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And keep the commandments of the Lord, and his ceremonies, which I command thee this day, that it may be well with thee? - Deut. x.13.



Eleventh Promise of our Blessed Mother To Christians Who Recite The Rosary: You shall obtain all you ask of me by the recitation of the Rosary.

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## THE ENCYCLICAL HUMANAЕ VITAE: CHARTER OF LIFE AND LOVE. REFLECTIONS ON THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY

by Msgr. Vincent N. Foy

### Humanae Vitae: A Charter of Pastoral Love

The doctrine of Humanae Vitae gives guidance to more than husbands and wives. Willy-nilly all are caught up in the consequences of right doctrine on human life. So in the pastoral section the Church as Teacher and Mother guides those who must guide others. There are specific instructions for public authorities (par. 23), men of science (par. 24), doctors and medical personnel (par. 27), priests (par.28) and Bishops (par. 30). While the tone of the pastoral section is full of understanding and compassion, it is uncompromising in doctrine. The teaching of the Church is to be expounded without ambiguity (par. 28). **God's grace is always sufficient. All the means of grace are to be used.**

**Pastoral concern does not and never did justify doctrinal accommodations to suit individual preferences. That would effectively be not an act of charity but of grave moral injury. It would be a denial of the graces of matrimony, prayer, Penance and the Eucharist.** "And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is poured forth in the sacrament of Penance" (par. 25). The sacrament of Penance is the specific and supreme remedy for those who have fallen. Immediately after the encyclical was promulgated, some held that a new doctrine of Penance was taught in that an effective purpose of amendment was not required. It would be sufficient if the persons agreed to reconsider their conduct in "the light of the encyclical." This attack on the doctrine of the Council of Trent is more absurd than quoting one General Council against another, and more insidious. It is also a betrayal of pastoral love. One can never protect the divine law surrounding life and love if one holds that there are two different doctrines: one to be taught and one to be lived. That is the double-talk which reduces the teaching on human life to an ideal which is equated with a counsel.

### Humanae Vitae Under Attack

**Despite the beauty and truth and binding force of the doctrine of Humanae Vitae, that teaching has been distorted and often nullified.** In the U.S. a recent presentation of statistics by Dr. Westoff, Director of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University, shows how Catholics are ignoring the teaching of Humanae Vitae. Dr. Westoff reported that by 1975, ninety percent of the nation's Catholic women who were married less than five years were using contraceptive methods not approved by the Church. In 1955, eighty percent conformed to prohibition of any contraceptive method other than the rhythm method. His conclusion was that in this regard "there is very little remaining to differentiate American Catholics from those of other religious persuasions" (cf. International Herald Tribune, April 17, 1978). One might contest the statistics, but hardly the general conclusion. The U.S. is far from unique.



**What are the causes? Certainly constant hammering against the Catholic position in the public media has been a factor. But Catholics have withstood such attacks before. Certainly there has been a general decay in moral behavior. Catholics have withstood such encompassing decay before.**

**It is incontestable that there has been a betrayal from within, and from high places as well as low.** Bishops were asked to keep silent on the question of the Church's impending declaration. This silence did not imply they were to be silent in the face of attacks on the constant teaching of the Church. The great majority respected this caution, but some few did not and this caused widespread confusion. Even after **the caution of 1966 ("The thought and the norms of the Church have not changed")**, a few Bishops issued confidential confessional directives not to be published or preached, which were not in accord with the Church's teaching. Inevitably, some such directives were published. The gist often was: "Catholics must be reassured that decisions made in good conscience should not make them fearful or prevent them from receiving the sacraments." After the encyclical, these same few Bishops did not retract. This

unwarranted subjectivism spread like wildfire.

Just before the official release of the encyclical, the bishops were asked through Cardinal Cicognani, Secretary of State, to stand firm with the Pope in his presentation of the Church's teaching, and "to explain and justify the reasons for it." This explains a large number of statements of national hierarchies. Unfortunately and tragically, many of these statements--some prepared with incredible haste--communicated dissent and confusion rather than full assent.

Immediately after the encyclical many theologians decried its teaching and maintained the rights of individuals to dissent. Many Bishops of these theologians were silent.

In some places Seminary professors openly dissented and while some were removed or disciplined, others were not; and so the infection of dissent was spread to a new generation of priests. Some professors asked to leave one Seminary were taken into another.

Confessors and preachers began to contradict one another in pulpit and confessional. As this became known and confusion spread, fewer and fewer Catholics confessed the sins of artificial contraception or direct sterilization or the crime of abortion with its attendant excommunication, while the evils themselves multiplied.

Ethical boards in some Catholic hospitals, often with the knowledge or consent of Bishops, permitted direct sterilizations. Catholic surgeons were assured in some places that they could proceed with direct sterilizations when the majority on a board voted for it. Chaplains have been assured by some Bishops that if they cast their vote against sterilization they had done their duty, even when the majority were habitually in favor.

Legislators even in Catholic countries, or countries with large Catholic populations, were given advice by Bishops' Committees and theologians contrary to the pastoral section of Humanae Vitae. That is a very sorry story indeed. In many cases the things that are God's were given into the hands of a pagan Caesar when the divine law could have been easily upheld.

High school texts, codes of hospital ethics, pre-marital instruction texts and other books were given the "Imprimatur" when they attacked, distorted or compromised the teaching of the encyclical.

There have been, sad to say, even insinuations that **the Holy Father** was unsure of himself and in this sense was guilty of the Ultimate Dissent: dissent from himself. These insinuations have been circulated in the most contemptible way, despite **his repeated affirmation of the doctrine of the encyclical and his own declaration to the world: "After imploring the light of the Holy Spirit, we placed our conscience at the free and full disposal of the voice of truth ... until we had no doubt about our duty to give our decision in terms expressed in the present encyclical" (Pope Paul VI, address "We Had No Doubt about Our Decision," July- 31, 1968).**

The above is only a part of the way in which the teaching of the encyclical and therefore of the Church was subverted. All of the above points can be documented. They are not mentioned to scandalize, but to help provide necessary insights into the remedies needed to defend the Church's great charter of human life and love.



### Humanae Vitae: How Can Its Teaching Be Upheld?

We come to the key question, **a question of incalculable importance for the Church, for the people of God, for all mankind: How can the teaching of Humanae Vitae be upheld? Everyone can do something. Everyone should do something. The suggestions given here are only indicators and what applies to one may not apply to another. The basic predisposition to any positive action is, of course, full assent of mind and will to the teaching of the Church in its interpretation of the divine law and will.**

1. **All the spiritual means should be given pre-eminence.** The encyclical outlines these first for married couples, then for others.
2. **Right pre-marital instructions are of the greatest importance.** Many young people are the victims of slogan morality. They sometimes parrot phrases: "We have the right over our own bodies"; "We have the right to follow our own consciences"; "We have the right to decide the means best for us to determine when and if we are to have a family." **Very often they have no insight into how the Church's teaching is one of God's love for them and the key to the stability and happiness of their own marriage.**
3. **For those who are teaching or preaching or writing, study is important.** Tertullian tells us that any kind of heresy must be understood in terms of its origin. This is true of all false teaching. **Study will reinforce one's faith in the Church as Mother and Teacher.**

4. **Encouragement should be continually given to all who uphold the Church's teaching** in their lives, their writing, in their work and by their sacrificial efforts.
5. **Some will be able to make use of the communications media in the struggle for human.**
6. **Some can take an active part in pro life -life groups which are faithful to the Church's teaching. Some so-called pro-life groups or "Peace and Development" groups live the lie to their titles and should not be supported.**
7. **Special groups: physicians, psychologists, nurses, hospital administrators, marriage counsellors, social workers and others should make certain that their own ethical standards are in conformity with the Church's teaching and not some evasion of it.**
8. **The laity have a basic right to expect that the Church's teaching be upheld by their Bishops and priests. All ought to pray for their Bishops and priests and make respectful presentations to them if there are failures to uphold the totality of the Church's teaching.**
9. **Seminarians, students in Catholic colleges and schools have the right to expect that the Church's teaching on issues touching human life be upheld without dilution. They have a right to expect that textbooks do the same.**

### Concluding Thoughts

**In the final analysis, the questions raised and answered by Humanae Vitae are those of the roles of conscience and authority. In this matter, where millions of lives and souls are at stake the Catholic must opt for authority. He accepts the Church as his sure guide in matters of faith and morals. He sees in the Pope him who holds the keys of Peter.** It is true that the last resort in dealing with a person afflicted with an invincibly erroneous conscience is the advice: "You must act logically in accordance with your error." But the advice must also be given: "You cannot logically try to compel others to act in accordance with your error: not your spouse, not your confessor, not your teacher, not your doctor, not your Bishop, not your Church, not the Holy Father who stands in the place of Christ." **We need in this age, at this time of the tenth anniversary of Humanae Vitae, a greater confidence in the God-given role of the Church.** Perhaps it would help to reflect on the words of Cardinal Newman:

Trust the Church of God implicitly even when your natural judgement would take a different course from hers and would induce you to question her prudence or correctness. Recollect what a hard task she has; how she is sure to be criticized and spoken against, whatever she does; recollect how much she needs your loyal and tender devotion; recollect, too, how long is the experience gained in 1900 years; and what a right she has to claim your assent to principles which have had so extended and triumphant a trial. Thank her that she has kept the faith safe for so many generations and do your part in helping her to transmit it to generations after you.

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