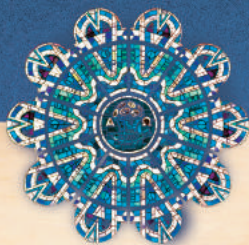


50th Anniversary



Of Human Life
Humanae Vitae



Paul VI

ANNOTATED EDITION

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Of Human Life

Humanae Vitae

POPE PAUL VI

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Foreword

In order to take stock of one of the most famous documents ever to issue from the Catholic Church—still incessantly discussed after fifty years—it is necessary to consider the context in which it was written, as well as its profound wisdom and its prophetic achievements.

Humanae Vitae was written just eight years after the “pill” was released to the world. Many predicted that this new drug could end poverty and “overpopulation” by dramatically reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies. It also promised to improve marriages and free women to take advantage of the new opportunities outside the home that were opening up for them at this time. Its manufacturer, G. D. Searle, delivered it to doctors with a paperweight of a naked, gold-painted, bare-breasted woman—Andromeda—with her head up, breaking free from her chains. On her back was the word “unfettered.”

Men and women at this time were increasingly inclined to believe that human progress could be measured by the pace of new technology, especially technology promising control over

the human body. More and more people believed that the Catholic Church would not want to stand alone in opposition to such “progress,” especially following its recently expressed desires at Vatican II to more actively engage the world. Anticipation of a major change in Church teaching was also fueled by the leaking of the majority report of the commission appointed by Popes John XXII and Paul VI to study contraception. The report favored a change in the Church’s teaching.

In other words, it was the perfect storm.

No matter what *else* one might say about *Humanae Vitae* and the Catholics who have stood by it these many decades, it must be said that they had courage. Courage to stand against the tide and to be charged with hating sex, science, and women’s freedom. Courage to stop and think deeply about what contraception could do to relationships between men and women, and between adults and children. For the pill promised that sex could be unlinked from even the thought of children, and thus from sexual responsibility, and from marriage, family, kin, and even love.

It should also be said that *Humanae Vitae* took sex seriously, far more seriously than the contemporary world, for all its talk about sex. The document called sex “noble and worthy” (no. 11). *Humanae Vitae* also took seriously the bond between men and women. It fully grasped its importance for their own happiness and for their coming to understand and model to the world what faithful, permanent, fruitful love could look like. In other words, their love could provide the couple

themselves and the world some understanding—a glimpse—of how God loves us and how we are to love one another.

Its author, Pope Paul VI, understood long before sophisticated social measures could (and did) prove him right: that the quality of marital and parental love had social consequences. These consequences would manifest themselves first in the basic cell of society, the family, and from there radiate out into the world. Today we know and can measure what this pope already intuited: that robbing sex of its full meaning would lead to a great deal of sex without commitment, without even love. That children would suffer the loss of their parents' stable marriages. And that women would become sexual instruments and find themselves all too often in what we now call #MeToo predicaments.

In addition to its other prophecies, *Humanae Vitae* correctly predicted that countries would give in to temptations to take “radical measures” (no. 2) to promote contraception among people it did not wish to procreate. This has occurred not only in China and India, but also in the U.S., albeit here with a friendly face; poorer women here are incentivized to use free contraception, especially if they will use the so-called long-acting varieties that require a doctor's help to remove.

At the same time, Pope Paul VI anticipated that couples resorting to natural methods of family planning would achieve an important degree of tranquility and peace. Their marriages would be strengthened, and their sensitivity to one another's hopes and feelings improved. This is indeed the kind of testimony one hears from couples practicing Natural

Family Planning. It is also the kind of testimony that attracts non-Catholics toward the Catholic vision of marriage and parenting, and even to conversion into the faith.

Pope Paul IV foresaw as well that contraception would provoke an increasing desire to achieve technological dominion over the human body. It would encourage us to forget that we did not design or make ourselves and that we are not each “arbiter of the sources of life” but rather the “minister[s] of the design established by the Creator” (no. 13). Our bodies would become mere matter for our manipulation. This has reached perhaps its logical limit with contemporary demands for easy access to surgery to transform human bodies into the opposite sex.

Throughout *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI acknowledged the firestorm it would unleash and the Church’s role as a sign of contradiction respecting human sexuality. He implored bishops and priests, educators and married couples to embrace and promote the Church’s faithful and intelligent reflection. Their courage and persistence these many years have proved critical to the continued, living witness to *Humanae Vitae*. Considering the ferocity of opposition to its teachings, and even the ridicule heaped on its supporters, one can only conclude that it is by the grace of God that its message lives on to inform another generation.

HELEN M. ALVARÉ

May 2, 2018

ENCYCLICAL LETTER
OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI

Of Human Life

Humanae Vitae

On the Regulation of Birth

*To the venerable Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops
and other local ordinaries in peace and communion with the
Apostolic See, to priests, the faithful and to all men of good will.*

Venerable brothers and beloved sons:

The Transmission of Life

1. The most serious mission* of transmitting human life, for which married persons are the free and responsible collaborators of God the Creator, has always been a source of great joys to them, even if sometimes accompanied by not a few difficulties and by distress.

At all times the fulfillment of this duty has posed grave problems to the conscience of married persons, but, with the recent evolution of society, changes have taken place that give rise to new questions which the Church could not ignore, having to do with a matter that so closely touches upon the life and happiness of men.

* Editor's note: This translates the Latin word *munus*, which is an office or mission. Scholars such as Janet Smith have shown that this concept of office or mission is a key to the document. The important mission of married couples is specifically ordered to transmitting life.

I.

New Aspects of the Problem and Competency of the Magisterium

New Formulation of the Problem

2. The changes that have taken place are in fact noteworthy and of varied kinds. In the first place, there is the rapid demographic development. Fear is shown by many that world population is growing more rapidly than the available resources, with growing distress to many families and developing countries, so that the temptation for authorities to counter this danger with radical measures is great.* Moreover, working and lodging conditions, as well as increased

* Editor's note: In the 1960s dire predictions were made about population growth, including mass poverty and starvation. Those concerns have so far proven to be unfounded. Today scientists and some government agencies warn of the dangers of depopulation due to falling birth rates in parts of the world such as Europe.

exigencies both in the economic field and in that of education, often make the proper education of a large number of children difficult today. A change is also seen both in the manner of considering the person of woman and her place in society, and in the value to be attributed to conjugal love in marriage, and also in the appreciation to be made of the meaning of conjugal acts in relation to that love.

Finally and above all, man^{*} has made stupendous progress in the domination and rational organization of the forces of nature, such that he tends to extend this domination to his own total being: to the body, to psychical life, to social life and even to the laws that regulate the transmission of life.[†]

3. This new state of things gives rise to new questions. Granted the conditions of life today, and granted the meaning that conjugal relations have with respect to the harmony between husband and wife and to their mutual fidelity, would not a revision of the ethical norms, in force up to now, seem to be advisable, especially when it is considered that they cannot be observed without sacrifices, sometimes heroic sacrifices?

And again: by extending to this field the application of the so-called “principle of totality,”^{††} could it not be admitted that

^{*} Editor’s note: The word “man” is meant to designate the whole human race, men and women included.

[†] Editor’s note: The pope was prophetic here. At the time few foresaw the type of reproductive technologies, genetic manipulation, and medical procedures aimed at altering a person’s sexual characteristics.

^{††} Editor’s note: The principle of totality means that the human body is to be respected as an integral whole, so it may not be mutilated. A non-essential

the intention of a less abundant but more rationalized fecundity might transform a materially sterilizing intervention into a licit and wise control of birth? Could it not be admitted, that is, that the finality of procreation pertains to the ensemble of conjugal life, rather than to its single acts? It is also asked whether, in view of the increased sense of responsibility of modern man, the moment has not come for him to entrust to his reason and his will, rather than to the biological rhythms of his organism, the task of regulating birth.

Competency of the Magisterium

4. Such questions required from the teaching authority of the Church a new and deeper reflection upon the principles of the moral teaching on marriage: a teaching founded on the natural law,* illuminated and enriched by divine revelation.

No believer will wish to deny that the teaching authority of the Church is competent to interpret even the natural moral law.† It is, in fact, indisputable, as our predecessors have many

diseased part may be removed for the health of the total person. The pope is referring to some attempts to apply this principle to contraception, for example by saying that it was licit to contracept and have fewer children for the sake of better care of the children already born, the total family.

* Editor's note: Natural law is the law written on the heart of each person (cf. Rom 2:14–15). It “expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie” (CCC, no. 1954).

† Editor's note: Unfortunately, there was widespread dissent from the papal teaching in the aftermath of *Humanae Vitae*.

times declared,¹ that Jesus Christ, when communicating to Peter and to the apostles his divine authority and sending them to teach all nations his commandments,² constituted them as guardians and authentic interpreters of all the moral law, not only, that is, of the law of the Gospel, but also of the natural law, which is also an expression of the will of God, the faithful fulfillment of which is equally necessary for salvation.³

In conformity with this mission of hers, the Church has always provided—and even more amply in recent times—a coherent teaching* concerning both the nature of marriage and the correct use of conjugal rights and the duties of husband and wife.⁴

1. Cf. Pius IX, Encyclical *Qui Pluribus*, Nov. 9, 1846; in Pius IX P.M. *Acta*, I, pp. 9–10; St. Pius X, Encyclical *Singulari Quadam*, Sept. 24, 1912; in *AAS* IV (1912), p. 658; Pius XI Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, Dec. 31, 1930; in *AAS* XXII (1930), pp. 579–581; Pius XII, allocution *Magnificate Dominum* to the episcopate of the Catholic world, Nov. 2, 1954; in *AAS* XLVI (1954), pp. 671–672; John XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, May 15, 1961; in *AAS* LIII (1961), p. 457.

2. Cf. Mt 28:18–19.

3. Cf. Mt 7:21.

* Editor's note: Saint John Paul II developed this teaching in his masterful *Theology of the Body*. See *Man and Woman He Created Them* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).

4. Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, part II, ch. VIII; Leo XIII, Encyclical *Arcanum*, Feb. 19, 1880; in *Acta Leonis XIII*, II (1881), pp. 26–29; Pius XI, Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, Dec. 31, 1929, in *AAS* XXII (1930), pp. 58–61; *Casti Connubii*, in *AAS* XXII (1930), pp. 545–546; Pius XII, alloc. to the Italian medico-biological union of St. Luke, Nov. 12, 1944, in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, VI, pp. 191–192; to the Italian Catholic union of midwives Oct. 29, 1951, in *AAS* XLIII (1951), pp. 857–859; to the seventh Congress of