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## From the Editor's Desk

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## From the Editor's Desk



### *Reflection on the Pope and 'Humanae Vitae'*

As we look back upon the twenty years which have elapsed since the encyclical "Humanae Vitae" was promulgated, we can all see how prophetic Pope Paul VI was. Since its issuance, we have been witness to a veritable avalanche of abortion, illegitimate pregnancies, sexual promiscuity, the treatment of women as objects, premarital sexual relations, couples living together without the commitment of marriage, increased sexually-transmitted diseases, AIDS, the breakdown of family life, and rampant pornography. Pope Paul VI predicted that such would come to pass and how right he was. Some have said that "Humanae Vitae" was a watershed document of the Catholic Church. While emphasizing the unbreakability of the unitive and procreative aspects of marriage, the document had a great deal to say about the true needs and values of persons if they were to attain their fulfillment as individuals. By rejecting contraception as a viable option, Paul VI pointed to an area in which man would attain the destiny to which he had been called as a Christian. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical "Familiaris Consortio", along with his 129 allocutions on family life has fleshed out this teaching, mining the riches of "Humanae Vitae". In his penetrating insights into the theological, philosophical and anthropological aspects of the marital union, we are given guidance as to how we should attain the closest union and affirmation with our spouses in the light of our basic Christian commitment and as human persons.

We have been truly blessed by God for giving us this present Pope who has been endowed by Christ with a powerful, penetrating intellect, great

courage, and evident holiness. He is a man not only endowed with great gifts, but Christ's successor and Vicar to us who struggle through this "mortal coil". If we witness divine inspiration in our own lives, how much more is this successor of St. Peter inspired by Christ in his daily duties of office. The testimony and witness of those intimate with him affirm the intense prayerfulness of this Pope who carries the burden and weight of the world and the Church on his shoulders for all of us.

At a recent Congress in Rome, four days were devoted to studying the various theological, philosophical, and anthropological aspects of modern biotechnology and how they impinge on the reproductive aspects of human sexuality. Organized by the John Paul II Institute on the Family and Marriage of the Lateran University and the Roman Academic Centre of the Holy Cross, over 300 theologians, philosophers, physicians, professors, and scholars from dozens of countries over the world dialogued on the rich meaning and content of "Humanae Vitae." There seemed to be a spirit of optimism among this group that the teaching of "Humanae Vitae" was at last coming into its own. The past twenty years have been masked by theological dissent, discord, and confusion. It was a time, in my view, where there was "confusion even among the elect". "Humanae Vitae" was greeted with disappointment by many in the world when it was issued. Many had been led to believe that the Church would change its position, especially in view of the findings of the Papal Commission which studied this item. The reaction of bishops and clergy was one of studied neglect and ambiguous statements, leaving their flocks with no directives. The dissident theologians prated their rallying cry of dissent with the advice to "follow one's conscience". Lost in this cacaphony of advice from these quarters, was the admonition to follow one's "properly informed conscience", which of course means the ordinary magisterial teaching of the Church, of which the encyclicals, including "Humanae Vitae" form a part.

The uncertain trumpet sounded by the bishops and clergy during the past twenty years in regard to contraceptives should give us pause and a time for reflection on what this means to us. I do not believe that this is a time for recrimination, backbiting, or discord toward our well-meaning bishops, pastors, and teachers. The confusion that has reigned among us in this past generation has served a useful purpose according to God's eternal Providence. If anything, it has made us reflect on the true meaning of sexual intercourse, the dignity and sacredness of marriage and human personhood, the fruits of marriage and children, the great gift of God to us when we give ourselves in love to our spouses and the intimate role that God, our Creator and Lord, plays in this awesome relationship between spouses. It has given us an opportunity to appreciate God's gift to us when we have given ourselves to each other in the chaste marital embrace. It reminds us of the fruits of human moral action properly performed according to the plan which God has laid down for us in marriage, following the natural laws He has ordained for our human natures.

“*Humanae Vitae*”, which was conceived and issued in a time of confusion and discord, has proven to be a divinely-inspired guidepost to us all in following God’s will for us. As it is studied and acted upon, all men of good will will come to see the inherent wisdom of this humble Pope who authored it.

It took enormous courage and divine inspiration to promulgate it. We, the faithful, who are the benefactors of it, are grateful in receiving its teaching and pray that our brethren, bishops, priests, teachers, and fellow Christians, will embrace it, teach it, and build up the faithful so that we may be one in Christ and be in complete harmony with His church and its visible head, Pope John Paul II.

— **John P. Mullooly, M.D.**  
**Editor**

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