



A prophetic encyclical of Paul VI Humanae Vitae encyclical Synthesis

This is a synthetic summary of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (HV) for its great interest to everyone, at almost 50 years since it was given by Pope Paul VI in Rome, July 25, 1968.

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We present a synthetic summary of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (HV) for its great interest to all, at almost 50 years since it was given by Pope Paul VI in Rome, July 25, 1968.

This encyclical is aimed for all men of goodwill and deals with the regulation of birth. The transmission of human life has always been for the husbands, as free collaborators and responsible of the creator God. In the face of the social changes that transform society and the new issues that have emerged, the Church does not ignore this matter related to the life and happiness of men (cf. HV, 1).

The encyclical HV explains the rapid demographic development and the temptation of some authorities to oppose the dangers of radical measures. The encyclical asks this question: Would it not be appropriate to revise the ethical norms so far in force, as less exuberant but more rational and voluntary fertility with lawful and prudent control of births? (cf. HV, 2-3).

The natural law enlightened and enriched by divine revelation are the principles of moral doctrine on marriage. The Magisterium of the Church has for all its faithful the interpretation of the natural moral law, for Jesus Christ, by communicating to Peter and the Apostles his divine authority and sending them to teach all the people his commandments (cf. Matthew 28, 18-20), constitutes them in custodians and in authentic interpreters of any moral law, not only of the evangelical law but also of the natural law, as the will of God, whose fulfillment is equally necessary to be saved (cf. Matthew 7, 21; HV, 4).

Limiting the problem of birth to partial perspectives of biological, psychological, demographic or sociological order would not be correct but should be considered in the light of a holistic vision of man and his natural, earthly, supernatural and

eternal vocation (cf. HV, 7).

The true nature and nobility of conjugal love are revealed considering their supreme source, God, who is love (cf. 1 John 4, 8), "the Father of whom all paternity comes in heaven and on earth" (Ephesians 3, 15). Marriage is a wise institution of the creator to carry out in humanity his design of love. Through their reciprocal personal and exclusive donation of husbands, they tend to the communion of their beings to a mutual personal perfection, collaborating with God in the generation and the education of new lives. In the baptized, the marriage also has the dignity of sacramental sign of the grace that represents the union of Christ with his Church (cf. HV, 8).

Conjugal love is above all fully human, sensitive and spiritual at the same time. It is total love, a singular form of personal friendship in which the husbands generously share joyful to be able to enrich themselves with the gift of oneself. It is a faithful and exclusive love until death, freely assumed, a fidelity that is always possible, noble and meritorious, a source of deep and lasting happiness. It is a fruitful love, which in addition to the communion of the husbands continues to provoke new lives, with the procreation and the education of the offspring, because the children are the most excellent gift of the marriage and contribute to the good of the parents themselves (cf. HV, 9).

Responsible parenthood, in terms of biological processes, means intelligent knowledge and respect for the functions of the life-giving power and the biologic laws that are part of the human person; in terms of tendencies of instinct and passions, it involves the necessary dominion over those who have to exercise reason and will; as for physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, it is put into practice with the weighted and generous deliberation of having a large family, or with the decision, taken for serious reasons and in respect to the moral law, to avoid a new birth for a time or indefinite time. It mainly involves a deeper connection with the objective moral order, established by God, whose faithful interpreter is the righteous conscience. Their responsible exercise requires that the spouses fully recognize their duties to God, to himself, to family and society, in a fair hierarchy of values. The mission of transmitting life is not an autonomous task in the ways to follow, but the husbands have to form their conduct to the creative intent of God, manifested in the very nature of marriage and its acts and constantly taught by the Church (Cf. HV, 10).

In the respect of the nature and the purpose of the marriage act, the spouses unite in chaste intimacy, and through which the human life is transmitted, with honest and dignified acts, that do not cease to be legitimate if by causes independent of the will of the spouses they are expected to be infertile, because they continue to be ordained to express and consolidate their union. God has wisely arranged laws and natural rhythms of fertility that by themselves distance births. The Church, demanding that men observe the norms of the natural law interpreted in their constant doctrine, teaches that any marriage act must be open to the transmission

of life (cf. HV, 11).

This doctrine exposed by the Magisterium is founded on the inseparable connection that God has wanted and that man cannot break on his initiative, between the unitive and the procreator meaning of the conjugal act. To safeguard both essential aspects, unitive and procreative, and thus the conjugal act conserves the whole sense of mutual and true love, and its ordination to the very high vocation of man to paternity (cf. HV, 12).

It is not a true act of love in the relationship between husbands with straight moral order, the conjugal act imposed on the spouse without considering his current situation and his legitimate desires. To use the divine gift of the transmission of life by destroying its meaning and its purpose, even partially, is to contradict God's plan and his will. Exploit the gift of marital love respecting the laws of the generator process means to recognize non-arbitrators of the sources of human life, but rather administrators of the plan established by the Creator. Human life is sacred since its inception directly engages the creative action of God (cf. HV, 13).

Therefore, it is not lawful to regulate the direct interruption of the generator process already started, and especially the abortion wanted or attempted, even for therapeutic reasons. It is not lawful to direct, perpetual or temporary sterilization of man or woman. Any action that in anticipation of the conjugal act or its realization or the development of its natural consequences is proposed as an end or as a means to make procreation impossible is not lawful. It is not lawful to justify deliberately infertile conjugal acts, the lesser evil or the fact that such acts would constitute a whole with the previous fruitful acts or that they will follow. While it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil to avoid a greater evil or to promote a larger good, it is not lawful, even for serious reasons, to do evil to achieve good. A voluntarily infertile conjugal act is dishonest and cannot be co-honest with the whole of a fertile conjugal life (cf. HV, 14).

But it is lawful to use therapeutic means that are truly necessary to cure diseases of the organism, even if an unwanted impediment to procreation was continued (cf. HV, 15).

The Church is the first one to praise and recommend the intervention of intelligence in a work that so closely associates the rational creature with its Creator but affirms that it must be done respecting the order established by God. To space births for serious reasons, derived from the physical or psychological conditions of the spouses, or outside circumstances, the Church teaches that it is lawful to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generating functions to use of marriage only in the infertile periods and so regulate the birth without offending the moral principles that we have remembered. In the resort to the infertile periods, the spouses legitimately serve a natural disposition. In the use of illicit means directly contrary to fertilization, the development of natural processes is impeded (cf. HV, 16).

Methods of artificial birth control would open up the easy and broad path to marital infidelity and the general degradation of morality. Young people would be more vulnerable to being faithful to the moral law and should not be offered any easy means to circumvent their observance. The man who habituates the use of anticonceptive practices could end up losing respect for women and, without worrying about his physical or psychological balance, could come to regard it as a simple instrument of selfish enjoyment, not as a respected companion and beloved. Public authorities could also leave at the mercy of their unconcerned criterion of moral demands the most personal and reserved sector of marital intimacy (cf. HV, 17).

These teachings, in anticipation of Paul VI, will not be perhaps easily accepted by all, because the Church in the likeness of its divine founder is "sign of contradiction" (Luke 2, 34), but does not leave by this to proclaim with humble firmness all the moral law, natural and evangelical as his depository and interpreter, without being able to declare lawful what is not for his intimate and unchanging opposition to the true good of man. Defending the marital morality in its integrity, the Church contributes to the establishment of a truly human civilization, it commits the man not to "abdicate of the own responsibility by submitting to the technical means", defending with this the dignity of the spouses, being a sincere and selfless friend of all the men who want to help from their ground way to participate as children to the life of the living God, Father of all men (cf. HV, 18-19).

The Church, as the Redeemer, knows the weakness and has compassion of the crowds, welcomes sinners, but cannot renounce to teach the law that in reality is the human life brought to its original truth and led by the Spirit of God (Romans 8). The doctrine of the Church in the area of birth regulation, like all great and beneficial realities, requires commitment and many family, individual and social efforts. It would not be possible to act without the help of God who sustains and strengthens the goodwill of men, but these efforts ennoble man and benefit the human community (cf. HV, 19-20).

An honest practice of the regulation of the birth demands especially the husbands acquire and to possess solid convictions on the true values of life and family, and a perfect control of themselves; it implies mastery of instinct by reason and free will according to the right order and to observe periodic continence, self-discipline of the purity of husbands. A continuous effort that develops the personality of the husbands, contributing to the family life fruits of serenity and peace and facilitating the solution of other problems, favoring the attention to the other spouse, helping to overcome the selfishness as an enemy of true love, and rooting more their sense of responsibility. Thus parents acquire the capacity for a deeper and more effective influence to educate children, and they grow in the righteous esteem of human values and the serene and harmonious development of their spiritual and sensitive faculties (cf. HV, 21).

Call for attention to the educators and responsible in order to the good of the human coexistence on the necessity to create a favorable climate to the education of the chastity, triumph of the freedom on the debauchery, by the respect of the moral order. Notice to the social media that lead to the excitement of the senses, to the wildness of the customs, like any form of pornography and licentious spectacles, which must arouse the frank and unanimous reaction of all the people in defense of the supreme goods of the human spirit, without seeking justifications for these depravities (cf. HV, 22).

The encyclical ends with an appeal to public authorities (for the rulers are the first responsible for the common good and can do so much to safeguard the moral customs by not allowing the morality of the peoples to be degraded or accepting the legal introduction practices contrary to the natural and divine law in the family, and by the economic development and social progress that respect and promote the true human values, individual and social), to the Christian spouses (called by God to serve him in marriage, with the effective help of the teaching of the Church and of the sacraments as a way of grace corresponding in the true freedom to the plan of the Creator and Savior, and to find soft the yoke of Christ - Matthew 11, 30 - because the door is narrow and narrow life that leads to life - Matthew 7, 14; Cf. Hebrews 12, 11 - Striving courageously to live wisely, justice and piety in time - Titus 2, 12 -, aware that the shape of this world is transient - 1 Corinthians 7, 31 - Supported by faith and hope that does not deceive because God's love has been spread in our hearts together with the Holy Spirit that has been given to us - Romans 5, 5 - performing the fullness of the conjugal life described by the Apostle - Ephesians 5, 25.28-29.32-33 -, to the apostolate among the households (turning the same husbands into the guidance of other spouses), physicians and health workers (persevering in constantly promoting solutions inspired by faith and on the right line, encouraging conviction and respect for them in their environment, and efforts all the necessary science in this delicate aspect to give wise counsels and healthy guidelines to the husbands who wait for them with righteousness), to the priests (whose concern is to expose without ambiguity the doctrine of the Church on the marriage, giving example of loyal gift, internally and externally to the Magisterium of the Church in the ministry speaking in the same way for the peace of the consciences and unity of the Christian people - 1 Corinthians 1, 10 -, not undermining the healthy doctrine of Christ who did not come to judge but to save - John 3, 17 -, being intransigent with evil, but merciful to the people, teaching the necessary path of prayer, Eucharist and Penance), and the bishops (work in front of the priests, your collaborators, and your faithful for the safeguard and sanctity of marriage for may it be lived in all its human and Christian fullness, with pastoral action in human, economic, cultural and social activity).

With the final call to the brothers, sons, and men of goodwill, to observe morality with intelligence and love, because man cannot find true happiness other than in respect of the laws engraved by God in his nature (cf. HV, 31).

The encyclical, which Pope Francis himself in 2014 called as prophetic (Bagnasco,

2015), and which was questioned within and outside the Church (sources, 2008), as the same blessed Paul VI intuited in the encyclical itself (cf. HV, 18), still has an undisputed current validity in our time.