest intellectual calibre, learning, and moral probity are to be found on both sides of the great debate on the existence or non-existence of an omniscient and omnipotent creator and the consequences which may stem from that proposition. The only civilised implication of these facts is that we must respect each other while – if we get the urge – we each do our level best to convince the other that our belief system is the best.

This is a broadside, no doubt about that, but it is directed at the iron rule of the small Vatican clique of more or less aged celibates. As David stressed – and as this monograph further documents at some length – by far the largest and strongest body of opinion rejecting the antedeluvian dogma and prejudices of the old guard is to be found not merely within the flock of the Roman church, but up to and including the rank of cardinal, one of whom – the Belgian, Godfried Danneels – is strongly tipped to be the next pope.

It is our sincere hope that this short document may be able to give a sufficiently salutary shock to the consciences of enough extra members of the hundreds of millions of sensible and decent everyday Roman Catholics – who in their own family and social lives totally reject the archaic and destructive teachings of the Vatican Hierarchy on sex education, contraception, etc – to stimulate effective action on their part towards reform.

If by great good fortune it does in some measure achieve this, it should help with the much-needed reform of their ancient Church and thence to a significant improvement in the overall quality of human life overall through a reduction in the massive amount of mortality and suffering from AIDS and other diseases and in excess population pressure on scarce resources in general.

Jack Parsons, 10 August 2004

Acknowledgments

I must first express my gratitude to Yvette Willey for her seemingly endless kindness, patience, and practical help with missing references, etc, as this presentation of David's brainchild slowly expanded and took shape. I also thank Professor Malcolm Potts for his helpful suggestions on new sources of valuable information somewhere in the middle.

I also owe a big debt to Professor John Guillebaud who took a critical interest at an early stage, and who – right at the end – suddenly dived in with great gusto while on holiday overseas and produced a wealth of ideas and suggestions on topics ranging from minor typos to deep philosophical and ethical perspectives, all the time generously insisting that the final choice is mine alone.

I did my best with these, accepting quite a few. However, I could not agree some of the weightier items so – even more firmly than is usually the case, I must take full responsibility for the final content of this monograph.

* *OPT position-paper 99/3. 1st draft, Sept. 1999*

** *'An Attempt to Quantify the Vatican's Share of Responsibility for Maternity-Related Deaths.'*

The Vatican Body-Count

An attempt at quantification

by David Willey

If the possibility of conceiving a child is artificially eliminated in the conjugal act, couples shut themselves off from God and oppose his will. (Pope John Paul II, Chihuahua, Mexico, 11 May 1990)

WHEN IN POST as Secretary of State at the UK Department for International Development (DFID) the Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP, described the stance of the Roman Catholic Church on modern contraception and related matters as morally destructive.

The Holy See is in an unholy alliance with reactionary forces ... if it had its way, a million people would get the HIV virus, there would be more and more unwanted pregnancies, more and more illegal abortions, more and more mothers dying as a result of illegal abortions. (The Guardian, June 30th, 1999)

Sad to relate, the Holy See all too effectively does continue to get 'its way' over wide swathes of human society and the lives of hundreds of millions of our fellow world-citizens. The above press report coincided with the opening of a unwanted conference on population in New York, at which 126 women's organisations presented an open letter to the Roman Church, questioning its role in "blocking advances in contraception, sexual education and HIV prevention". One of the questions posed by these women was this:

How could a church that holds life as a fundamental value, watch thousands of women die because they lacked access to contraception and abortion?

Towards the end of this document we deal briefly with some more of the powerful internal forces opposing the Catholic Hierarchy, although these – regrettably – are still much too weak to bring about the much-needed reforms in the archaic teachings of this body.

The question these women posed immediately prompts two others, more concrete. *How many* premature deaths has the Vatican been responsible for; and *how much human suffering*, short of premature death?

This paper is a preliminary attempt to provide an approximate answer. If the figures it comes up with turn out to be unfair, this could in part be taken as a reflection of the moral outrage aroused by Vatican dogma and cruelty. Cool detachment is made extremely difficult.

When should the body-count start, and why?

Although Vatican values and social controls have long been inimical to birth control, thereby powerfully increasing the intensity of the population explosion, we propose, for the sake of both simplicity and understatement, to start the body-count only from 1968. This was the year in which the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* attempted to rule out for all time any change in the Church's opposition to contraception.

The background was as follows. In 1964, Pope Paul VI created a Papal Commission on Population and Birth Control with two parts; one consisting of 64 lay persons, the other of 15 clerics including the present Pope, John Paul II, then a Polish cardinal. Paul VI gave the Commission a single task: to determine how the Church could change its position on birth control without undermining papal authority.

After two years of intense study, the Commission concluded that, while it was not possible to make any change without undermining papal authority, the Church should make the change anyway because it was the right thing to do. Both parts of the Commission voted in favour of change: the lay members by 60 votes to 4 and the clerics by 9 to 6.

However, a minority report, co-authored by the present Pope, was also prepared, and this one set forth the exact opposite:

*If it should be declared that contraception is not evil in itself, then we should have to concede frankly that the Holy Spirit had been on the side of the Protestant churches in 1930 (when the encyclical *Casti Connubii* was promulgated); in 1951 (Pius XII's address to the midwives); and in 1958 (the address delivered before the Society of Haematologists in the year the pope died).*

It should likewise have to be admitted that for a half century the Spirit failed to protect Pius XI, Pius XII, and a large part of the Catholic hierarchy from a very serious error.

This would mean that the leaders of the Church, acting with extreme imprudence, had condemned thousands of innocent human acts, forbidding, under pain of eternal damnation, a practice which would now be sanctioned.

The fact can neither be denied nor ignored that these same acts would now be declared licit on the grounds of principles cited by the Protestants, which popes and bishops have either condemned or at least not approved.

Because of this conflict with the recently adopted Doctrine of In-fallibility [created in 1870], *Humanae Vitae* permanently ruled out all change in this sphere. Hans Küng believes the official Catholic problem with contraception and related matters cannot be solved until the doctrine of infallibility has been changed.

Maternity-related deaths overall

According to revised estimates made by the World Health Organisation in 1996, the number of women who have died annually from maternity-related causes in recent years is over 600,000, i.e. the equivalent of four fully-loaded jumbo-jets crashing every day with 100% mortality.

World totals of maternity-related deaths, 1968-1999

1968 - 1971	4 years at 250,000	=	1,000,000 deaths
1972 - 1975	4 years at 300,000	=	1,200,000 deaths
1976 - 1979	4 years at 350,000	=	1,400,000 deaths
1980 - 1983	4 years at 400,000	=	1,600,000 deaths
1984 - 1987	4 years at 450,000	=	1,800,000 deaths
1988 - 1991	4 years at 500,000	=	2,000,000 deaths
1992 - 1995	4 years at 550,000	=	2,200,000 deaths
1996 - 1999	4 years at 600,000	=	2,400,000 deaths
TOTAL			13,600,000 deaths

To avoid error on the high side, the figure is rounded down to 12 million deaths.

We have no figures for the years before the mid-80s but the estimates above allow for the way in which rapid population growth in recent years means there would have been fewer pregnancies and therefore fewer deaths in the 70s and 80s. Because of improvements in maternity services they underestimate deaths in earlier years.

The long drawn-out suffering preceding many of these deaths

The deaths of approximately 600,000 women every year from maternity-related illness are often extremely unpleasant, as a 1996 UNICEF report by Peter Adamson made painfully clear. (UNICEF refers to the unwanted Infant & Child Emergency Fund.)

For a decade the figure of 500,000 maternal deaths a year has been part of the statistical liturgy. Now, new estimates are showing that the number of women who die each year in pregnancy and childbirth is probably closer to 600,000. However, before the new estimates replace the old as a way of packaging up the problem, it should be said that a mistake has been made in allowing statistics such as these to slip into easy usage. For these are not deaths like other deaths, and death is only a part of the story they have to tell.

They die – these hundreds of thousands of women whose lives come to an end in their teens, twenties, and thirties, in ways that set them apart from the normal run of human experience. Over 200,000 die of haemorrhaging, violently pumping blood onto the floor of the bus or bullock cart or as their families and friends search in vain for help. About 75,000 more die from attempting to abort their pregnancy themselves. Some will take drugs or submit to violent massage ... many choose to insert a sharp object – a straightened coat-hanger, a knitting-needle, or a sharpened stick into the uterus.

Some 50,000 women and girls attempt such procedures every day. Most survive ... often with crippling discomfort, pelvic inflammation disease, and a continuing foul discharge. And some do not survive: with punctured uterus and infected wound, they die in pain and alone, bleeding, frightened and ashamed.

Perhaps 75,000 more die with brain and kidney damage in the convulsions of eclampsia, a dangerous condition that can arise in late pregnancy and has been described by a survivor as 'the worst feeling in the world that can possibly be imagined'.

Another 100,000 die of sepsis, the bloodstream poisoned by a rising infection from an unhealed uterus or from retained pieces of placenta, bringing fever, hallucinations and appalling pain.

Smaller but still significant numbers die of an anaemia so severe that the muscles of the heart fail. And as many as 40,000 a year die of obstructed labour – days of futile contractions repeatedly grinding down the skull of an already asphyxiated baby onto the soft tissues of a pelvis that is just too small.

In the 1990s so far, three million young women have died in one or more of these ways. And they continue to die at the rate of 1,600 every day, yesterday, and today and tomorrow. (Adamson, 1996)

Non-fatal maternity-related sickness

Mothers who are injured but do not die from childbirth are often left with painful, lifelong illnesses, as Adamson graphically described.

But the numbers of the dead alone do not reveal the full scale of this tragedy. For every woman who dies, approximately 30 more incur injuries, infections, and disabilities which are usually untreated and unspoken of, and which are often humiliating and painful, debilitating and lifelong.

Many of the injuries sustained during pregnancy and childbirth are distressingly obvious. Rupture of the uterus, prolapse, pelvic inflammatory disease and lower genital tract injuries make life miserable for millions.

Most obvious and distressing of all is fistula. This occurs when the tissues of the birth canal are deadened by prolonged labour and days of pressure from the baby's skull.

In the days and weeks after birth, the dead tissue falls away, leaving holes which allow leakage from the bladder and rectum, or both, into the vagina.

Urine and faeces now bypass the muscles that normally control the flow. ... Special clothing is not available. ... The victim must make do with cloths and rags which quickly become soaked and soiled. ...

The best available estimates suggest that 80,000 women develop fistula every year. Most cases go untreated, and somewhere between 500,000 and a million women are now living with the problem.

This means that at least 12 million women a year sustain the kind of damage in pregnancy and childbirth that will have a profound effect on their lives. And even allowing for the fact that some women will suffer such injuries more than once during the child-bearing years ... The cumulative total of those affected can be conservatively estimated at some 300 million, or more than a quarter of the adult women now living in the developing world.

It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the issue of maternal mortality and morbidity, locked fast in its conspiracy of silence, is in scale and severity the most neglected tragedy of our times. (Adamson, 1996)

How far is it reasonable to calculate the Vatican's share – if any – of responsibility for this reproductive holocaust? Clearly, opinions are likely to vary widely and it will hardly be surprising if feelings on the topic run high.

The Vatican's share of responsibility for these deaths

(i) Maternal deaths

As fewer than a quarter of maternity-related deaths occur in South America, the Philippines, and other regions where the Roman Church is dominant, it might seem unreasonable to assign to the Vatican more than a quarter of the responsibility.

However, such an approach fails to take into account the powerful if not sinister role played by the Vatican in the politics of the United States and the UN. In 1975, the National Council of Catholic Bishops announced its Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities. This soon led to the formation of the New Right movement, which has since succeeded in persuading the US Congress to make major reductions in financial contributions to population aid, leading to a *worldwide* increase in unwanted pregnancies and unwanted births.

According to the 1997 and 1998 reports of the unwanted Population Fund, (UNFPA) the 35% cut made in 1995 led to 4 million additional unwanted pregnancies, 1.9 million additional unwanted births, and 1.6 million additional abortions. We would be interested to hear both criticisms and counter-arguments, but in the circumstances it seems not unreasonable to ascribe *one half* of maternity-related deaths since 1968 to the activities of the Vatican, i.e. six million.

(ii) Infant deaths

The Vatican's apparent position – that a death outside the womb is less important and therefore not to be condemned in the same way as a death within the womb – must seem counterintuitive to many people. It is arguable that – if there is one thing more wicked than condemning a woman to a painful death – it is condemning a woman to give birth to a child which has no hope of survival.

Every year 12 million children die from malnutrition or preventable disease, i.e. the equivalent of four fully-loaded jumbo jets crashing every hour, again with 100% mortality. For how many of these deaths is the Vatican responsible? Detailed calculations must await another day.

Meanwhile it seems reasonable to assign responsibility to the Vatican for a large proportion of the deaths of the estimated 2 million or so children every year whose births are not wanted. Whatever the exact number, the total since 1968 [up to 1999, ie] must at least be equal to maternal deaths, ie six million.

A comparison of institutional body-counts

What sort of body-counts have some other powerful social systems – the Fascist and Communist nations, for example – managed to achieve in recent times? *Le Livre Noir du Communisme (The Black Book of Communism)*, by Stéphane Courtois, catalogues in great detail the deaths which can be ascribed, directly or indirectly, to Communism.

It comes up with a total of 100 million, including 65 million in China and 20 million in Russia. The authors compare this total with the 25 million deaths that can be attributed, directly or indirectly, to Naziism.

To avoid any possibility of overstating the indictment we leave out of account the many deaths due to violence and even periodic culls in overpopulated countries – notably one million dead Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda, Burundi and Congo in 1994.

All we then need to do is to add on a minimum of six million infant deaths to the six million deaths of mothers, giving a combined total of 12 million deaths between 1968 and 1999 for which the Vatican has been responsible.

Compared with the figures for Fascism and Communism, the Vatican's 12 million body-count – though approximately double the toll of the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews – may seem small, though it is doubtful whether the survivors or the relatives of the victims would agree.

However, Vatican dogmas enforced by powerful social controls still prevail over wide areas and bring about the addition of many hundreds of thousands of deaths to its score every year.

Roman Catholic opposition to Vatican values and controls

There are, of course, many reasons why it would be unfair to tar all Roman Catholics – even all of the middle-ranking figures – with the same brush. It is Vatican leaders in particular at whom an accusing finger should be pointed.

In developed countries at least, the vast majority of Roman Catholics tacitly or even overtly reject the teaching of the Vatican so far as their own sexual behaviour is concerned.

Some of the highest usage-rates of artificial contraception are to be found in countries – notably Italy and Spain – where Roman Catholicism is by far the dominant religion.

Many highly vocal Catholic organisations – some formed for this express purpose – openly oppose Vatican dogma. Along with 70 other NGOs (non-governmental organisations), the Washington based group 'Catholics for a Free Choice', is even seeking to downgrade the Vatican's status at the United Nations from "non-member observer state" to that of an NGO (a category with many members and a much lower status).

The object of this is to reduce the destructive influence of the Vatican – stemming from its present status as a quasination – in world diplomacy and politics.

In addition, a number of eminent Catholic theologians strongly reject and openly campaign against Vatican teachings on sex, birth control, and population, e.g. Hans Küng and Eugene Drewermann. One of the most recent attacks on the Vatican's position by a Catholic theologian came from Daniel Maguire, Professor of Moral Theology at Marquette University in Milwaukee and head of the organisation, 'Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics'.

In a speech at the New York conference, the professor cited St. Antonius – a 15th-century Archbishop of Florence – as a church father who defended induced abortion. [NB. Further material in the Afterword]

Some individual commentators and organisations believe that the Vatican is too broad a target for criticism and that this should be centred on a single individual, Pope John Paul II in person.

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*Position paper 99/3. 1 Sep 1999
(Ed. JP, Jan - August 2004)

Afterword

Many bodies from earlier times to add to the count

If David's sources and calculations are roughly correct, this already amounts to a shocking indictment of Vatican influence on human reproductive behaviour and general wellbeing, both directly within the Church, and indirectly *via* the organs of international government.

However, as David explicitly left out of account two important sources of casualties, the true situation is far worse than even this powerful case shows. The first is the whole (and even less enlightened) epoch before 1968. During this, as well as sabotaging as far as possible the dissemination of knowledge about sexuality, population dynamics and modern birth control, powerful emissaries of the Roman Church – in total disregard of where the means of sustenance were to be found – were actively preaching the large family ideal and pronatalism generally, as some still do. Mother Theresa was notoriously guilty of this.

The only form of birth control allowed was the ineffective 'rhythm-method', widely known among the irreverent (including many believers) as 'Vatican Roulette'. Even ignoring all previous historical epochs in many regions during which Vatican influence was completely dominant, Catholic power must have been exerting a wide and malign influence on maternal and child health and mortality.

This is particularly true of the 23 years between the end of World War II and David Willey's starting-point, 1968, during which birthrates were very high and world numbers increased by about 1.25 billion. This alone could have substantially increased his modest 1968-1999 figure of 12 million deaths to be attributed to Vatican social control. In addition, another factor tends to exacerbate this already deadly reckoning. David noted but did not give any weight to the number of casualties brought about by violent conflict (in Rwanda, eg), over basic resources, land, fresh water, etc.

It is reasonable to argue that such conflict has been partially caused by excess population pressure, in turn partly due to propaganda against Malthusian awareness of potential problems and the corresponding imperative to balance numbers and resources against each other. An acceptable quality of life – preferably for all – can never be enjoyed if this balance is not first achieved and then maintained.

Many more bodies from HIV/AIDS, etc, to add to the count

Nor does this end the reckoning. Since the appearance of HIV/AIDS, some 50 million people have already been infected, of whom about 28 million have died prematurely from its effects. The current rate of new infections is around five million per year, and – according to the Gates Foundation for Research into HIV Vaccines – by 2010 there will be 45 million more infections and nearly 70 million more deaths.

A large number of these coming deaths will be in Africa, where, again, the Roman Church is in the vanguard, as far as possible preventing both effective sex education and condom use – probably the cheapest, most readily available, and most effective countermeasure.

Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa where the affliction is doing much of its damage, Catholic bishops and other dignitaries are preaching – with high-level support from the Vatican – as hard as they can against the use of condoms. As noted in the Foreword, they are even encouraging militants to seek out condom supplies from retail and other outlets and ceremoniously destroy them, mostly on bonfires, even if this means having to purchase them first. Every condom taken out of use opens up another channel for the transmission of the deadly virus and the risk of yet another painful and long drawn-out death from AIDS.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, here again, Vatican sabotage of the modern disease-prevention and fertility control movement is having devastating effects, causing millions of extra deaths and untold human suffering short of the ultimate penalty.

These additional items could substantially increase David Willey's already conservative figure of 12 million premature deaths, thereby raising the Vatican's modern body-count to an even higher multiple of that of Nazi Holocaust. Even if the extra dimensions listed here have no relevance, and even if – in addition – David

Willey's minimal figure of 12 million extra premature deaths between 1968 and 1999 is exaggerated by one thousand percent, this still leaves 1.2 million deaths and a vast amount of non-lethal suffering.

This is a human tragedy – for which the Vatican cannot by any means escape full responsibility – far larger than the recent Rwandan genocide. How is it possible for a venerable institution – allegedly dedicated to universal love, the highest possible Christian morality, peace, goodwill, and the finest flowering of the human spirit – to behave in such a monumentally destructive way while at the same time remaining totally complacent and self-satisfied about these matters. How can an allegedly civilised world stand by and calmly observe this tyranny?

The Vatican body-count in the developed world

The great bulk of Vatican sabotage of birth control, the full range of modern medical science, sex education and women's health, is of course focused on the developing countries, as we have seen, and it is there that it has its greatest effects.

However, Vatican social controls extend world wide and tend to produce comparable outcomes where social counter-controls are too weak to resist. Even in highly developed countries considerable and quite unnecessary suffering is caused.

David made no attempt to quantify this and it would indeed be very difficult to repair the omission here as statistics are not readily available: all we can say with any confidence is that it is unlikely to be insignificant.

This may be reinforced with the observation that even if it is only a few tens of thousands over the whole developed world, this is a far from trivial matter either for those who suffered unnecessarily and died prematurely – as shown in the following case-study – or for their families and friends.

An individual case-study from Ireland

This tragic tale – reported in some detail by Brenda Maddox (1998) – concerns the distressing fate of the Irish woman, the late Mrs Sheila Hodgers. It began with Mrs Hodgers – already a mother of two who had been using the contraceptive pill as a 'cycle-regulator' (a subterfuge necessitated by Vatican social control mediated through the local hierarchy) – undergoing a mastectomy on account of a deep tumour.

This necessitated her coming off the contraceptive pill, since the hormones it contains can – as may a pregnancy – reactivate a cancer in remission. Good practice involves preventing pregnancy for at least two years after the operation, which in turn necessitates either strict celibacy or effective contraception.

Mrs Hodgers was given anti-cancer tablets but not provided with effective alternative contraceptive help, whereupon she rapidly became pregnant again and was soon in such pain that she had to be readmitted to hospital as a re-emergence of the cancer was suspected.

Here, she was immediately taken off the cancer treatment and refused X-ray photography because of possible damage to the foetus. An induced abortion – which would have permitted a thorough diagnosis and precise treatment – was 'out of the question', as was sterilisation, either intentional or as a by-product of other essential treatment.

A senior Irish cancer therapist said of Mrs Hodger's case that, in his opinion, chemotherapy and radiation treatment on pregnant women are acceptable on both medical and religious grounds, but that this hospital's policy was that 'no woman was ever sterilised'.

A Health Board consultant privately confirmed that never in any circumstances would sterilisation be allowed, while admitting:

But you won't get any doctor or consultant to say that publicly or they would be fired. They're under the Bishop's contract ... under the highest religious authority in the country, Cardinal O'Fiaich. (Maddox, p. 1)

Brenda Maddox tersely summarised as follows:

But sterilisation would not have been necessary had Mrs Hodggers been offered the common everyday protection of a Dutch cap or an IUD. [Or, one might add, a supply of condoms] (Maddox, p. 17)

From this point the patient deteriorated rapidly. Although she was in such severe pain that she could neither walk nor stand she was not even given painkillers. Her husband told *The Times* that on one evening visit:

She was in absolute agony. I could hear her screaming from the front door of the hospital though she was on the 4th floor. (Maddox, pp.15-17)

When the baby was born, a girl, two months premature, it died immediately, and two days after that the mother herself died in great pain of tumours on her neck, spine, legs, liver, and ribs.

Of course it is possible that Mrs Hodggers would have died a premature, protracted, and painful death even had she received every possible personal consideration and care plus the full range of help potentially available from modern medical science. However, the facts remain that she would almost certainly not have become pregnant; would not have produced a non-viable child; and would not have died so soon.

Mrs Hodggers was a victim of Vatican dogma. The sentence passed upon her to die at that time and in that painful way was almost as sure as though the Cardinal concerned had donned a black cap and solemnly pronounced the dread words of a judge in the earlier days of capital punishment:

'You will be taken from here to the place of execution and there hanged by the neck until you are dead.'

Scenarios comparable to this must have been acted out many thousands of times even in the developed world, and substantially – if incommensurably – added to the already huge Vatican body-count in the developing world.

Until the dawn of the surely inevitable day of ethical and spiritual enlightenment when these outrageously dysfunctional dogmas begin to be humanely reformed. The relentless mechanisms of Vatican social control will continue to grind out their authoritarian imperatives and send ever more millions of innocent victims to their early and often painful and long drawn-out deaths.

As these dogmas, the would-be logical deductions drawn from them, and the population and health policies following inexorably in their turn are so central to the Vatican position and thence to the catastrophic ramifications in the world as a whole, the final section of the monograph is devoted to an analysis of the alleged facts and logic.

It is hoped that the facts and arguments presented here will give good grounds for rejecting the whole idea of dogma in favour of empiricism and reason – plus, of course, various faiths compatible with these. It is hoped that these factors may liberate our thinking about the paramount need to be truly ecological in our understanding and our policies on the never-ending problem of balancing numbers and resources at a reasonably acceptable and sustainable quality of life.

Let us now look at a further evidence that very powerful currents of reform are beginning to flow both within and outside the Roman church.

Further opposition to Vatican values

David Willey's already powerful case can be reinforced by evidence of outspoken opposition to Vatican pressure and manipulation even in some of the most downtrodden regions of the world. To illustrate this, I quote here a passage from my recent book on human population competition:

"The Pope jets round the world wreaking havoc on painfully constructed policies to satisfy the large unmet need for voluntary birth control and legal and safe induced abortion, or – still more painfully constructed – for combining development and population control measures to balance numbers and resources against each other.

With a few honourable exceptions, he and his local representatives do their best to prevent the will of the people on these vital matters from being realised in their own country, and the will of democratically elected

governments from being put into effect or even from being discussed – at international population/development conferences such as Bucharest 1974, Mexico City 1984, Cairo 1994, and Johannesburg 2002.

Of course we are all entitled to argue for what we believe in but an IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Federation) report on a recent video interview with the former First Assistant General Secretary at the WHO (World Health Organisation), Milton P Siegel, describes how the WHO and its first Secretary-General were:

... bullied and threatened into dropping family planning programmes ... by Church-influenced countries such as Ireland and Italy ...

The failure, in the 1950s, of the WHO to become involved in family planning, was clearly the result of a very effective job done by the Vatican ... not only at WHO but at meetings of unwanted and other organisations. ('Vatican Control of WHO Population Policy ...', 1992, pp. 25–6)

However, it was encouraging to see that one small country, Rwanda, which suffers from overpopulation, poverty, and ethnic violence on a monumental scale, had both the nous and the courage to rap the Pope over the knuckles on this score as he exhorted them to be even more prolific.

A Swiss newspaper reported that Pope John Paul II:

... is openly being pounded on account of his uncompromising stand on sexual morality. In the stadium of the capital city, Kigali, a Government spokesman ... against the Pope and the Catholic Church, condemned these 'hoary bastions of domination' for their opposition to birth control and to prophylactic measures against AIDS, thereby 'repudiating the interests of humankind'.

The speaker annihilated the Papal stance with the simple plea:

What advice shall I give to an ignorant and impoverished couple who are always giving birth to children who look like spectres and for whom death by starvation is certain? What shall I say to a young man, already sentenced to permanent unemployment, who is further condemned to celibacy by social and religious laws when he has no control of his sexuality and whilst AIDS is killing people. ('Scharfe Kritik Am Papst ...', 1990, p. 2)

I know of no figures on the number of parish priests and nuns who also disagree with the official line on birth control and similar matters but anecdotal evidence suggests that, worldwide, there may be many thousands of them. However, these brave souls are subject to rigorous disciplinary codes and can have little or no effect on policymaking at the top.

Nonetheless, it seems probable that in their quiet way they achieve significant results; permitting or even encouraging freedom of conscience on the matter of birth control, giving spiritual guidance and practical solace to those among their flocks who suffer remorse for 'sinning' in this respect, and producing a worthwhile reduction in population pressure into the bargain.

The sad fact seems to be that in this crucial area the hundreds of millions of Catholics at the grass roots level have no power at all to influence the policy of their Church, whereas the Pope and a small group of high functionaries can subvert the democratic will of both international bodies and national governments." [End of JP quot. 1998/ 2002. vol I, pp. 246-7]

In 2004, Austen Ivereigh – the deputy editor of *The Tablet*, a leading Roman Catholic international journal – wrote:

While caring for a quarter of all AIDS sufferers in sub-saharan Africa ... [the Catholic church] is accused of being a killer rather than a healer; by rejecting condoms in the battle against AIDS, it stands charged with contributing to its spread. ... Catholic ... agencies in Africa say that AIDS can only be dealt with by attacking its roots in war, poverty, and the sexual abuse of women ...

This is a powerful witness. But it has been undermined by the church's refusal ... to concede that in some circumstances the use of a condom may not be just licit, but obligatory. ...

He went on to discuss his preview of the BBC TV programme, *Panorama*, due the following day, which described the plight of a youngish Catholic woman in Uganda whose husband had recently contracted AIDS. She was not yet infected and had decided to continue with normal unprotected marital relations with her partner, saying:

'We won't go to heaven if we use condoms.'

The reporter discussed this case with the Archbishop of Kampala, Cardinal Emmanuel Wamala, and asked if the woman had made the right choice. The Archbishop, a plump and seemingly jolly, good-natured individual [I viewed this programme, too. Ed.], answered:

'If it is wrong to use the condom, then she has made the right choice.'

'Even if it costs her her life?' 'Yes', he replied.

'That is a harsh teaching' responded the interviewer, to which the Cardinal nodded assent without making a verbal reply.

Mr Ivereigh argued that the Cardinal's response was not only harsh but 'misguided':

Moral theologians agree that what makes a condom good or bad is the use to which it is put; if it is being used to prevent the transmission of death, then it is not contraceptive in intention. The doctrine of 'double-effect' holds that some good actions have bad, unintended consequences, but if the primary intention is good, it remains valid.

*For this reason the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* accepted the legitimacy of taking the birth-control pill for a medical, rather than a contraceptive, purpose – to regulate menstrual cycles rather than to prevent pregnancy.*

In the case of AIDS, it can be argued that there is a positive moral obligation on an infected person to don a contraceptive.

In support of this point he quoted the Belgian cardinal, Danneels – of whom more anon – and then continued:

No European or American cardinal would dare to follow the line taken by the Archbishop of Kampala [quoted above] ... so another casualty of the controversy is the obvious injustice that while Catholics in the West are, in effect, allowed a conscience, African Catholics are not.

*Rome's refusal to modify its stance on condoms in the light of AIDS has much to do with the long-standing impasse over its ban on artificial contraception. Pope John Paul II has made adherence to *Humanae Vitae* a touch-stone of orthodoxy and obedience ...*

But if that explains Rome's callous intransigence, it does not justify it. By its refusal to deal with human realities, the church has muffled its own prophetic voice on AIDS ...

[It has] ... encouraged the conclusion that Christian teaching that can only be upheld at the cost of African lives does not deserve the name. (Ivereigh, 2004, p.25, italics added)

Another article in *The Tablet* was actually entitled 'Ashamed of my Church'. The author of this, Clifford Longley, wrote:

*The Church appears to be unreasonable and oppressive. Many times since the first appearance of AIDS, spokesmen for the Church in various parts of the world have closed the door on one obvious remedy for the AIDS/HIV epidemic, the ready availability of condoms. They have done so because the Church's teaching, elaborated in ... *Humanae Vitae*, insisted that 'each and every marriage act' should remain 'open to the transmission of life'. ...*

*... in AIDS-ravaged Africa and not so long ago in France, attempts to get round the hardline Catholic position against condoms have been thwarted by the heavy hand of Church authority. This has now become a cause célèbre in Brazil, where AIDS is rampant. As the *Tablet* reported last week ('Church in the World') a Catholic Church committee has recommended making condoms available as the lesser of two evils, and senior members of the hierarchy have condemned it for doing so.*

There is no issue under heaven that causes more distress to practising Catholics than repeated Church opposition to the most effective, and therefore necessary, remedy for preventing the spread of AIDS. It is certainly not life that is being transmitted when someone with AIDS has unprotected sexual intercourse.

'Each and every marriage act should remain open to the transmission of death' is a hellish doctrine that cannot possibly have been what Pope Paul VI intended. Yet the strict interpreters

of the Church's teaching have impaled themselves on that interpretation because of the principle that it is wrong to do evil that good may come out of it – that the end can never justify the means.

What poignancy that phrase takes on when one considers the hundreds of thousands of children orphaned by AIDS in Central Africa.

Has their desperate plight become the 'means' to the 'end' of upholding the authority of Paul VI ...?

Only someone consumed with hatred of the Church could enjoy the spectacle of what is, in the quite literal sense, a scandal. What makes it all the more painful is that it is not necessary. There is a better way ... there is ... a valid theological rationale for the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS. It is by applying the principle of double-effect.

If a husband infected with AIDS through a blood-transfusion, say, has intercourse with his wife, he is threatening her life if he does not use a condom. In using a condom his intent is to perform the ... good act of making love to her while not threatening her life. It is not, per se, to prevent conception ...

*But his semen contains an inextricable mixture of spermatozoa, whose journey to the Fallopian tube it is wrong (according to *Humanae Vitae*) deliberately to interrupt, and particles of the HIV virus, the agent of a deadly and incurable disease which must be interrupted at all cost. In order to interrupt the latter it is inevitable that you also interrupt the former. This – under the principle of the double-effect – is allowable. I would say that in all honesty and humanity, it is not only allowable but obligatory. And there are few things that I could wish for more fervently than that the Church should say so, too.*

I am not generally ashamed to be a Catholic, but in this one respect ... I have to admit I really am. ('Ashamed of my Church'. 1 July 2004)

The BBC recently showed two powerful *Panorama* TV programmes subjecting the Vatican to damning criticism. The first of these, 'Sex and the Holy City' (12/Oct/03), gave an annual world figure of 70,000 for maternal deaths from botched induced abortions. The Vatican may argue that there will be no deaths at all from abortions, if – as it urges – none are attempted, but this ignores social reality. If proper medical facilities are not available, then – as from time immemorial – very large numbers of abortions will continue to be induced in dangerous circumstances, with the tragic consequences shown above.

The programme also showed Kenyan bishops and other priests in Nairobi condemning sex-education, birth control, condom use against AIDS – reinforced in the latter case with celebrations at the condom bonfire ceremonies mentioned earlier.

In the Philippines, the Catholic Mayor of Manila – with strong support from the Catholic hierarchy – had abolished all sex education and all family-planning facilities in the city's clinics.

Another section showed interviews with very senior personnel at the Vatican who welcomed all the above goings-on and added their strongest support to the canard that condoms are permeable to the HI virus.

On Sunday, 27th June, 2004, another *Panorama* programme took the above topic as its central theme; 'Can condoms kill?'. The programme-makers started with an official paper written by Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo – allegedly supported by '87 footnotes including scientific papers in support of the belief that trusting condoms can kill you.'

The BBC website, reporting these matters, states:

'The major ... AIDS control agencies say this is not true ... there's no health-risk from holes in condoms.'

'The European Union condemns the Catholic Church over "bigotry" in its approach to condoms.'

The team investigated these matters in another strongly Catholic country, Brazil. They timed this to coincide with the great annual carnival, in which:

' The Church's claims have caused a row so bitter that the Rio carnival this year became a protest against the Vatican ...'

They showed that 'some protesters – and the government itself – have started to question whether the Church's stand could become a crime against humanity.'

America as a tool of the Vatican hierarchy

In view of America's position as the leading world power in terms of wealth and military strength, it may seem absurd to claim that any other entity could ever use it as a tool to further its own ends. Nevertheless, the Roman Church is also an extremely powerful entity, often exerting its influence in secret and very devious ways including alliances with extreme Protestant groups to which it is otherwise totally opposed.

There is much convincing evidence to show that over several generations, American policy on many population-related issues has been strongly influenced – almost invariably for the worse – sometimes even being thrown into reverse. Since David Willey's day, the Vatican war on contraception in general and on condom use in particular, has gained a powerful new ally, a USA under the presidency of George Bush, Jnr.

In January 2003, Nicholas D Kristof contributed a hard-hitting article to *The New York Times*, entitled 'The Secret War on Condoms', in which he wrote:

... conservative groups in President Bush's support base have declared war on condoms, in a campaign that is downright weird – but that, if successful, could lead to millions of deaths from AIDS around the world.

I first noticed this campaign last year when I began to get emails from evangelical Christians insisting that condoms have pores about 10 microns in diameter, while the AIDS virus measures only about 0.1 micron.

his is junk science (electron microscopes haven't found these pores), but the disinformation campaign turns out to be a far-reaching effort to discredit condoms, squelch any mention of them in schools, and discourage their use abroad.

Then there are the radio spots in Texas: 'Condoms will not protect people from sexually transmitted diseases.' A report by Human Rights Watch quotes a Texas school official as saying: 'We don't discuss condom use, except to say that condoms don't work.'

So far President Bush has not fully signed on to [this] campaign, but there are alarming signs that he is clambering on board. Last month at an international conference in Bangkok, US officials demanded the deletion of a reference to "consistent condom use" to fight AIDS and sexual diseases. So, what does this administration stand for? Inconsistent condom use?

The scientific consensus is simple: condoms are far from perfect, but they greatly reduce the risk of HIV ... and other sexual infections.

Kristof quotes a University of California study showing that condom use is 'astonishingly cost-effective, costing \$3.50 per year of life saved', in contrast to antiretroviral therapy at almost \$1,050 per life-year saved.

He also reports the verdict passed on US policy by Adrienne Germain, President of the International Women's Health Coalition:

The Bush administration position basically condemns people to death by HIV/AIDS. And we're talking about tens of millions of people.

Fortunately for the future of the world, the USA is not a totally dedicated ally of the Vatican in its war against contraception in general and condom use in particular since it (the USA) continues to supply consignments of condoms as part of the overall foreign aid programme.

However, in closing, Kristof stresses the unfortunate fact that since the end of the first Bush regime (ie. as the need for condoms has expanded enormously) the yearly US supply has shrunk from 800 million to 300 million.

This savage 62% cut is causing an enormous shortfall in supplies precisely as the need rapidly escalates for this simple, cheap, innocuous, life-saving, population-pressure reducing device.

With an ally like this the Vatican challenge to ecological, economic, and ethical sanity is even more formidable: both the body-count and the overall total of misery and suffering will continue to swell until the light of reason finally dawns and triggers the necessary volte-face.

The US Centre for Research on Population & Security (CRPS)

Just as this monograph neared readiness for printing I was introduced by two old acquaintances – Professor John Guillebaud, former Medical Director of the Margaret Pyke Centre in London, and Professor Malcolm Potts of UC at Berkeley – to the splendid work done by Dr Stephen D. Mumford and his collaborators at the CRPS, set up at St Louis, Missouri, in 1984.

Among their wide-ranging and important studies are a number of probes into the ruthless invasions by senior Vatican emissaries into the principles of free speech and democratic politics in general and with specific reference to the USA.

Most of these are of direct relevance to David Willey's original thesis and to the further development attempted here. Some excerpts are provided here to give further weight to our thesis and to encourage others to visit the CRPS website <www.population-security.org/intro.htm> for further material.

The Commission on Population Growth & the American Future

One of the items on the site concerns this path-breaking investigation.

The causes and implications of population growth in America were cogently presented in the definitive report of the Commission on Population Growth and the American future (The Rockefeller Commission) in 1972. Had the 70 recommendations of the Commission's report ... been implemented, a comprehensive US population policy would have resulted. America and the world would be very different places today. Adoption of this policy would have provided leadership vital to coping with the world overpopulation problem.

According to John D. Rockefeller 3rd, the US Catholic bishops threatened President Nixon politically, and bowing to their pressure he disavowed this report. Not one of the 70 recommendations was implemented [and] the US continues to have no population policy.

The Vice-President's Task-Force on Combating Terrorism

Another passage on the website deals briefly with this:

Arguably the most authoritative work on terrorism was the February 1986 Report of the Vice-President's Task force on Combating Terrorism, chaired by Vice-President George Bush, Snr. Yet no mention of the study has appeared in the press since September 11, 2001.

On that day the George Bush Library Archivist, Melissa Walker, pulled it out from her files in anticipation of interest by the media. But not until October 29th did she receive her first request ... from CRPS.

This report concludes that the root cause of terrorism is overpopulation ... [which] the Vatican no doubt finds highly offensive since all of the solutions to the population problem undermine papal authority.

Dr Mumford has written an important book called *The Life and Death of NSSM 200* (where 'NSSM' means National Security Study Memorandum), which is described on the site as:

The definitive interagency study of world population growth ... requested by President Nixon in 1974 ... and its implications for US and global security ... It concluded that sustained rapid population growth had become a danger of the highest magnitude, calling for urgent measures to avoid severe damage to world economic, political and ecological systems, and to our humanitarian values.

President Ford reviewed [it] ... and wrote recently:

'I endorsed the 227-page NSSM 200 report in 1975, in National Security Decision Memorandum 314. My views are the same today.

Excerpts are provided from reviews of the Mumford book by a number of highly distinguished scholars, among them the late Professor Garrett Hardin:

Dr Mumford gives us a uniquely clear account of how the Vatican manipulated the American government, causing it to distance itself from the compassionate control of population. Tragically, the relevance of this keen analysis grows with every new population-fuelled horror.

Another is by Professor EO Wilson:

[This work] ... does a major service in calling attention to the strong link between world overpopulation and US national security. The point needs to be hammered home. Americans have perhaps begun to see the connection in the cases of Somalia, El Salvador, and Haiti, but the media unfortunately continues to concentrate on proximate and superficial political events. Population policy should be central to foreign policy.

A third is by Professor Hans Küng, the senior academic theologian of the Catholic faith quoted in David Willey's original draft:

This book gives extremely helpful background information about the hidden coordination of Vatican and American policy with regard to population and birth control. It is high time that certain problematic manoeuvres of the Vatican are discussed in public.

Further powerful opposition within the Catholic church

To David Willey's original list of prominent Roman Catholics who profoundly oppose the official teachings on sex and birth control, can now be added the names of at least two more very senior divines, the first of whom is the Scottish Cardinal, Keith O'Brien.

He was recently reported as saying:

... the ban on contraception should be debated, along with such issues as priestly celibacy and homosexual clergy. (Hooper & Osborn, 2004)

The second is none other than a man who has been strongly tipped to succeed John Paul II as the next pope. This is the Belgian Cardinal, Godfried Danneels, who – while making it plain that abstinence is the preferred method of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS – forthrightly announced on the radio for all to hear:

When someone is HIV-positive and his partner says "I want to have sexual relations with you", he doesn't have to do that, if you ask me. But, when he does, he has to use a condom.

This comes down to protecting yourself in a preventive manner against a disease or death. [It] cannot be entirely morally judged in the same manner as a pure method of birth control. (op cit)

Further remarks of his were paraphrased by the two reporters as:

He added that if someone who was HIV-positive did have sex, [then] failing to use a condom would be sinful – a contravention of the sixth commandment: thou shalt not kill. (op cit. NB: italics added by JP)

This could hardly be a more complete rejection of the official dogma, another element of which is a widely propagated but blatant falsehood reported in the same article from the lips of Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, the Vatican's Chief Advisor on family questions.

This is the claim that – quite apart from the absolute Catholic moral objection to the use of condoms – these should be avoided in any case simply because they don't work. The HI virus is claimed to be so small that it can readily pass through the wall of a condom.

Of course it is true that this virus – along with any others in the vicinity – may possibly get through a damaged condom, but the vast majority of condoms are not damaged either before or during use and the World Health

Organisation (WHO) has strongly denied this wide-spread Vatican canard, giving weighty evidence to show that condoms reduce the risk of HIV transmission by 90%.

Commentary on Vatican dogma and special pleading

As David showed (pp. 2-3), Pope John II rejected the Catholic Birth Rate Commission's overwhelming vote in favour of contraception on the grounds that, if adopted, it would show that earlier decisions and policies had been in error, which – he asserted – is impossible.

'If contraception is not evil', he proclaimed:

... then we should have to concede frankly that the Holy Spirit had been on the side of the Protestant churches in 1930 ...

It should likewise have to be admitted that ... the Spirit failed to protect Pius XI, Pius XII, and ... the Catholic hierarchy from a very serious error. ...

[also that] ... the leaders of the Church, acting with extreme imprudence, had condemned thousands of innocent human acts, forbidding, under pain of eternal damnation, a practice which would now be sanctioned.

Banning contraception for the reign of a particular pope is one thing; banning it for ever on the doctrine of papal infallibility – the dogma that it is impossible for popes ever to make a mistake on faith or morality – is quite another. This decision – insofar as it lies within the power of the church to enforce it worldwide – means that the resulting body-count must go on rising by several hundred thousands every year.

Surely this reflects the logic and morality of a spiritual and ethical Bedlam. In the first place, it is patently ludicrous – for any group or institution at any time in any sphere – designed and operated by *homo incompetens*, to claim omniscience and omnicompetence: that mistakes can never be made about existing knowledge, and clearer thinking about existing situations or vital new evidence can never emerge.

In the second place, if popes really are infallible, why was this not known until 1870? Admittedly, when finally asserted, the claim was retroactive, no previous pope could have made doctrinal mistakes, either. But this presents further problems. During the many long preceding centuries, the persons, bodies and procedures which decide these things and failed to declare this infallibility must themselves have been fallible.

Can a body which has conclusively proved itself to be highly fallible, then go on to validly declare a doctrine of infallibility? On the hypothesis that the Catholic God had been constant on the issue of infallibility, then the Vatican eminencies had been extremely fallible in not picking up on this vital issue and informing the faithful for nearly two millennia.

The opposite hypothesis – that in 1870 God changed his/her mind but then made sure that the Roman church got the message forthwith – suggests an even shakier basis for the idea of infallibility as it would show that from time to time even the Creator can find out that for ages he/she has been grossly in error so that earlier rulings on core issues must be reversed.

If the principle of change from fallibility to infallibility is granted, then the possibility of a second change – back to fallibility – must be conceded, and – surely – this vital correction can no longer be postponed.

In the third place, any honest enquiry must give reasonable consideration to the great mass of empirical evidence, to the many and often really fundamental changes in beliefs and behaviour in the preceding epochs. For instance, in 1215 – some seven centuries before the rise to power of Nazi racial ideologues in Germany – compulsory identity badges for Jews were introduced by the 4th Lateran Council at Rome:

... as it sometimes happens that by mistake Christians join with Jewish ... women ... In order that ... such a damnable mixing may not spread further ... we decree that such persons of either sex are to be distinguished in public by ... their dress [and] we order secular princes to restrain with condign punishment those who [disobey]. (para 68)

It was not until the early 1960s that the Vatican began to offer words of reconciliation and apology to the Jews for the virulent anti-Semitism of the Christian past.

What of the time (in the 14th century) of the Great Schism, when two popes, (even three, for a short period) existed simultaneously, one in Rome and the other at Avignon? Both of these popes excommunicated and interdicted the other and his followers, so that for a while – in theory – Catholicism was totally extirpated from the world.

Successive popes profited from the sale of indulgences, enjoyed their concubines, fathered children, permitted induced abortion up until 1840, compiled a long list of forbidden books (the infamous *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*), burned many of the most important ones, rejected the emerging scientific method and the heliocentric world view, persecuted Galileo, initiated wars and ethnic-cleansing, and made a host of other crass errors of judgement, including – until very recently – denial of the Darwinian theory of evolution.

In his 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*, Pope Pius condemned such things as civil marriage, secular education, and socialism. Even the basic dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus, was not proclaimed until 1854: her Bodily Assumption, not until 1950.

The church also reversed its views on usury, and on the fundamental question of heresy, in the name of which it has committed such monumental crimes against humanity.

My *Britannica* sums up as follows:

Roman catholic theologians often deal with heresy, paradoxically, as a necessary step in the development of dogma. ...

In recent times most of the theses of Modernism (a movement to change the Catholic Church by means of radical renovation), which were condemned vigorously by Pius X in 1907, have found their way into Catholic theology.

This may have something to do with absence of the words heresy and heretics from the acts of the second Vatican Council. Like the use of the word church for Protestant churches, this indicates a substantial change of attitude toward a genuine ecumenical position. (15th edn. Macropaedia, 15, p. 993, col 1)

Radical shifts have occurred in many other values, policies, and behaviour. For instance, it was not until the early 1960s that the Vatican stopped denouncing Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Christians as heretics and began to accept them in fraternal understanding.

Leaving all this aside for the purposes of argument, Vatican values and behaviour only in modern times and in just two spheres are surely far more than enough in any world not yet completely mad to extirpate every last remaining vestige of dogma and infallibility.

The coup-de-grâce for Vatican dogma and infallibility?

In despite of this damning historical catalogue of torture, persecution, grotesque scientific and moral errors – not to mention a generous admixture of plain human ignorance, fantasy, and stupidity – surely the coup-de-grâce to any notion of infallibility is provided by the recent and contemporary behaviour of the Roman hierarchy as a whole – not just the Vatican elite – in two spheres.

Historically – probably on the scale of moral weight, also – the first is in the political/militaristic sphere, the Vatican alliance with and unstinted support for fascism, while the second is in the realm of morality and law, manifest in the widespread and profusely-documented sexual abuse by many Catholic priests of members of their flocks, including many thousands of those least able to understand or resist; young children.

The first count: Vatican support for fascism

In 1929 the leaders of the Roman Church signed a pact with Mussolini's emergent Fascist regime in Italy and – despite its many cruel excesses, including the bloody conquest and repression of Abyssinia – worked closely with it from then on.

In 1933 a concordat with the then new Nazi Third Reich was signed and the church took little or no action to oppose or even criticise the cruel and violent excesses of this monstrous regime.

In the case of the 1936 -1939 Spanish Civil War (so-called, in reality it comprised mainly an invasion by a large combined force of Germans, Italians, and Salazar fascists), the Vatican was much more proactive, but, once again, as the Spanish branch of the Roman Church subsequently and shamefacedly admitted – in support of the wrong side.

In 1931 – via the ballot-box – Spain became a republic, a liberal democracy that separated state and church, ended financial aid for the latter, and adopted the principles of individual freedom and conscience, abominations to the Vatican. From then on the church opposed this legitimate democratic government and gave all possible support to General Franco, his fascist rebels, and their already powerful allies.

In every European country there were many Catholics – up to the level of cardinal – who, to their credit, did publicly oppose Franco, but in the USA the stranglehold of the Vatican was so tight that it has been said that only a single one raised any objection, Cardinal Mundelein, of Chicago, who later was made to pay heavily for stepping out of line.

Not only were those priests who opposed the Fascist takeover silenced, so were virtually all American journals – together with their reporting staffs. Even the New York Times was completely tamed by intense Catholic pressure, the main object of which was to prevent the surfacing of any criticism – even the basic facts – of the Fascist-revolt, in order to defeat the recurring move to overturn the US Neutrality Act and thereby allow aid to flow to the defence of the legitimate Spanish government forces against the Nazi and Fascist invaders.

When – after four years of massive casualties and destruction – the Luftwaffe and crack Italian troops brought them victory in 1939, Pope Pius XII publicly expressed his great joy. As one account puts it:

On July 11, 1939, Pope Pius reviewed 3,000 Spanish legionaries in Rome and called them 'the defenders of the faith and the culture of their country.'

[He also] blessed the Italian fascist army and airforce on its return from Spain, [and] not only sent his congratulations to the fascist victor, [General Franco] but stated that his 'Christian heroism' had 'pleased God'

These unsavoury machinations on the part of both Pope and hierarchy went very much against the grain for many worthy members of the faith – apparently a large majority in Spain itself, possibly even in Europe as a whole – as rapidly became clear after the fall from power of the Spanish dictator in 1971.

Following this occurrence a seemingly unstoppable surge of opinion on the part of both the public and the Spanish priesthood itself soon brought about a mass admission of guilt and a public expiation.

As one source put it, in Madrid, September 15, 1971:

Primate Cardinal Enrique Tarazon presided at a Congress of the entire Roman Catholic Hierarchy, with 94 bishops and 151 priests present ...

Although a two-thirds vote was necessary to pass resolutions, and this one did not pass, it is significant that it received a large majority of the vote ... The majority confessed it had sinned in supporting the wrong side (the fascist side) in Spain and asked to be forgiven.

'We humbly recognise' said the resolution, 'and ask pardon for it, that we failed at the proper time to be ministers of reconciliation in the midst of our people divided by war between brothers.'

Again in 1972, 1983, and in succeeding years – a majority of Spain's bishops and priests attending voted 60% or more for the Church's apology but never officially passed it.

The commentator added, drily:

By taking this action, Cardinal Tarazon probably prevented widespread killing of priests and nuns upon Franco's death in 1975.

Presidents Roosevelt and Truman both freely admitted later that they had been wrong to give way to Catholic pressure and refuse both to admit the truth about this cruel war and send aid to the legitimate Spanish government.

The second count: priestly sexual abuse and the official cover-up

With regard to the widespread and prolonged scandal of sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests and the universal cover-up by the Church authorities, it can readily be conceded that no large organisational selection and training programme can be 100% effective. It follows that the church cannot be faulted on account of the fact that some sexual perverts and other criminals manage to make their way into the priesthood and commence to use its lavish facilities and prestigious status to further their predatory careers.

What cannot on any account be excused, however, is that – as far as I have been able to ascertain – in not one of the now very large number of known cases of priestly abuse in many countries, did the Catholic authorities take any action whatever to inform the appropriate law-enforcement agencies or to assist in any other way to see that the law against these nefarious activities was enforced.

Instead – at highest executive levels and for many years – they did their level best, very successfully, to cover up priestly depravity. Serial offenders were typically moved on to another diocese, where – all too often – they carried on exactly as before with complete impunity. In many cases, it now appears, without counselling, treatment, punishment, or any other sign of discipline or control, they were allowed to continue for decades to abuse children entrusted to their care.

As far as I am aware, no statistics have been compiled about the number of cases of priestly abuse, the number of their victims, the number of cases which have come to court, the number of those found guilty, the types of punishment and length of their prison sentences imposed, or the amount of fines imposed. However, we have all seen the very large number of cases which have been reported in the press and heard that the fines imposed so far have mounted to the point at which some wealthy dioceses are on the verge of bankruptcy.

Summary and conclusions

Even if the world forgives and forgets the sorry catalogue of Roman Church abuses and cruelties over the many long centuries of its over-weening power and influence, are not these two truly disgraceful, shameful, and long-protracted major episodes sufficient all by themselves to destroy for ever all notions of – or even aspirations for in the future – anything remotely connected with ideas of dogma or infallibility?

Ought not the Roman Church to be publicly endeavouring to bite off, chew very thoroughly, and slowly digest an extremely large slice of humble pie, while burying at a great depth – and for keeps – every last, lingering notion of dogma and/or infallibility?

Whatever happened to the allegedly Christian value of humility? Wouldn't the Pope and his fellow eminencies benefit very considerably – most notably on the population problem – from a course of study and meditation on the personality and teachings of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, who is most outspoken about the huge problem of existing overpopulation and the imperative need to control human numbers?

In the light of all these delays, gross errors, crimes, contradictions, and reversals throughout history, my *Britannica* sums up as follows:

The infallibility of the Church has never been defined, and its extent is understood by theologians in the sense of pontifical infallibility as limited to faith and morals. [but] ... these terms are ambiguous ... Infallibility is actually hedged in with many reservations; nevertheless, pontifical documents often have an aggressive tone that may mislead the incautious reader.

The real problem is how a teaching authority that can and does make errors ... can be called infallible. (15th edn. Macropaedia, vol. 15, p. 995, col 2)

Just so. Surely it is impossible for any honest, informed, and concerned participant or observer to accept the rationale of popes and the Vatican hierarchy to justify – on the basis of such systematically distorted evidence and such flimsy reasoning – the setting up of a permanent ban on modern reproductive health measures including contraception.

Even in the complete absence of the huge volume of suffering and the ever-growing body-count, the Vatican position would be unacceptable to a truly civilised society. Given the facts of mass suffering and the huge

body-count hinted at or openly acknowledged by many observers and enumerated here by David Willey, a gentle, kind, and sensitive man, it should be repugnant even to members of a backward tribe.

In a moderately expressed but powerful passage, *Britannica* states that the Roman church is claimed by its staunchest supporters to be based on reason rather than faith:

The motive of faith that has been presented by Catholic theologians is "the authority of God revealing". It is held that the preambles of faith show beyond reasonable doubt that God exists and that he has revealed himself. (op cit. p.993, col 1)

For the would-be believer, whether or not God exists must surely be the most important question of all, and yet, here, the test for this is whether or not the proposition 'God exists' is 'beyond reasonable doubt'. In other words, faith follows on from reason, rather than the other way round. Shouldn't this powerful test, 'beyond reasonable doubt' be applied to all key questions in human life?

If we do, what answers does it provide in the spheres of condom use vis-à-vis HIV/AIDS, and contraception in general vis-à-vis the population explosion, poverty, hunger, and conflict over scarce resources?

We fumbling, struggling, members of *Homo sapiens*, so-called, know so little – compared with what is yet to be learned – about ourselves, the universe, and our place in it, and have done, and still stumble blindly onwards doing, so many foolish, cruel, and destructive things that no dogma of any kind in any sphere can have any place in any truly civilised and sustainable human society of the future.

When the Vatican finally gives up – as assuredly it must – this infantile fixation on absolutism, it will confer on the whole world one of the greatest boons it has received in many a long year. It will remove a truly huge obstacle – possibly the largest single sociopolitical barrier in existence – to a fully ecological approach to the overriding problem of attaining a sustainable balance between human numbers and resources at a decent quality of life – preferably for the whole of humanity.

A very good place to make a start on returning to the basic Christian values of humility and charity would be for the Vatican to voluntarily relinquish its ill-gotten and systematically abused status as a separate state giving it great power in world councils in which it has done so many wicked deeds and so much damage to human affairs.

After many centuries of great power and influence without statehood, the Vatican gained this spurious status only by striking a bargain (in the Lateran Treaty and Concordat of 1929) with Mussolini's new Fascist dictatorship. This 'state' covers only four tenths of one square kilometre – much less than the mini-states of Andorra and Liechtenstein – less than a quarter, even, of Monaco. Its population is a mere 1,000 or so and all basic supplies – water, food, electricity, etc. – must be imported, while its government is a dictatorship with little or nothing in the way of elections or recognised opposition. As my *Britannica* puts it:

[The Pope] ... has absolute executive, legislative, and judicial powers within the city. [He] appoints the members of the Vatican's governmental organs ... (Macropaedia, 19, p.36)

Strict censorship is the order of the day and all financial operations – involving vast sums in banking, investments, political operations, propaganda, etc. – are carried out under a total veil of secrecy.

Roman Catholicism is the only religion (strictly speaking, only one branch of a religion) to have been granted such an extraordinary set of privileges. Why haven't the Protestants been provided with their own absolutist city-state; the Hindus, the Buddhists, Sikhs, Baha'i, Copts, Shintoists, Rastafarians, and so on all, along the line?

True, in Salt Lake City the Mormons have come – via rampant capitalism – fairly near to creating one of their own, and the Zionists among the Jews have managed to carve out and hang on (so far, at least) to one for themselves. However, the state of Israel was created only with colossal military, political, and financial aid from the USA and at the cost of the destruction of someone else's national base – that of the Palestinians. Perhaps the religious entity with the greatest claim to such an extravagantly favoured and prestigious position is Mecca.

With a geographical area 65 times that of Vatican City, and a population normally about 1,400 times greater (numbers increase hugely during the Haj, of course) Mecca has a much bigger democratic and moral claim to special international status and power than the Vatican can muster.

It is the present editor's conviction (as a Humanist), however, that in fact none of these should enjoy special official status giving extraordinary power and influence on the world scene. Surely the American pressure-group 'Catholics for a Free Choice', which – as David Willey showed – in boldly calling for an end to this spurious status, has a well-argued and extremely strong case.

Such power as the Catholics and other religious groups can legitimately deploy should stem from and be wielded through the more democratic machinery of the NGO, (the non-governmental organisation), in proportion to their membership, the general validity of their various creeds and ideologies, and their powers of rational argument and generally constructive behaviour.

In pursuit of this lofty democratic ideal, if the Vatican hierarchy should fail in its clear moral duty to voluntarily relinquish forthwith its so-called 'statehood', then an international movement should be set up – with the support of as many individuals, organisations and governments as possible – to call upon it and finally, if necessary, compel it to relinquish this completely undeserved and hitherto spectacularly abused special status.

The Roman Church should thenceforth take its place – with a humility never before observed in its values and behaviour – in humankind's typically fumbling endeavours to resolve the many pressing problems confronting us.

David Willey did a great service in launching this thesis. It is greatly to be hoped that it will now strike a strong chord with some of the large numbers of disenchanted Roman Catholics, other believers, non-believers, and responsible citizens in general. A moral awakening could begin to stir which might at last lead to a realistic long-term confrontation with the basic problems of reproduction and ecological balance.

Even if David's figure for the Vatican body-count is inflated to one thousand percent of the correct value, that still leaves approximately one and a quarter million fellow humans condemned to death by Vatican machinations in only a few recent decades – ie, fifty percent more than the death-toll from the atrocious Rwandan genocide, an event which stirred the conscience of the world.

Similarly, it is much greater than the genocide and ethnic cleansing taking place in the Darfur region of the Sudan at the time of writing. Can we not reasonably expect widespread concern and an international enquiry into this major crime, also?

In his draft of the core of this document several years ago, David Willey made comparisons between the suffering and casualties inflicted by Vatican policies and those of other destructive bodies, notably the earlier Communist and Fascist regimes.

At this later date, among the questions which surely must arise and be given due weight include:

- 1) How does the harm done to humanity by Pope John Paul II compare with that done by Osama bin Laden?
- 2) How does the Vatican body-count compare with that of the Taliban or al Qaeda – or even the combined force of all the many groups presently dedicating themselves to violence and destruction?
- 3) Is it conceivable that the Vatican body-count overshadows their combined score by orders of magnitude?

The Roman church sets great store by its Jesuitical insistence on the categorical distinction between faith and morals on the one hand, and all other spheres combined. While admitting that popes and other priests always have been and still are humanly fallible in every other sphere, the church insists that somehow they manage to be infallible on the key issues of faith and morals.

Surely, this specious distinction cannot survive rigorous analysis. The dogma of infallibility – when it finally made its appearance – emanated from the lips of a human being and/or a pen wielded by a human hand – possibly both. Those lips and/or that hand were energised by a human brain, which, in turn, had been informed by data passing through the linked eyes and/or ears, (possibly touch, too?) or through some mystical channel not reliant upon any known physical means.

In either case, the natural or the mystical, the incoming information landed up – to make use of a modern metaphor – in the central processor, a complex mass of grey matter in the head of a human being, all of whose behaviour is regulated by that same massy organ which everyone knows, and the Roman church now readily admits, is fallible in all respects in all other spheres. How can any human being or human group or institution be ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN about *anything, ever?*

Surely dogma of any kind, in any sphere, can have no place in any half-civilised society. Can we dare to hope that before he vacates his high office through infirmity or death, Pope John Paul II will confer upon a long-suffering world the truly giant boon lying at his fingertips – by putting a complete and final stop to the campaign against contraception.

Nearly 40 years ago, after two years of intensive study – as David Willey stressed – the Vatican's own Papal Commission on Population and Birth Control concluded by a very large majority that while it was not possible to make any change in doctrine without undermining papal authority, the church should make the change anyway because it was the right thing to do. The present Pope co-authored the minority report rejecting this profoundly honest and refreshing finding and has personally seen to it ever since that change was ruled out. What a colossal human toll has been exacted over those 40 years.

At this eleventh hour, can His Eminence – Pope John Paul II – be persuaded to read, reflect upon, and then act resolutely in accordance with the awe-inspiring injunction delivered (appropriately enough to another notably dogmatic religious body*) by that devout one-time Lord Protector of England, Oliver Cromwell:

"I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ,
think it possible
that you may be mistaken!"

*(This was in a letter to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in September, 1643. See, among many other sources, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 1967, p. 71)

** See 'Late Note' no. 1 related to the theme of Vatican power.

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[With apologies for the question-marks. We could not trace all of DW's refs. If any sympathetic readers can help we shall be very pleased]

The three books strongly recommended by Brenda Maddox (and quoted in this monograph) are:

(1) Noonan, J. (1963, rev. 1986) *Contraception: A History of the Church's Teaching*. Harvard University Press

(2) Harris, P. et al (1968) *On Human Life: An Examination of Humanae Vitae*. London. Burns & Oates

(3) Lodge, D. (1981) *How Far Can You Go?*. Penguin. (A much praised novel)

Late notes

1) Removal of Vatican special status

In connection with the strong support given here to the Catholic plea (emanating from Catholics for a Free Choice in the USA) for the extraordinary special political status of the Vatican to be voluntarily relinquished or else removed by joint international action, it is interesting to note that if two current trends are maintained for a little while, a third solution may supervene.

The first trend concerns the native Italian birthrate; far below the replacement level. The second, the rapid build-up of Muslim sub-population through substantial immigration coupled with a much higher birth-rate. These could soon lead to a Muslim majority and government accompanied by a somewhat unceremonious retraction of the Vatican's special status.

My good friend Dr John Tanton, founder of *The Social Contract*, succinctly analysed this possible scenario under the title: **Vatican Capitulates! Pope leaves for Avignon. St Peter's converted to mosque.** The date chosen is April 10, 2020, when a TV news reporter comments on an article in the Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*.

The Muslim population of Italy has grown to a majority, and they have staged a democratic takeover of the government at the ballot box. The newcomers have insisted that the pope move his headquarters out of this newly Muslim territory to what remains of the Christian world. He has accepted an invitation of the French government to set up at Avignon, as the popes did in the 14th century.

This area in the south of France is already heavily Muslim, so it is not certain how long this arrangement will last. (The Social Contract. XIV (3) 2004, pp. 229-231)

See, also, the article by Sophie Arie in the *Christian Science Monitor*, (9 Aug. 2004). 'Italy takes heat as racist voices rise', an appraisal of a new anti-Islamic book by Oriana Fallaci – an Italian woman war-correspondent – which 'sold half a million copies in a matter of hours ...'.

2) Vatican plotting against Turkey

A slightly later article in *The New York Times* showed that the Vatican hierarchy is still insistently endeavouring to manipulate the international political process in its own interest:

Having failed to persuade Europe's leaders to enshrine Christianity in the final draft of the Constitution of the European Union, the Vatican has found a new way to try to conflate European and Christian identity.

*The Holy See would like to block Turkey's candidacy to the European unwanted-ion. In an interview ... with *Le Figaro*, the ... top theologian, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, said that Turkey, a predominantly Muslim secular republic of 70 million ... is "in permanent contrast to Europe" and that linking it to Europe would be a mistake.*

To drive home his point about Turkey's disqualifying otherness, he cited the Ottoman Empire's incursions into the heart of Europe in centuries past.

The writer declares:

Like meddling clerics the world over, Cardinal Ratzinger is inflaming an important political debate ... elevating religious differences over political process and personal beliefs over values that are universal, not a Judeo-Christian monopoly ... (Anon, 'Saying No to Turkey', 15 Aug. 2004)

3) Professor John Guillebaud's notes on David Willey's data

Although he strongly supports the late David Willey's initiative in launching this thesis, our concern for the massive human problem to which it draws attention, and PPP's decision to round off the whole thing in the form of this monograph, he does have some reservations. Having studied the near-final draft in great detail, he expressed these as follows:

Discussion re any possible over-estimates of the number of maternal death-causing pregnancies attributable to the Vatican.

If 12 million maternal deaths is 'in the right ball-park', as it must surely be, there remains the problem that maternal deaths can follow conceptions of three varieties:

1) WANTED/INTENDED by the mothers, ie they would have been conceived by choice even in the presence of optimum contraceptive services.

2) UNINTENDED due to failure to use modern contraception (even though available services, whether good or bad, might in no way be impeded by Vatican influences) – or to use it consistently.

This can be for cultural reasons, partner's pronatalism, or simple forgetfulness (a potent cause of conception in ALL countries).

3) UNINTENDED pregnancies directly because the Vatican made women or partners believe contraception is sinful, or ensured the local non-availability of modern contraceptive services.

The WHO calculated prior to the 1994 unwanted Population Conference in Cairo, based on the data from massive AID-funded social surveys (The World Fertility Survey and the Demographic and Health Surveys, see the Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1995) that two-fifths of world maternal mortality would disappear if every woman who said she did not want a baby at time present had the opportunity to use modern contraception.

Therefore the original 12 million figure should certainly be reduced by 60% to allow for 1) above (wanted conceptions). But to obtain 3) (Vatican-attributable lethal pregnancies) means also allowing for 2) (Conceptions leading to maternal deaths that would still occur even if there were to be greatly improved access to contraception but in locations fortunate enough to be free of the Vatican's maleficent influence).

However, [and here he rounds off partly using my text referring to a possibly large overestimate on David's part] even if David's figure of 12 million extra premature deaths between 1968 and 1999 – six million of whom were infant deaths – is exaggerated by one thousand percent, and even if all pre 1968 and all HIV deaths are deemed to have no relevance, this still means 1.2 million deaths and a vast amount of non-lethal suffering.

This still indicates a human tragedy – for which the Vatican cannot by any means escape responsibility – that is far larger than the 1994 Rwandan genocide. (JG. email, 24 Aug. 2004)

[All this points strongly to a need for rigorous research for the best possible figures for these quantities. Surely they cannot turn out to be negligible – what could the word 'negligible' mean when applied to a quantity of unnecessarily inflicted human suffering and deaths? Ed.]

4) Centuries of Vatican support for castration

This penny – Vatican support for male castration during the centuries of the epoch of bel canto music – did not drop for the editor until the monograph was otherwise complete and the early review copies had gone out. It seemed to necessitate one more late note for production copies.

As David showed, the Pope insists that every sexual act must be open to the transmission of human life, and as the quoted case of the late Mrs Hodgers in Ireland emphasised, surgical sterilisation is completely ruled out by the Roman church in all circumstances, even to save life.

Here is yet another sphere in which the church has been inconsistent and far from infallible. During the elaborate, complex, and highly demanding bel canto (beautiful song) era from about 1605 until well into the 19th century it became impossible – bearing in mind St Paul's injunction; 'Let your women keep silence in the churches' – to reach the standard required in choirboys before they attained puberty and were lost.

The solution was to train them to the highest standard, select the very best, and castrate them – permanently sterilising them – so that maturation could not 'ruin' their voices. It appears that this practice was not legal and was not openly called for by the church, but there is no doubt that it was widely accepted on all sides, not least by the church.

Of course the bel canto era involved music in general and opera and theatre in particular, and as the latter evolved new composers, theatres, orchestras, and forms of drama, the tradition gradually died away. Unsurprisingly, it survived in the church much longer than anywhere else – even into living memory.

My *Britannica*, from which much of this material comes, notes that:

A few [castrati] survived in the theatre into the first three decades of the 19th [century]. They survived in the church even longer ... the last of them, Alessandro Moreschi, who died in 1922, was Director of Music at the Sistine Chapel ... (Macropaedia. 16, p.790)

This hypocrisy parallels that of the Inquisition, which – having selected its victims for torture and death at the stake – would hand them over to the 'secular arm' to ensure that their dread designs would be mercilessly carried out without the inquisitors having to soil their own hands with these grisly tasks. In similar fashion the church accepted the cruel handiwork of the castrators and made use of this for its own selfish ends.