

In The School of Mary

(Papal documents condensed by Deacon William Wagner)

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Pope Paul VI

Humanae Vitae, The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, July 25, 1968.

INTRODUCTION

Modern Society at the advent of the second half of the twentieth century was convulsed with reckless abandon of a cultural heritage that had weathered the storms of many centuries of attacks, admittedly some more successfully met than others. However, the assault in this moment of time was unique in its pervasive intensity as it ushered in a rejection of morally "restrictive" authority and its ultimate source. It thus planted the insidious seeds of society's self-destruction that has become ever more evident with the passage of time, all in the name of freedom of the individual who is answerable to himself alone. Nowhere did this become more explicit than within the "sexual revolution". Amidst this dark night of self-indulgence flickered one small flame, *Humanae Vitae*. It is the watershed document of the age. If a *culture of life* is to be re-constructed, it begins here.

The Transmission of Life

Pope Paul VI begins by saying that married persons were God the Creator's free and responsible collaborators in the transmission "of human life", often despite inherent difficulties. However, with the changes in the evolution of society that had begun to take place, the Pope says that the Church could not but confront these matters, so closely touching upon the life and happiness of men.

I. NEW ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM AND COMPETENCY OF THE MAGISTERIUM

New Formulation of the Problem

In the first instance there was the rapid demographic development. Many feared the growth of the world's population would accede its available resources. In developing countries, the temptation might be great to counter this threat by radical measures. The needs within the fields of economics and education posed daunting problems. A change became evident in the manner of considering the person of the woman in society, the value to be attributed to conjugal love in marriage, the appreciation for the meaning of the conjugal acts and their relationship with that love.

Finally, man had made stupendous progress in the domination of the forces of nature. As a result he began to extend that domination to his own total being: to his body, to his physical and social life, even to the laws that regulate the transmission of life.

This new state of things created new questions. Granted the conditions of life today, it was questioned whether or not a revision of the ethical norms might not seem advisable, especially when, at times, they could not be observed without some considerable sacrifice.

Perhaps the so-called "principle of totality" could be admitted here so that a less abundant but perhaps more rationalized fecundity could be applied to a licit and wise control of birth? Could it be that the ends of procreation pertained to the whole of the conjugal life, rather than to its single acts? Additionally, in view of the "increased sense of responsibility of modern man" could he not now entrust to his reason and will, rather than to the biological rhythms of his organism, the task of regulating birth?

Competency of the Magisterium

Such questions required that the Church reflect more deeply upon the principles of its moral teaching on marriage, founded on natural law, but illuminated by divine revelation. Surely the Church is competent in this area. Christ gave to Peter and the Apostles his divine authority. He sent them to teach all nations his commandments. He constituted them as guardians and authentic interpreters of all the moral law, not only of the Gospel but of the natural law as well. This natural law is also the expression of God's will and compliance with it is necessary for salvation. Faithful to this mission, the Church has always provided a coherent teaching on the nature of marriage and the correct use of conjugal rights and duties.

Special Studies

Paul VI's predecessor, Pope John XXIII, in 1963 had instituted a commission of experts as well as married couples. Its scope was to gather opinions on the new questions regarding conjugal life, especially the regulation of births. This information the magisterium felt might be helpful to adequately inform the faithful and the wider world concerning these matters. The work of these experts, and that of others, would permit the magisterium to measure more exactly all aspects of this complex issue.

Reply of the Magisterium

Nevertheless, the conclusions of the commission could not be considered as definitive. Pope Paul VI felt that a personal investigation was still required. Above all, he deemed it necessary because certain criteria had emerged that departed from the Church's moral teaching on marriage, teaching that she had constantly and firmly taught. Having carefully studied the documentation, the Pope now proposed, in virtue of his mandate from Christ, to give his reply to these grave questions.

II. DOCTRINAL PRINCIPLES

A Total Vision of Man

The problem of birth is to be considered beyond partial perspectives and in the light of an integral vision of man and of his vocation, not only natural and earthly but also supernatural and eternal. In an attempt to justify artificial methods of birth control, many have appealed to the demands both of conjugal love and of "responsible parenthood." Vatican Council II in its pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, speaks very precisely of these two great realities. Conjugal love reveals its true nature when it is considered in its supreme origin, God, who is love.

Marriage is neither the effect of chance nor of the evolution of unconscious natural forces. It is the wise institution of the Creator. In the reciprocal, proper and exclusive, personal gift of self, husband and wife tend towards the communion of their beings to collaborate with God in the generation and education of new lives. For baptized persons, marriage invests the dignity of a sacramental sign of grace because it represents the union of Christ and the Church.

Its Characteristics

It is supremely important to have an exact idea of the characteristic marks and demands of conjugal love. This love is fully human simultaneously in terms of the senses and of the spirit, the result of an act of the free will intended to endure and grow through the joys and sorrows of daily life. In this the husband and wife become one of heart and soul and together attain their human perfection.

This is a total love in which the husband and wife generously share everything without undue reservation or selfish calculations. The partners rejoice in that each can enrich the other with the gift of self. This love is faithful and exclusive until death as they conceived it from the day that they freely and with full awareness assumed the duty of the marriage bond. Down through the centuries this fidelity has been shown to be in accord with the very nature of marriage. This love is fecund, destined to raise up new lives. Once again, *Gaudium et Spes* declares that marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children, the supreme gift of marriage.

Responsible Parenthood

“Responsible parenthood” today is rightly insisted upon but it must also be exactly understood. In terms of the biological processes, responsible parenthood means the knowledge and respect for their functions. In the power to give life the biological laws are part of the human person. With regards to instinct and passion, responsible parenthood pertains to the necessary dominion that reason and will must exercise over them.

Paul VI, continuing his thought introduced last week concerning this topic, says that responsible parenthood is exercised also by the deliberate and generous decision to raise a numerous family. It would also include the decision, for grave motives and in respect of moral law, to avoid a new birth. Responsible parenthood above all implies the place of a right conscience as its faithful interpreter. Responsible parenthood implies that husband and wife recognize their own duties towards God, towards themselves, towards the family and towards society in a correct hierarchy of values. They are not free to proceed completely at will. Nor may they act autonomously. They must conform their activity to the creative intention of God expressed in the very nature of marriage and its acts, and as manifested by the constant teaching of the Church.

Respect for the Nature and Purpose of the Marriage Act

These acts of chaste intimacy by which human life is transmitted are noble and worthy. They do not cease to be lawful even if, for causes independent of the will of husband and wife, they are foreseen to be infecund, since they always remain ordained towards expressing and consolidating their union. As experience bears witness, not every conjugal act is followed by a new life. God has wisely disposed the natural laws and rhythms of fecundity, of themselves, to cause a separation in the succession of births. The Church, calling man back to the observance of the natural law, teaches that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life.

Two Inseparable Aspects: Union and Procreation

The magisterium’s teaching of the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive and the procreative meaning, is founded upon their inseparable connection willed by God and is unable to be broken by man. By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination towards man’s most high calling to parenthood. Men of our day are capable of seizing the deeply reasonable and human character of this fundamental principle.

Faithfulness to God’s Design

Justly, a conjugal act imposed upon one’s partner without regard for his or her condition and lawful desires is not a true act of love and so denies the requirements of right moral order. It also must be recognized that a reciprocal act of love that jeopardizes the responsibility to transmit life is likewise contradictory to the constitutive design of marriage as willed by the Author of Life.

To use the divine gift of conjugal love, destroying even partially its meaning and purpose, is to contradict the nature both of man and woman and of their most intimate relationship. It is to contradict the plan of God and his will. To use this gift properly is to acknowledge that we are not the arbiters of the source of human life but rather the ministers of the design established by the Creator. Man does not have unlimited dominion over his body, much less over his generative faculties as such, since intrinsically they are ordered towards raising up life, of which God is the principle.

Illicit Ways of Regulating Birth

The direct interruption of the generative process already begun, and above all directly willed, and procured abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as licit means of regulating birth.

Equally to be excluded, as the Magisterium has frequently declared, is direct sterilization, either perpetual or temporary, of man or of woman. Similarly, every action that, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible is excluded.

To justify conjugal acts made intentionally infecund, one cannot invoke as valid reasons the lesser evil, or the fact that such acts would constitute a whole together with the fecund acts already performed or to follow later, and hence that they would share in the same moral goodness. It is never licit, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil so that good may follow therefrom. We cannot make into the object of a positive act of the will something that is intrinsically disordered. Consequently it is an error to think that a conjugal act that is deliberately made infecund, and so, is intrinsically dishonest could be made honest and right by the ensemble of a fecund conjugal life.

Licitness of Therapeutic Means

The Church, on the contrary, does not at all consider illicit the use of those therapeutic means truly necessary to cure diseases of the organism, even if an impediment to procreation, that may be foreseen, should result, provided such impediment is not, for whatever motive, directly willed.

Licitness of Recourse to Infertile Periods

It is the prerogative of the human intellect to dominate the energies offered by irrational nature and direct them towards the good of man. Yet, some may ask whether it is not reasonable to have recourse to artificial birth control if, by it, we secure the harmony and peace of the family and better the conditions for the education of children already born? The Church affirms that the intervention of intelligence is praise worthy *but it must be done with respect for the order established by God.*

If there are serious motives to space out births, the Church teaches that it is licit to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions, for the use of marriage, in the infertile periods only, without violating the moral principles recalled earlier. The Church is consistent when she considers recourse to the infertile periods to be licit, while condemning, as being always illicit, the use of means directly contrary to fecundation, even for reasons that appear honest and serious.

There are differences in the two cases. In the first, married couples make legitimate use of a natural disposition. In the second, they impede the development of natural processes. In the first case, they are able to renounce the use of marriage in the fertile periods when, for just motives, procreation is not desirable. Yet, they legitimately may use the infertile periods to manifest their affection and to safeguard their mutual fidelity. In doing so, they give proof of a truly and integrally honest love.

Grave Consequences of Methods of Artificial Birth Control

The Church's teaching is based on solid grounds. If upright persons reflect upon the consequences of methods of artificial birth control they will be convinced of the validity of the Church's reasoning. How wide and easy a road would thus be opened towards conjugal infidelity and a general lowering of morality. Human weakness, being what it is, the young rather need encouragement to be faithful to the moral law. They must not be offered some easy means of eluding its observance. It is likewise to be feared that in using anti-conceptive practices, men will lose respect for women. They would come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.

Artificial birth control could easily become a dangerous weapon in the hands of those public authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies. Who will stop rulers from favoring, even imposing upon their peoples, the method of contraception that they judge to be most effective? In attempting to avoid family and social difficulties, sometimes encountered in observance of divine law, public authorities would come to intervene in the most personal and most reserved sector of conjugal intimacy.

We must necessarily recognize insurmountable limits to the possibility of man's domination over his own body and its functions. These are limits that no one, whether a private individual or one invested with authority, may licitly surpass. Such limits cannot be determined except by the respect due the integrity of the human organism and its functions, according to principles recalled before and the "principle of totality" elaborated earlier by Pope Pius XII.

The Church, Guarantor of True Human Values

It can be foreseen that all will not readily receive this teaching. Numerous are the voices, amplified by the media and others, that are contrary to the voice of the Church. Though the Church is not surprised to be made, as was her divine founder, a sign of contradiction. Yet, she proclaims the entire moral law, both natural and evangelical. Of such laws the Church was not the author, nor consequently can she be the arbiter. She is only their depository and their interpreter. In defending conjugal morals, the Church knows that she contributes towards the establishment of a truly human civilization. Faithful to both the teaching and the example of the Savior, she defends the dignity of man and wife.

III. PASTORAL DIRECTIVES

The Church, Mater et Magistra

The church, mother and teacher of all peoples, not only recalls men to the observance and respect of the divine law regarding matrimony, but she strengthens them in the path of honest regulation of birth, even amid difficult conditions. With the Redeemer, the Church knows human weakness, has compassion on the crowd, and receives sinners. However, she cannot renounce the teaching of the law proper to human life restored to its original truth and guided by the spirit of God.

Possibility of Observing the Divine Law

The teaching of the Church on the regulation of birth that promulgates the divine law, may appear to many to be difficult or even impossible. Indeed, it does demand serious engagement and much effort. Furthermore, it may not be practical without the help of God. Yet, to anyone who reflects well, it cannot but be clear that such efforts ennoble man and are beneficial to the human community.

Mastery of Self

The regulation of birth demands first of all that husband and wife acquire and possess solid convictions concerning the true values of life and of the family. They need to pursue a path that tends towards securing perfect self mastery. The Pope notes that the discipline that is proper to the purity of married couples confers a higher human value. It does demand continual effort. Yet under its influence, husband and wife fully develop their personalities, being enriched with spiritual values. Such discipline bestows upon family life fruits of serenity and peace. It favors attention to one's spouse, helps both parties to drive out selfishness and deepens their sense of responsibility. Thus, parents acquire the capacity of having a deeper and more efficacious influence in the education of their offspring. Their children will grow up with a more just appraisal of human values

Creating an Atmosphere Favorable to Chastity

Pope Paul VI wishes to draw the attention of educators and all those responsible for the common good of society to the need for chastity, to the need for the triumph of healthy liberty over license by means of a respect for the moral order. There is so much in the modern media that leads to a sense of excitation and unbridled customs, to every form of pornography and licentious performance. These must arouse a response in all those solicitous for the progress of civilization and the common good of the human spirit. Vainly should one seek to justify such depravity under the pretext of artistic or scientific necessity.

Appeal to Public Authorities

Public officials must not allow the morality of their peoples to be degraded. They should not permit, by legal means, practices contrary to the natural and divine law to be introduced into that fundamental cell, the family. These public authorities must, on the contrary, contribute to the solution of demographic problems by way of a provident policy towards the family, a wise education of peoples in respect of moral law and liberty of citizens.

Pope Paul VI says that with his predecessor, Pope John XXIII, he wants to repeat that no solution to the difficulties of demographic problems is acceptable that does violence to man's essential dignity. The only possible solution is one that respects and promotes true human values. Neither can we consider divine providence to be responsible for what depends, instead, on a lack of wisdom in government, on an insufficient sense of social justice, on blame-worthy indolence in confronting the efforts and the sacrifices necessary to ensure the raising of living standards. The Pope's desire is that mutual aid between all the members of the great human family never cease to grow. There is limitless opportunity for the generous activity of great international organizations.

To Men of Science

The Holy Father seeks to encourage the men of science who can so advance the welfare of marriage and the family by pooling their efforts and laboring to explain the various conditions favoring a proper regulation of births. Pope Pius XII had previously expressed a desire that medical science provide a sufficiently secure basis for the regulation of birth, founded on the observance of natural rhythms. In this way, especially, Catholic scientists could demonstrate that no real contradiction can exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those fostering an authentic conjugal love.

To Christian Husbands and Wives

To her own children, the Church announces the tidings of salvation that by means of the sacraments it opens up the paths of grace. Thus, man is made a new creature capable of corresponding to love and true freedom in the design of his Creator and Savior. In this way the Pope says that man will find the yoke of Christ to be sweet.

Christian married couples, docile to the voice of the Church, must remember that their Christian vocation is further specified and reinforced by the sacrament of matrimony. By it husband and wife are consecrated for the faithful accomplishment of their proper duties, even to perfection. The Pope says that to them the Lord entrusts the task of making visible to men the holiness of the law. In their mutual love, husband and wife cooperate with the love of God, the author of human life.

Pope Paul VI says that he does not intend to hide the sometimes serious difficulties inherent in the life of Christian married couples, for "the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life."

Pope Paul VI encourages married couples to face up to the efforts needed in their vocation, supported by the Holy Spirit who has been poured into their hearts. They are to implore divine assistance in persevering prayer. He tells them to draw upon the Eucharist and if sin should still keep hold of them, they should perseveringly then have humble recourse to God's mercy in the Sacrament of Penance. In this way couples can achieve the fullness of the conjugal life described by the Apostle: "Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the Church. ...Let each husband love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Apostolate in Homes

The fruit of this generous effort of fidelity is that married couples themselves often desire to communicate their experience to others. It is married couples themselves who become apostles and guides to other married couples. The Pope sees this apostolate as most opportune today.

To Doctors and Medical Personnel

The Holy Father holds in the highest esteem those physicians and medical personnel who place their Christian vocation above every other human interest. He urges them to persevere in promoting the discoveries of solutions inspired by faith and right reason. Their professional duty should be to pursue all the knowledge needed, assisting those who seek their wise counsel and healthy direction.

To Priests

Their first task, especially for those who teach moral theology, is to expound the Church's teaching on marriage without ambiguity. They are to be the first to give the example of loyal internal and external obedience to the teaching authority of the Church. That obedience obliges, not only because of reasoned argument, but also because of the light of the Holy Spirit given to pastors of the Church so that they may illustrate the truth. It is of the utmost importance for peace of conscience and for the unity of the Christian people. All should attend to the magisterium of the Church as Paul the Apostle notes: "I appeal to you... by the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." The saving teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls. He was intransigent with evil, but merciful toward individuals.

The Pope seeks to animate his beloved sons, the priests, to speak with confidence. In doing so they assist the magisterium to illumine the hearts of the faithful. They prepare them to seek the Eucharist and Penance while not allowing discouragement because of weakness to enter in.

To Bishops

Pope Paul VI, speaking to the Bishops of the Church, says that working ardently and incessantly to safeguard the holiness of marriage is one their most urgent responsibilities. It implies concerted pastoral action in fields of human activity. Theirs is the task of rendering the life of parents and children easier and more joyous, of making their life together in human society more fraternal and peaceful. All is to be done in faithfulness to God's design for the world.

Great is the work of education. The Pope says that he is convinced that it is so for both the world and for the Church. Man cannot find true happiness except he respect the laws written by God in his very nature, laws that he must observe with intelligence and love. The Holy Father then invokes upon all, and especially upon married couples, the abundant graces of the God of holiness and mercy.

Given at Rome, from St. Peter's, the 25th day of July, feast of St. James the Apostle, in the year 1968.