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And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee: but that thou fear the Lord thy God, and walk in His ways, and love him, and serve the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul: - Deut. x.12.



Tenth Promise of our Blessed Mother To Christians Who Recite The Rosary: The faithful children of the Rosary shall merit a high degree of glory in Heaven.

J.M.J.

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

by Msgr. Vincent N. Foy

The most embattled document in Church history is perhaps the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, signed on the feast of St. James the Apostle, July 25th, 1968, by Pope Paul VI. Ten years later it remains under constant attack by pen and tongue and conduct.

It was an answer to new questions (cf. par. 3). Unfortunately, by some it was regarded as only so much "in-put" into the solution of great problems and not the definitive answer it was intended to be. Others had already given their own answers to their own questions and what is worse, had claimed these answers to be definitive. When the Pope spoke they were neither prepared to listen nor to humble themselves before the Church. Others attempted to nullify by human reason what was declared with the authority of Christ.

**The teaching of the encyclical is normative and binding. Bishops and priests are bound to uphold it. It is an exercise of the supreme magisterium to which is owed religious assent of mind and will.** (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Vatican II, par. 25.). **Above all it is a proclamation of divine love and gives to those who accept it the certitude and peace which come from accepting God's will**

### **Humanae Vitae: A Testimonial to God's Love**

**All through the encyclical, like a golden thread, there is reference to the accomplishment of God's law and will through proper respect for human life and proper regard for its transmission. Married couples, in the most serious duty of transmitting human life, are the free and responsible collaborators of God the Creator (cf. par.1). The encyclical is an exercise of the magisterial competency coming from Christ himself (par.4). The natural law, which it rightly interprets, is an expression of the will of God (ibid.). The encyclical provides its answers to the grave questions raised, by virtue of the mandate of Christ (cf. par.6). Conjugal love reveals its true nature and nobility when considered in its supreme origin, God, who is love (cf. par.8). For baptized persons the marriage union is a symbol of the union and therefore the love between Christ and His Church (ibid.). Responsible parenthood implies that husband and wife recognize fully their own duties toward God (cf. par.10). They must conform their activity to the creative intention of God (ibid.).**

The above are only some of the earlier references by which the pope identifies the teaching of the encyclical by text and context with the law and love of God. Not a single page of the encyclical omits to forge more strongly this linkage. It is a testimonial to God's love in what it commands and what it forbids. This is not only for married persons but also for those who shepherd them and teach them and guide them and relate to them.

### **Humanae Vitae: Testimonial to the Church's Love**

**The encyclical is another manifestation of the love of the Church for her children. It would be quite incredible if the living voice of God were not to speak out clearly in what is among the most important of moral issues: that of human life and its transmission. We deal here with matters affecting countless millions of lives either in fact or in potency, in matters by which God has allowed free will to touch eternal destinies. They are matters over which God jealously fixed His laws and lovingly gave their interpretation to His Church so that she could speak in His name: "The Lord puts to death and gives life" (1 Samuel, II, 6).**

**It is of prime importance to realize that the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is not that of a man; it is not an informal statement of a Pope. It is not "Pope Paul's encyclical" except in a restricted historical context. It is the teaching of the Church. The pope has the right to speak in the name of the Church as its Head and Vicar of Christ by his own authority (cf.**

**Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, par. 22). The encyclical makes clear that it enshrines the Church's teaching. So we note, for example: "The Church ... teaches ... that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life" (par. 11).**

Some have tried to isolate the doctrine of the encyclical in time and describe it as a new tyranny. In fact it is upheld by a thousand pillars. At the annual colloquium last November of the Confraternity of Catholic Clergy in Arlington, Virginia, Bishop Austin Vaughan remarked that when professor **John Noonan wrote his book in 1966 on the history of the teaching of theologians and the Church on contraception**, he expected that he might trace this teaching to the mid-eighteenth century. **He found the doctrine against artificial contraception taught by Clement of Alexandria at the end of the second or the beginning of the third century. The encyclical itself rightly refers to the "constant teaching of the Church" (par. 10).**

**The Church has not left us to the mercy of merely human disciplines or unaided reason.** Neither demographers nor agronomers nor biologists nor philosophers can give certain answers to questions outside their fields. It is right and proper for the Church to weigh their arguments but never right to allow them to step outside the circles of their own competencies. **Nor can unguided reason reach to the order of revelation. So Scripture warns us: "On your own intelligence rely not ... Be not wise in your own eyes" (Proverbs III, 5, 7). The questions treated in the encyclical required from the Church a teaching "founded on the natural law, illuminated and enriched by divine revelation" (par. 4).**



**Nor has the Church left us at the mercy of theological opinion.** Essential and noble as the science of theology is, theological opinion can be a great mixture of good and bad, of true and false, of wise and foolish things from which only the Church by her right of discernment can pick out what is good and true. **After the Church has spoken definitively, all contrary theological opinions become non-normative.**



Unfortunately some theologians still hold as normative theories already authoritatively condemned: wrong concepts of the natural law, the concept that the ban on artificial birth control is historically conditioned, wrong notions of the "principle of totality," a confusion of the terms abnormal and pathological, false doctrine in the area of private morality vs. public policy. Others refer to "accepted principles of moral theology" which are not acceptable.

**The Church did not leave us to the mercy of our own uninformed or unformed consciences.** The late Rev. David Knowles, writing from a vast knowledge of history and referring to the case of King Henry VIII and St Thomas More, remarked. "The word conscience has a terrible ambiguity, which cannot be by-passed by a kind of blind assumption that we are all acting with clear minds and pure motives" ("The Encyclical Without Ambiguity," The Tablet, Oct. 5, 1968). **In the encyclical the Church warns married people that "they must conform their activity to the creative intention of God, expressed in the very nature of marriage and of its acts, and manifested by the constant teaching of the Church" (par.10).** One of the greatest theologians of our time wrote: "It is nonsense for a Catholic to set up in opposition to the authority of the Encyclical the authority of his own personal conscience" ("The Light of the Encyclical" by Cardinal C. Journet, L'Osservatore Romano, Oct. 10, 1968, p.10). It is nonsense, but nonsense still repeated far and wide; it is the nonsensical reply of depravity to love.

### **Humanae Vitae:Guardian of Married Life and Love**

**The church reaffirms in Humanae Vitae that marriage is "the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love" (par. 8). She discerns clearly the threat to marriage and married love in illicit contraception, direct sterilization and abortion. She sees the grave spin-off effects of these practices in the areas of human sexuality, civil legislation and society in general.**

The teaching of the encyclical is a necessary support of the three essential goods of marriage: fidelity, permanence, and openness to new human life. **These goods are under attack when illicit contraception is practiced. The more easily and more certainly effective are the illicit means, the stronger are the temptations to use them. So the Church says, regarding the natural law: "man ... must not be offered some easy means of eluding its observance" (par. 17). When the barriers are down, fidelity is endangered, infidelity often leads to separation and divorce and those who give free rein to their lusts recoil before the responsibilities of parenthood. The encyclical warns that all methods of contraception lead to loss of respect for woman, so that she is looked upon as "a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as the respected and beloved companion" (par. 17).**

It is a truism that no law can stand without sanctions (Nulla sanctio, nulla lex). **The Church in her role as guardian life and love reaffirms that the gravest of all sanctions are attached to practices condemned in the encyclical: the consequences of grave sin.**

**Another point is often forgotten and its importance cannot be over-emphasized. This is a threat to the validity of marriage posed by the contraceptive mentality. Very few theorists or immured theologians, however well meaning, see the concrete results of their speculations mirrored in the lives of men, women and children. The more the**

teaching of Humanae Vitae is rejected, the greater the number of invalid or illicit marriages with all the resulting tears, unhappiness and shattered lives. More and more young people, without having even read the encyclical or the Church's teaching, have been victimized. They come now in ever increasing numbers, boldly asserting, on the basis of a newspaper article, or panel discussion, or a sermon, that they have the right over their own bodies and will decide when and whether to have children and what means they are going to use. They do not know or understand or accept what the Church affirms: "One must necessarily recognize insurmountable limits to the possibility of man's domination over his own body and its functions' (par. 17). More and more do not transfer the essential rights of marriage, and so their marriages are invalid from the beginning. This is compounded if due care is not taken in the prenuptial investigation or preparation course.

So couples often walk from the altar and out of the church and to their own ruin. It is further compounded when the intention of one party is good and the other bad or invalidating, and one party becomes the victim of the other.

It is no coincidence that books, articles and talks which attack the doctrine of Humanae Vitae nearly always promote a human sexuality contrary to God's law. Once sex is completely divorced from the transmission of life by deliberate act, a whole brood of moral monsters is hatched, the offspring of unbridled erotic love. The contraceptive mentality has led and leads to pre-marital sex and extra-marital sex. When sex is so radically debased, the moral order gives way. Self-indulgence without restraint becomes an end in itself. "Free love," "swinging," orgies, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality and every abomination are justified. Paradoxically, illegitimate births increase because illegitimacy becomes "respectable," while at the same time what was called the great threat of over-population becomes the threat of genocide and even economies are unbalanced.

No less an evil resulting from the defiance of divine and natural law is the reflection of the defiance in civil legislation. "Who could blame a government for applying to the solution of the problems of the community those means acknowledged to be licit for married couples in the solution of a family problem?" (par. 17.) To many the morality of civil legislation is equated with a proper moral code. Often spiritual leaders discover this too late. **Often too, legislation takes a leap when the spiritual leaders, for the sake of civil liberties, thought they were acquiescing only to a step.**

In the final analysis, moral corruption in society can be traced back to moral corruption in its fundamental cell, the family. Where human life is not respected in its beginnings, neither will it be respected in its course or in its end. And so there is verified the solid basis of the Church's teaching: "In defending conjugal morals in their integral wholeness, the Church knows that she contributes towards the establishment of a truly human civilization" (par. 18).

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