

# Pope Paul VI

Pope Paul VI, born Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria Montini, has been crucial to the clarification of Roman Catholic views on embryos and abortion in recent history. His 1968 encyclical "Humanae Vitae" spoke to the regulation of birth through various methods of contraception and sterilization. This encyclical, a result of Church hesitancy to initiate widespread discussion of the issue in a council of the Synod of Bishops, led to much controversy in the Church but established a firm Catholic position on the issues of birth control and family planning.

Montini was born 26 September 1897 at Concesio in Lombardy. His father was an editor and lawyer, thus Montini came from an upper-class, well-educated family. He received his early schooling from the Jesuits in Brescia, joined the seminary in 1916, and was ordained in 1920. Shortly thereafter, he was sent to the University of Rome and the Gregorian University to continue his studies, but soon transferred to Accademia dei Nobili Ecclesiastici in 1922, where he began studying diplomacy. In 1923 Montini was sent to Warsaw, Poland, to be the attaché of the nunciature, or "head of the region," but an especially harsh winter forced him to return to Rome for health reasons. Back in Rome he was named Secretariat of State, a position he held for the next thirty years. During this period he also taught at the Accademia dei Nobili Ecclesiastici and was named chaplain of the Federation of Italian Catholic University Students.

In 1937 Montini was named Substitute for Ordinary Affairs for the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pacelli. During World War II Montini was responsible for organizing relief work and taking care of political refugees. In 1952 Pope Pius XII named Montini a prosecretary of state, but just a year later Montini was appointed as the archbishop of Milan. Montini officially took possession of this post in January of 1955, where he made himself known as the "archbishop of the workers." In addition to winning the support of the laboring class, he preached the social justice messages of the Gospel, promoted the Catholic press, and pushed for Catholic education at an early age. His actions attracted attention worldwide, and he was elevated to cardinal at a 1958 conclave. He then was immediately appointed to the Central Preparatory Commission for the Second Vatican Council and the Church's Technical-Organizational Commission.

Archbishop Montini was elected Pope on 21 June 1963 after the death of Pope John XXIII. Taking the name Paul VI, the new Pope announced to the world that he would continue the work of his predecessor. In order to address a long-standing tension between the bishops and the papal office, Pope Paul VI initiated the collaborative Synod of Bishops in 1965, but many controversial issues were still diverted directly to him. These issues included celibacy, which he addressed in a 1967 encyclical, and the regulation of birth, which was discussed in his final encyclical, "Humanae Vitae," in 1968. It is this encyclical, meaning "On Human Life," that reaffirmed the Church's position against artificial birth control methods, including the birth control pill and sterilization as an elective procedure. The document endorsed Natural Family Planning and respect for human life from conception, reiterating the gravity and sinfulness of abortion and warning of the discord artificial birth control could cause between partners.

Pope Paul VI, often called the "Pilgrim Pope," died 6 August 1978 in Rome. Although his "Humanae Vitae" encyclical regarding regulation of birth and abortion caused a great deal of controversy even within the Church, he was generally a very respected and admired Pope for his worldwide travels and relief efforts.

## Sources

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