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Humanae Vitae – Ten Years Later

Most Rev. Andrew R. Grutka

This address was given by Bishop Grutka of Gary, Ind., at the September, 1977 Chicago meeting of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds.

The tenth anniversary of the encyclical letter, *Humanae Vitae*, will fall in the year during which William A. Lynch, M.D., of Boston, is national president of the Physicians' Guilds. We are blest to have the Guilds led during this important year by a physician who has worked decades on natural methods of fertility control and served in the crucial role of chairman of the science committee of the board of the Human Life Foundation. Through his role in the Foundation, he has been in an influential position to accelerate worldwide research developments meeting the request for such efforts stated within the encyclical itself.

Another head table guest is Dr. Herbert Ratner who predicted the medical problems now developing with the birth control pill in the same year that the encyclical was published. Dr. Ratner has been president of the Guilds over the past year.

Dr. Ratner accepted the gavel from Dr. John Brennan of Milwaukee. Dr. Brennan, an advisor to the Human Life Foundation and board member of both the Natural Family Planning Federation of America and the new organization to promote the work of Dr. John Billings of Australia, was principal investigator in work leading to the new curriculum for teaching natural methods supported by H.E.W. and the World Health Organization. There are other doctors and health specialists who practice expertly and in keeping with God's law.

Probably no other group of Catholic physicians in the world has such a solid track record in support of the research and educational aspects of *Humanae Vitae* as those here present.

Looking back over these past nine years to the political and medical climate of 1968-69, we should take delight in noting that what was argued then in the need for research and use of natural methods of fertility control is being echoed today by both the World Health Organization and the United States Government. That echo is pretty loud when we consider that between these two sponsors of research,

more than three million dollars have been invested in the last year and a half along lines recommended by our associates worldwide.

In 1968, when the American Bishops voted to launch a research and educational foundation directed to natural family planning — the only national hierarchy in the world to do so — a handful of organizations was teaching couples in scattered areas of the nation. Few diocesan programs existed and private physicians were providing whatever leadership they could through a commission that gained its strength from many in this room. Today many Americans are employed full time providing for the training of teachers and the counseling of couples in natural methods.

Earlier this year another benchmark went into place when Wayne State University conducted a medical seminar on human reproduction including Natural Family Planning by name.

Also earlier this year we saw the publication of a diocesan directory of available services related to Church agencies. This reported more than 150 dioceses with services available. A 1973 study found programs in only 43 dioceses.

Three false charges prevalent at the time of the publication of *Humanae Vitae* have been seriously challenged:

Opponents claimed the methods would not work. Today the U.S. Department of H.E.W. rates temperature-based methods as “highly effective.”

Opponents claimed couples would not use them. Over the past ten years we have seen thousands turn out for single lectures by Dr. Billings, and a steady flow of couples to the teaching centers across the nation. Marketing studies by commercial firms have demonstrated solidly that the American people want an effective natural approach.

The other attempt to squelch the use of government research funds claimed that these were “Catholic methods” followed only on the teaching of the Church. Two recent books by secular publishers, prepared for the public in general, were out of print in a few months. Two major publishers have commissioned new books for general circulation next year.

Our profound thanks to the men and women of faith and science whose love for God and their fellowmen enabled them to practice effective medicine without any compromise in principles.

Now let us give thought to the status of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* as it approaches the tenth milestone of its guidance along the pilgrim’s journey.

Pope Paul’s Consultations

Before publishing the encyclical on human life, Pope Paul VI consulted extensively with the most knowledgeable people of the world and agonized a long time before making his decision. One of the persons he consulted is his dearest lay friend, Jean Guittou, who is

considered the greatest lay theologian in the Church today. Archbishop Fulton Sheen considers Guitton one of the greatest minds in Christendom. In a day-long session with the Holy Father, Guitton recorded his discussions in a book entitled *The Pope Speaks*. Hear this brilliant lay theologian as he presents the Holy Father's reasoning behind the issuance of the encyclical on human life.

Marriage and the family are not simply a human and sociological structure, linked to the changing conditions of life, of culture, of technique. Marriage and the family come from God. They correspond to a design which is invariable; they are transcendent. Marriage and the family are not changed by the horizontal movement of history; they tend toward a vertical relation with God. Families are founded on earth, live on earth, but are destined for heaven. In marriage and the family God has wisely joined two of the greatest human realities — the love of man and woman and the transmission of life. God wishes husband and wife to share in His divine love, to complete themselves in a reciprocity of giving both physical and spiritual.

The Church has always regarded marriage as a sacred bond, a sacrament, and safeguards its celebration by laws. The world deems these laws of the Church mostly as interdictions, taboos, obstacles to true love, condemnations of sexual intercourse. There is no denying that this state of mind has existed among certain representatives of the Church. Let it be affirmed, however, that the Christian law is not intended to condemn or to restrain life. Gospel Law is designed to make life more abundant, to permeate it with contentment, with unity, to spread happiness and protect families from illusions and deviations. There is no intention to hamper the freedom of love but rather to aid love to keep its purity, its plenitude, to prevent its becoming perverted, so that it may attain its fulfillment which is to join one human being to another integrally and finally to unite them eternally to God Who is Love. Let it be repeated emphatically, love is not made for the law, but the law is made for love. The fundamental problem of love is to enable what is of the flesh to rise above the flesh, to lift what is immersed in the realm of the senses to the realm of spiritual exhilaration. Divine love is an element in all true love. That is why the link between love and fecundity is deep, hidden and substantial. Authentic love between a man and a woman yearns for the creation of another human being as the fruit of that love. What is precisely to be feared in modern technique is that separation which it introduces between love and fecundity. There are those who state that this separation is sometimes sadly necessary for budgetary or health reasons. All must realize, however, that this separation is not normal, that it is fraught with danger. The use of a technique aimed solely to disassociate the act of love from its end does violence to its nature and subtracts from its happiness.

The problem which technique raises touches the very sources of life. The Church is sensitively aware of the numerous complexities involved, particularly the anxieties of married couples as they sense themselves restrained in their freedom, their consciences, their careers, in the expression of their love.

Incidentally, it is our conviction that conjugal chastity still possesses a quality of autonomy — a disarming liberty that modern people value highly and admire warmly. It can be said there is no true liberty without the spirit of chastity.

With sages, saints and heroes let us voice the firm belief that all true friends of human nature, of human happiness, believers and unbelievers, even those who protest and resist, nourish deep in their hearts a flame of gratitude for the authority which staunchly refuses to lower its ideals and continues to radiate light, strength, confidence and courage.

The Church has to uphold her position — hers not by assumption but by the imposition of the law of God. She is bound to expound, apply, interpret, and preserve God's immutable laws even when they appear burdensome and foolish. She has to do so even in the face of scientific, sociological and psychological findings — products of the most intensive research — if these seem contradictory to divine law. (Two truths can never falsify each other. True science cannot contradict true theology.)

May we focus our attention on two subjects — the encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the propagation of human life according to the right order which is marking its tenth year and on His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, who marked his 80th year last September.

Not many encyclicals have evoked the kind of reaction this encyclical did. And very few popes in the history of the Church have been subjected to the mental pressures which Pope Paul endures. For me personally this adds up to an accurate assessment of the essential importance of both — the encyclical and the Holy Father. The negative reactions to this encyclical remind me of the scriptural example of the rejection of the stone by the builders which later on became the cornerstone of a magnificent structure. The negative reactions to the Holy Father's pontificate mirror the difficulty of presenting the truth over the ages — going all the way back to God's prophets in the Old Testament and to Christ, the Lord, in the New Testament.

Encyclical's Salient Points

It might be well for us to review some of the salient points of this encyclical. The very first sentence is noteworthy: "Married people are the free and responsible collaborators with God the Creator in the most serious duty of transmitting human life."

Shortly after this it recognizes the problem: "The fulfillment of this

duty has always posed serious problems for the conscience of the married persons. The recent evolution of society, however, has brought about changes which give rise to new questions which the Church could not ignore, since they refer to an area which so closely touches upon the life and happiness of people."

The encyclical then goes on to indicate the competency of the Church Magisterium, the total vision of mankind, conjugal love, responsible parenthood, the respect for the nature and purpose of the marriage act, stressing that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life.

The chapters which have generated considerable discussion include:

"Two inseparable aspects — union and procreation";

"Unlawful ways of birth regulation";

"Licitness of recourse to infertile periods";

"Grave consequences of methods of artificial birth control."

Then there is a very significant chapter, "The mastery of self."

The last eight chapters are unique in their appeals to many different classes of people for aid in safeguarding the sanctity of marriage and the procreation of life. Appeals are addressed to public authorities, to men of science, to husbands and wives, to the apostolate at home, to doctors and medical personnel, to priests, to bishops and finally to all people of good will to cooperate in a truly great work, both for the world and for the Church, since people cannot find true happiness for which they aspire with all their being other than in the respect for the laws written by God in human nature — laws which must be observed with intelligence and love.

The emphasis in the encyclical is on the human, on chaste love — love touched by the divine. The Holy Father unmistakably shows a deep perception of that which can dehumanize, and in a perfect reflection of the rock of Peter, he takes an adamant stand against anything that dehumanizes.

So it might be asked at this point, what is it that humanizes? What is it that distinguishes that which is so beautiful in a human person from the rest of the animal kingdom?

It is will power — the faculty to choose. In the final analysis, this is what will save mankind now and for all eternity. It isn't so much a matter of knowledge as it is of choice.

Even the brilliant historian, Arnold Toynbee, who had considerable difficulty with religion, admitted in one of his last works that to be truly human one has to have religion — and religion is nothing else but the conforming of the human will to the divine.