

WHO GETS THE PARKING TICKET?



THOMAS
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THE BATT

Catholic stance on birth control needs reversing

"Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio; Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will show the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second." Thomas Malthus realized this relationship in 1798 and left it for the world to ponder and worry over in his timeless *An Essay on the Principle of Population*.

It is unfortunate that the Roman Catholic Church either has not come to the realization that the spectre of overpopulation is a severe threat to mankind, or has chosen to ignore this problem.

This Saturday will mark the 21st anniversary of Pope Paul VI's banning of all forms of birth control.

Though the Roman Catholic Church has certainly made its share of mistakes over the centuries, the recent position it has taken on sex may be its most drastic screw-up.

The Pope's decision was centered on his belief that "every matrimonial act must remain open to the transmission of life." He also indicated that the rhythm method should not even be employed as a regular practice. The papal ruling aborted the efforts of the Pope's own appointed committee that had, in 1966, recommended that the already existing ban on contraception be halted.

Well, Pope Paul is dead, but Catholicism is flourishing. How could it not?

When the papal ruling was handed down, half a billion Roman Catholics inhabited the world. Because the followers of this faith tend to adhere to its policies, the church is growing boundlessly. It reminds me of Monty Python's "The Meaning of Life" — a film that at one point depicts the plight of a third world



Matt McBurnett
Columnist

Catholic family that grows so large the father has to sell his kids to medical science.

Though the movie was humorous, the situation it satirized is not at all funny. I recall that in my youth I was fascinated with knowing what the biggest (along with fastest, strongest and baddest) things in the world were. Tokyo was the biggest city in the world. That meant it was even bigger than Houston, which was almost inconceivable to a kid my age.

Later, I was even more shocked when I found out Mexico City had instantaneously shot by Tokyo to become the most populous city. I do not know whether to blame the Pope or Cortez for that one, but either way, Mexico is a largely Catholic country and birth control is seldom practiced.

Mexico City is symbolic of many of the Catholic third-world countries. These countries often face the overpopulation and subsequent starvation seen in Mexico City and described by Malthus. In these seemingly godforsaken places, survival of the fittest is merely survival of the fullest. The only people who are full are the supporters of the birth-control ban, and I prefer not to mention their contents.

Times have changed over the 21 years since Pope Paul VI made his decision. A sad note is that Catholic contraception policies haven't changed.

Since 1969, the threat of sexually

transmitted diseases has manifested itself, in America and abroad, as a most formidable opponent. The federal government even advised the use of condoms via the Surgeon General's quite widely distributed AIDS pamphlet.

I see only two possible solutions to these ills. The first is the reversal of the Roman Catholic birth-control stance. Beyond the fact that the reversal is now almost a necessity, it is quite logical. If birth is held in such high regard by the church, how do they treat infertile people?

"I cannot agree with sex as being purely a means to an end. This is especially true considering that the end, childbirth, often perpetuates the problem of starvation as Malthus suggested.

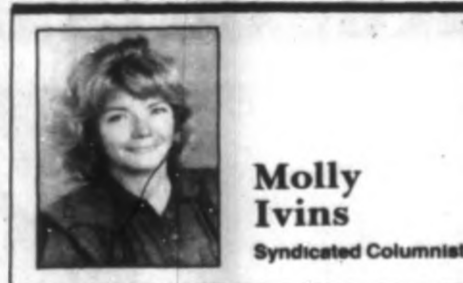
The only other solution would have to be the disregarding of the anti-contraception rules by members of the Roman Catholic Church. This is quite difficult to achieve, but something must be done.

Starvation is not a Christian policy.

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Legislative session ends in failure

Another special session has ended in failure and there's an all-stations blame-alert on. All the usual suspects in workers comp are being blamed by all the obvious people: The governor blames the trial lawyers, the Senate blames big business, Housies blame labor, the smart people are blaming the insurance companies and everybody's mad at the system. Ain't democracy grand?



Molly Ivins
Syndicated Columnist

For a handle on who's being unreasonable around here, you may want to take note of the post-session comments of House Speaker Gib Lewis, staunch friend of business and the man who heads the chamber that kept writing workers comp bills that favor bidness and insurance. "You can blame the business community — if that's what you want to do, if you want to blame someone — for playing an inactive role in the whole process," said Lewis.

Maybe he means business should have leaned harder, but I took it to mean that business wasn't paying attention and didn't know when it was being offered a good deal. Sen. Ted Lyon said, "If the business community had been offered this bill two years ago, they would have danced out of the Capitol and held a party on the front lawn."

Two items for next time — this should be the last time we have to listen to Richard Smith and the House negotiators piously claim they care deeply about worker safety and are supporting all measures to help in that area. Bull, they are. I point out for the jillionth time that the main reason this state has such high workers comp costs is because this state has such a high rate of workers being hurt on the job. If you fix worker safety, you fix the workers comp problem. It is the cheapest, most effective, most rational and most humane way to fix it. But when it got down to actually doing something about worker safety, suddenly the House members didn't want to go "overboard."

Rep. Rick Perry of Haskell, who was on the conference committee, said current economic conditions in Texas do not support spending millions on safety and that the House doesn't want to "put a burden on the business of this state." Why is it better to pay billions in workers comp than millions for worker safety? And what does he think business in this state is totting around now? The figures I used in this column three months ago — although they were challenged by a poorly-informed legislator — have been reverified by the National Safety Council and are correct.

Numero Two-o, everybody needs to take a much closer look at how insurance companies set the premiums for comp insurance. There are some hickies in there that need to be fixed real bad.

The sensible thing to do would be to call the members back into session im-

mediately since they're all focused, intense and full of information and ideas on comp. Difficult legislation is sort of like making fudge — you have to let it boil for a while before it will jell. Right now the Legislature is boiling, but if Clements puts off a special until November, they'll all cool down again and it will just take longer. But it's been so long since I've seen Bill Clements do anything right, I have no hope he will.

And, here's a pleasant summer assignment — a good movie. Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing" shouldn't be missed (although it is not for those who wince at the f-word). Lee, the extraordinarily talented young, black director, has made a brilliant movie on a shoestring about racism in America. It's also funny and, of course, sad.

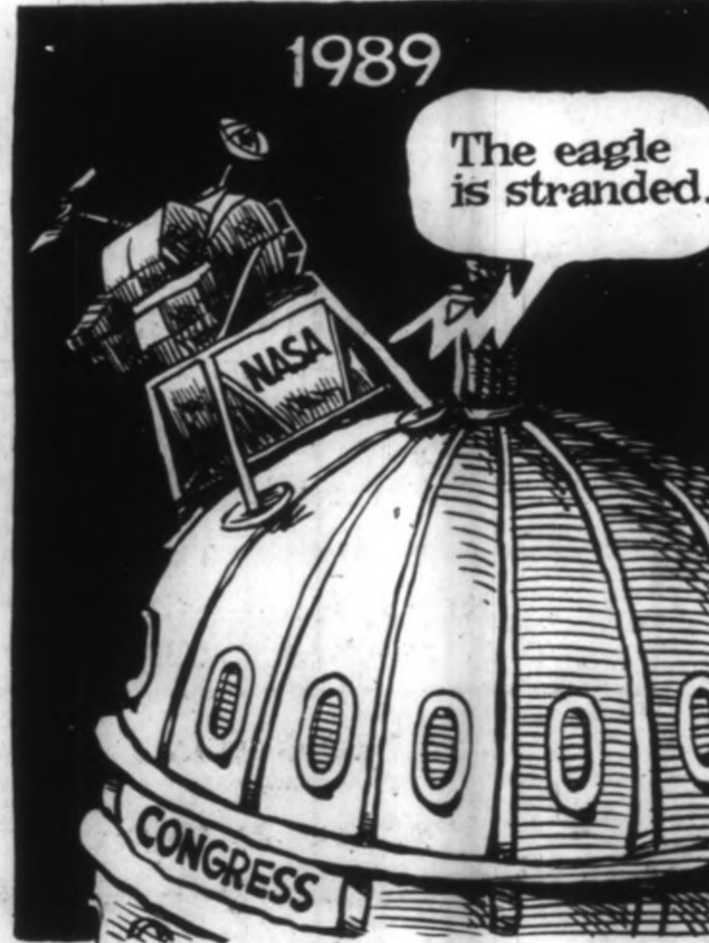
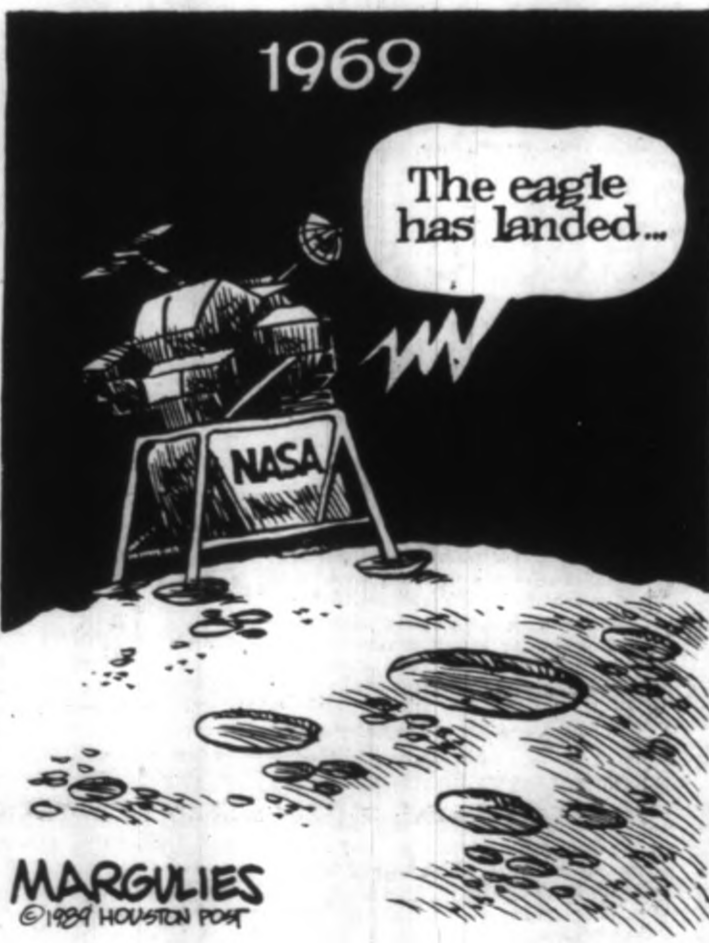
And, how about those abortion polls? New abortion polls are rolling in since the Webster decision, with the usual confusion stemming from how the questions are asked. But some constants are showing up that should be useful to all of us in the coming debates.

Polls consistently find that only one in 10 Americans believes abortion is murder. The polls show people are all over the spectrum on when and why, and they think abortions should be performed but are happily united, over 70 percent, in their opinion that the government should not make these decisions.

And one finding that seems to me most interesting is that one demographic segment of the population consistently turns up as the most pro-choice. Who? Women of child bearing age.

Cynics will find this evidence of Dr. Johnson's famous contention, "Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." No surprise that those not facing the prospect of being hanged in a fortnight, as it were, seem not have concentrated as much on the subject.

An extension of that phenomenon appears in a gender gap among legislators. According to a poll done by the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers University, women legislators are more pro-choice than their male colleagues. Only 26 percent of the women lawmakers think abortion should be banned under all or most circumstances, while 38 percent of their male colleagues do.



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