

# Gaudium Et Spes (On the Church in the Modern World)

## Summary

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The Council expresses a desire to engage in conversation with the entire human family (a. 3) so that the Church can help shed light on the human mystery and cooperate in solving contemporary problems (a. 10). It addresses this Constitution to Catholics, to all Christians, and to the whole of humanity (a. 2).

The Church has the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel (a. 4), and in line with this the Council expresses its own view of contemporary society. It says that we are in a new age of human history, since the social and cultural circumstances of life have profoundly changed (a. 54). The human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one (a. 5). We are undergoing a cultural and social transformation (a. 4) resulting in rapid changes in industrialization, urbanization, communication, and socialization (a. 6) as well as changes in attitudes, values, and norms of behavior (a. 7). We are witnessing a healthy evolution toward unity and a process of wholesome socialization (a. 42). Increasing socialization can cause problems but it also offers opportunities for the positive development of the human person (a. 25). Modern technical advances are promoting a growing interdependence among people (a. 23), which tightens and spreads by degrees over the whole world (a. 26).

We are on the road to a more thorough development of human personality and to a growing discovery and vindication of our rights (a. 41). There is growing awareness of human dignity, of rights and duties that belong to everyone and cannot be taken away (a. 26). People are claiming the rights deprived them through injustice or unequal distribution (a. 9); they thirst for a full and free life worthy of humans (a. 9). A keener sense of human dignity is leading to a political environment more protective of human rights (a. 73).

There is a mounting increase in the sense of autonomy as well as of responsibility: we are witnessing the birth of a new humanism in which humanity is defined in terms of social and historical responsibility (a. 55). Under these circumstances it is now possible to free most of humanity from the misery of ignorance (a. 60).

These positive signs noted by the Council are countered by several negative signs. Splits have developed within individuals, families, races, and nations (a. 8). Many find it difficult to identify permanent values and apply them to changing circumstances (a. 4), and one of the more serious errors of our age is the split between people's faith and their daily lives (a. 43).

Social disturbances take place, resulting in part from natural economic, political and social tensions, but at a deeper level they result from pride and selfishness (a. 25). The magnified power of humanity threatens to destroy the race itself (a. 37). Wars continue their devastation, and the fierce character of warfare threatens to result in unsurpassed savagery (a. 79). Even when no war is being waged, the world is constantly beset by strife and violence (a. 83).

The Council concludes that the modern world shows itself at once powerful and weak, capable of the noblest deeds or the foulest; before it lies the path to freedom or to slavery, to progress or retreat, to community or hatred (a. 9).

The Council sets out to establish a working relationship with the world in which it finds itself, for the Church goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does (a. 40). The followers of Christ share the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of today's people, especially those who are poor (a. 1), and Christians are joined with the rest of society in the search for truth (a. 16).

The People of God and the human race render service to each other (a. 11). The Church serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society (a. 40). It can contribute to making people and history more human (a. 40), opening up to people the meaning of their own existence (a. 41). The Church can inject into modern society the force of its faith and love put into vital practice (a. 42). The universality of the Church enables it to serve as a bond between diverse human communities (a. 42). The Church respects all the true, good, and just elements found in human institutions (a. 42), and Christians living and working in the world are bound to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit (a. 43). The Church can and ought to be enriched by the development of human social life, and indeed the Church has profited richly by the history and development of humanity (a. 44). Whoever works to better the world contributes to the Church as well (a. 44).

While defining the Church's relationship to the world, the Council restates as well the mission of the church. The Church has a saving and an eschatological purpose which can be fully attained only in the future world (a. 40). The Church's mission is religious and not in the political, economic or social order, but this religious mission can help the human community structure itself properly (a. 42).

The mission of the Church includes these religious and less specifically religious goals: to reveal the mystery of God (a. 41); to make God present and in a sense visible (a. 21); to communicate God's life to people and cast the reflected light of that life over the entire earth (a. 40); to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the Spirit (a. 3); to preach the Gospel to everyone and dispense the treasures of grace (a. 89); to guard the heritage of God's Word and draw from it moral and religious principles (a. 33); to work that God's Kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass (a. 45); to scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel (a. 4); to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and judge them in the light of God's Word (a. 44); to promote unity (a. 42); to stimulate and advance human and civic culture (a. 58); to foster and elevate all that is found to be true, good and beautiful in the human community (a. 76); to shed on the whole world the radiance of the Gospel message, and to unify under one Spirit all people of whatever nation, race or culture (a. 92). Asserting that the Church can open up to people the meaning of their own existence (a. 41), the Council addresses the human person and human activity and experience. It says that people are more precious for what they are than for what they have (a. 35). The dignity of the human person applies to the human body, good and honorable, which God created and will raise up on the last day (a. 14); the human intellect, which shares in the light of the divine mind (a. 15); and the human conscience, the most secret core and sanctuary of a person where one is alone with God (a. 16). Human dignity demands the freedom to direct oneself toward goodness (a. 17).

Human work constitutes an unfolding of God's creation, and human accomplishments are a sign of God's grace (a. 34). Human progress is good, but it tempts us to seek our own interests and not those of others (a. 37). We find ourselves fully only in giving ourselves sincerely to others (a. 24)

Human experience includes both the call to grandeur and the depths of misery (a. 13). All human activity is threatened by pride and must be purified by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection

(a. 37). The human mystery takes on light only in the mystery of the Word made flesh, whose Spirit offers to every person the possibility of being associated with the saving events of Jesus (a. 22). The riddle of human existence grows most acute in the face of death, yet revelation tells us that God created us for life beyond death and Christ has freed us from death (a. 18).

The Council acknowledges that people want to know the meaning of life and death, and they can never be altogether indifferent to the problems of religion (a. 41). The recognition of God is not hostile to human dignity (a. 21), and indeed the basic source of human dignity lies in our call to communion with God (a. 19). There is not a mutual opposition between faith and science (a. 36), nor is there an opposition between professional and social activities on the one hand, and religious life on the other (a. 43). Religion is being purified of superstition at the same time that growing numbers of people are abandoning religion in practice (a. 7).

The Council argues against a concept of religion which includes only worship and moral living: it asserts that religion also includes involvement in earthly affairs (a. 43). It also argues against discriminatory attitudes involving religion. All discrimination based on religion is contrary to God's intent and must be overcome and eradicated (a. 29), and we ought to respect and love those who think or act differently from us in religious matters (a. 28).

Noting with approval that there is a steadily growing respect for people of other religions (a. 73), the Council attempts to conduct a respectful dialogue with atheists. Atheism is one of the most serious problems of our age (a. 19). The word atheism is used to cover a number of different attitudes and approaches (a. 19). Atheism arises from different causes, and believers themselves frequently bear some responsibility for the atheism of others, concealing rather than revealing the authentic face of God (a. 19). Atheism often reflects a desire to be totally independent of God, so that humans can be an end unto themselves (a. 20). Atheism can also result from the anticipation of human liberation solely through economic and social efforts, while viewing religion as an obstacle because it arouses hope for a deceptive future life (a. 20). Atheism raises weighty questions, which should be examined seriously (a. 21). The remedy to atheism is a proper presentation and living out of our faith (a. 21). There must be dialogue so that believers and unbelievers can work together for a better world (a. 21).

In line with the mission of the Church to guard the heritage of God's Word and draw from it moral and religious principles (a. 33), the Constitution includes some general moral statements which the Council wants us to reflect on before proceeding on to the concrete problems of today's world: --All human activity must harmonize with the genuine good of the human race (a. 35); --We cannot, through laziness or lack of concern, be satisfied with a merely individualistic morality (a. 30), for God created us not for life in isolation but for the formation of social unity (a. 32); --Serving and living and working with others strengthens our freedom (a. 31); --Only in freedom can we direct ourselves toward goodness (a. 17); --One must obey one's conscience, for according to it one will be judged (a. 16); --An improper hierarchy of values results in self-centeredness (a. 37); --The acknowledgment of personal rights does not imply exemption from every requirement of divine law (a. 41); --What divine revelation makes known to us conforms with experience (a. 13); --We often experience an imbalance between a concern for practicality and efficiency, and the demands of moral conscience (a. 8); --We can love and respect others who think or act differently from us without becoming indifferent to truth or goodness (a. 28); --We must distinguish between error and the person in error: the error must always be rejected while the person never loses the dignity of being a human person (a. 28).

In addition to these general moral statements, the Council also offers a number of guidelines for social justice intended to help humanity establish a political, social and economic order which will serve people and affirm and develop their dignity (a. 9).

The Council promotes respect for both individuals and the community. It asserts that the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person (a. 25). Respect for human dignity means that everyone must have what they need to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, shelter, the freedom to choose a state of life and found a family, the right to education, employment, a good reputation, respect, appropriate information, action in good conscience, protection of privacy, and religious freedom (a. 26). God made us into one family, and we should treat one another in a spirit of community (a. 24). Every social group must respect the needs and aspirations of other groups as well as the general welfare of the entire human family (a. 26). We must make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception, and each of us must consider every neighbor without exception as another self (a. 27).

The dignity of the individual and the community demands respect for life: whatever is opposed to life poisons human society, harms its practitioner, and dishonors the Creator (a. 27). It also demands respect and love for those who think or act differently from us in social, political, and religious matters (a. 28). We must recognize the basic equality of all people: all discrimination is contrary to God's intent and must be overcome and eradicated (a. 29). Both the individual and the community have obligations to each other: human institutions must work to safeguard basic human rights (a. 29), while at the same time each person must contribute to the common good and must support the private and public institutions which work for a better world, and one of our primary duties is the observance of social laws and precepts (a. 30)

The Council teaches that we have a mandate to govern the world with justice and holiness (a. 34), so that we have a duty imposed upon us to build a better world based upon truth and justice (a. 55). Believers and unbelievers alike must work for a better world (a. 21); we must work together without violence and deceit to build up the world in genuine peace (a. 92). This task demands that we recognize that technical advances are worth less than the work we do for justice, community, and social order (a. 35), and that the effort to establish a universal community is not a hopeless one (a. 38).

The Council has some messages directed primarily to members of the Church. It says that our hope related to the end of time does not diminish in any way our duty to address contemporary problems (a. 21); the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one (a. 39). Christians should seek and think of those things which are above, but this duty should increase their obligation to work with others for a better world (a. 57) and those Christians are mistaken who think they can shirk their earthly responsibilities just because we seek a life to come (a. 43). The Christian message holds us bound to build up the world and be concerned for the welfare of others (a. 34), and the teaching of Christ requires that we forgive injuries and love our enemies (a. 28). We must foster within the Church itself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, through the full recognition of lawful diversity (a. 92).

After laying out its theoretical program, the Council turns its attention to several problems which it says are of special urgency (a. 46). **The first topic is marriage and family.** The companionship of male and female produces the primary form of interpersonal communion (a. 12). The Council notes that modern economic conditions are causing serious disturbances in families (a. 47), and this is important because the condition of families has a decisive bearing on the dignity, stability, peace

and prosperity of human society as a whole (a. 48). Everyone should work for the welfare of marriage and the family: parents, children, those who exercise influence in society, Christians, researchers, pastors, and various organizations (a. 52).

The **second topic taken up in the Constitution is culture**. People arrive at full humanity only through culture, those things by which people develop and perfect their bodily and spiritual qualities (a. 53). A more universal form of human culture is developing, one which promotes and expresses the unity of the human race (a. 54). For the first time in human history all people are convinced that the benefits of culture ought to be and actually can be extended to everyone (a. 9).

The Church is not bound to any particular form of human culture (a. 42), to any particular way of life or any customary pattern of life (a. 58). Because there are many ties between the message of salvation and human culture (a. 58), the Church is involved in a living exchange with diverse cultures of people (a. 44), although sometimes it is difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching (a. 62).

The Council lays down the following guidelines for evaluating the role of culture in society.

- Culture needs freedom and autonomy, and it demands respect (a. 59). We ought to respect and love those who think or act differently from us in social, political, and religious matters (a. 28).
- Culture should be subordinated to the integral perfection of the human person and the common good of society (a. 59).
- Individuals should be educated to a higher degree of culture (a. 31).
- All cultural discrimination is contrary to God's intent and must be overcome and eradicated (a. 29). There should be no discrimination in the satisfaction of the right to culture because everyone has the right to culture and the duty to develop themselves culturally (a. 60).
- Women must be affirmed as participants in cultural life (a. 60), and they ought not to be denied the right to cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men (a. 29).
- Increased exchanges among cultures cannot be allowed to disturb the life of communities or destroy ancestral wisdom and the peculiar character of each people (a. 56).
- The refinement of the culturally competent cannot stand in the way of others' participating in the cultural values of the world (a. 56).
- The recognition of the autonomy of culture cannot give rise to an a-religious or anti-religious humanism (a. 56).
- The arts and disciplines should be free to use their own principles and methodologies, and people must be free to search for the truth, express opinions, and practice art (a. 59).
- Culture cannot be made to serve as an instrument of political or economic power (a. 59).

**The third topic taken up by the Council is socio-economic life.** It teaches that people are the source, center, and purpose of all economic and social life (a. 63), and that the purpose of economic production is to serve people in their material needs as well as in the demands of their intellectual, moral, spiritual, and religious lives (a. 64). The Church is not bound to any particular economic system (a. 42), but it is critical of the excessive economic and social differences among people or groups of people which violate social justice, equity, human dignity, and social and international peace (29). It is also critical of the dangerous lack of balance between developed and other countries, and also between agriculture, industry, and the services (a. 63).

Of special concern to the Church is poverty and the poor. The followers of Christ share the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of all people, but especially of those who are poor (a. 1). The Council

notes with sadness that even with unprecedented wealth, resources and economic power, we are still tormented by hunger and poverty (a. 4); the greater part of the world is still suffering from so much poverty that it is as if Christ himself were crying out in these poor to beg the charity of the disciples (a. 88). Subhuman living conditions are opposed to life, thereby poisoning human society and dishonoring God (a. 27). Moreover, human freedom is often crippled when a person encounters extreme poverty (a. 31). Economic development sometimes results in contempt for the poor (a. 63), but the Council calls on us to react differently: love of neighbor means that we cannot imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus (a. 27). People must help the poor, and not merely out of their superfluous goods (a. 68). At the same time, those in extreme necessity have the right to procure what they need from the riches of others (a. 68). The Council condemns the arms race, which it says ensnares the poor to an intolerable degree (a. 81), and it proposes the establishment of an organism of the universal Church which would be set up to cultivate both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor (a. 90).

The Council offers a vision of a just socio-economic order. This vision is based on the principle that the right to have a sufficient share of earthly goods belongs to everyone (a. 68). Based on this principle, the Council asserts that everyone has the right to work and the duty to work faithfully (a. 67), and that wages should be such that people and their dependents can live worthy lives (a. 67). Workers have the right to form unions and to take part in them without fear of reprisal (a. 68). Disputes should be settled by negotiation, but if necessary by strikes (a. 68).

Private property is an extension of human freedom, and access to ownership should be fostered, keeping mind the social obligations attached to private ownership (a. 71). Investments should be based on concern for the common good (a. 70). Everyone involved in an economic enterprise should share in its administration and profits (a. 68), and the largest possible number of people and nations must have an active share in directing economic development (a. 65).

Economic growth cannot be controlled exclusively by market forces or government authority (a. 65). Special attention must be given farmers, immigrants, the sick and the elderly (a. 66). All discrimination based on social condition is contrary to God's intent and must be overcome and eradicated (a. 29).

More international cooperation is needed in the economic field (a. 84). The international economy demands an end to profiteering, national ambition, appetite for political supremacy, militarism, and ideological propaganda (a. 85).

**The next topic taken up by the Council is political life.** Political community exists for the common good--the sum of social conditions within which people attain their perfection (a. 74). The Council welcomes the fact that more and more people are becoming politically active (a. 73), and it teaches that the Church is not bound to any particular political system (a. 42, 76), and can work under any kind of government which recognizes basic human rights, the demands of the common good, and the freedom of the Church to exercise its own mission (a. 42).

People should be free to choose their political system and their rulers (a. 74). Political authority must be based on appeals to people's freedom and sense of responsibility. It must always be exercised within the limits of the moral order and directed towards the common good (a. 74). It can never be based on dictatorial systems or totalitarian methods which violate human rights (a. 75). Political systems should not hamper civic or religious freedom, victimize people through avarice and political crimes, or serve special interests (a. 73). People have the right to defend human rights

from abuse by public authority (a. 74).

Citizens and governments have duties to each other which must be carried out for the common good. People have the right and the duty to use their free vote to further the common good. Political parties can never give their interests priority over the common good (a. 75). We ought to respect and love those who think or act differently from us in political matters (a. 28).

**The final topic taken up by the Council is peace.** Peace is an enterprise of justice and the fruit of love: it is not merely the absence of war, or the maintenance of a balance of power, or the calm enforced by dictatorship (a. 78). It must be born of mutual trust among nations and not be imposed through fear of available weapons (a. 82). Excessive economic and social differences among people or groups of people violate social and international peace (29), and building up peace involves rooting out the causes of discord, especially injustice (a. 83).

Governments have the right to legitimate defense when peaceful means of settlement have been exhausted. Those in military service who fulfill this role properly contribute to the establishment of peace, but conscientious objectors should be protected by law. Orders should not be obeyed which are immoral, such as those designed for the methodical extermination of an entire people (a. 79).

The new circumstances surrounding war force us to evaluate war with an entirely new attitude (a. 80). In its own evaluation of war, the Council declares that any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of cities and populations merits condemnation (a. 80). It teaches that the arms race is not a safe way to preserve peace, and may even aggravate the causes of war. It is a trap for humanity, ensnaring the poor to an intolerable degree (a. 81). Our goal should be a time when all war is outlawed by international consent (a. 82). Christians should work with all true peacemakers, and especially praiseworthy are those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights (a. 78).

Throughout its Pastoral Constitution, the Council returns time and again to Christ because, it says, God provides a full answer to human questions in Christ, so that whoever follows after Christ, the perfect human, becomes more human (a. 41). Christ is the model and guide for all that we seek in social justice. He is the perfect human being, providing us with an example for our imitation (a. 22). He taught us by his example to share in human community, revealing the human vocation in terms of the most common of social realities (a. 32). Christ entered the world to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served (a. 3). Christ through his Spirit can offer us the light and the strength to measure up to our supreme destiny (a. 10). The Father wants everyone to recognize Christ our brother and love him in word and deed (a. 93). Marriage is a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, manifesting to everyone Christ's living presence in the world (a. 48)

The Council bases its hopeful perspective on the saving acts of Christ. Christ won the victory for humans when he rose to life, for by his death he freed us from death (a. 18). People are equal because they have all been redeemed by Christ (a. 29). All human activity is threatened by pride and must be purified by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection (a. 37). Christ is now at work in human hearts through the energy of his Spirit (a. 38).

Christ is himself the cause of the justice and peace we seek. He is the author of peace, the Prince of Peace reconciling all people with God (a. 78). In Christ can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of humanity and of all human history (a. 10); he is the goal of human history, the focal point

of the longings of history and of civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings (a. 45). Only in Christ can the human mystery take on light (a. 22). He entered the world's history as a perfect human, taking that history up into himself and summarizing it (a. 38).



# Humanae Vitae: A Challenge to Love

Overview by Janet E. Smith, PhD

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## I. Introduction

The amount of hostility directed at *Humanae Vitae* has been so great that most people are astonished when they first learn that contraception has not been a hotly debated issue since the very beginnings of the Church. All Christian churches were united in their opposition to contraception until as recently as the early decades of this century. It was not until 1930 that the Anglican Church went on record as saying that contraception was permissible, for grave reasons, within marriage. It was also at this time, however, that Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical *Casti Connubii*, generally translated "On Christian Marriage," in which the Holy Father reiterated what has been the constant teaching of the Catholic Church: contraception is intrinsically wrong.

One might assume that there has been a continuing dispute since the 1930s, but there has not been. Surveys of this period indicate that as many as 65% of Catholics in the US were living in accord with the Church's teaching, as late as the early sixties. A book entitled *Contraception*, written by John Noonan, provides a comprehensive history of the Church's teaching against contraception. It clearly documents that the Church has been "clear and constant" in its position on contraception, throughout the whole history of the Church.

The first clamoring for change appeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the widespread availability of the birth control pill. Some Catholic theologians began to think that the pill might be a legitimate form of birth control for Catholics because, unlike other kinds of birth control, it did not break the integrity of the sexual act. This was the very first attempt within the Church to argue that contraception might be morally permissible. Meanwhile, in the political and social realms, there were perceptions of a population problem and growing sentiments that it would be inhumane for the Church to continue with a "policy" that promoted large families. Feminism had also begun to make itself felt with its demand that women be given full and equal access to employment and the political process. Feminists argued that having children had been a hindrance to such opportunities in the past, and that contraception – not having children – would enhance access to careers and thus be a great boon for women. These were the developing pressures on the Church to reconsider its teaching regarding contraception.

Pope John XXIII set up a commission of six theologians to advise him on these issues. Pope Paul VI took over the commission when John XXIII died and began adding new members with expertise from different fields, including married couples. The majority of the commission voted that the Church should change its teaching. A minority on the commission argued that the Church not only should not but could not change its teaching regarding contraception because this was a matter of God's law and not man's law, and there was no way that the Church or anyone else could declare it morally permissible. The report of this vote and its recommendation, as well as all of the other records of the commission were, of course, to be kept strictly confidential, intended for the eyes of the Holy Father alone. They were meant to advise and assist him in the writing of a formal document. The commission finished its work in 1966. In 1967, the commission's records, including the report on its recommendation, were leaked to both *The Tablet* in London and to *The National Catholic Reporter* in the United States.

Interested parties had known about the commission and had been waiting for several years for the Church to make a decision. There had been an incredible proliferation of articles on the subject of contraception between 1963 and 1967, most of them favoring it. For instance, there was a book

written by an Archbishop during these years under the title *Contraception and Holiness*, a text consisting of articles by married couples and others promoting the practice of contraception. The commission reports were undoubtedly leaked to fan these fires and they did, in fact, heighten the expectations of those desiring a change.

## **II. Dissent Greets *Humanae Vitae***

When *Humanae Vitae* was released in July, 1968, it went off like a bomb. Though there was much support for the encyclical, no document ever met with as much dissent, led to a great extent by Father Charles Curran and Father Bernard Haering.

It was a historic and pivotal moment in Church history. Dissent became the coin of the day. This had not been true prior to *Humanae Vitae*. Dissenting theologians had never before made such a public display of their opposition on any given issue. The open dissent to *Humanae Vitae* is a real watershed in the history of the Church. One can view the phenomenon as either a crystallization of something that had been bubbling under the surface for some time, or as catalyst for everything that was yet to come. Soon theologians and eventually lay people were dissenting not only about contraception but also about homosexuality, masturbation, adultery, divorce and many other issues.

In spite of the dissent and in spite of widespread use of contraception among Catholics, the Church continually reiterates its opposition to contraception as a great moral wrong; Pope John Paul II has made opposition to contraception one of the cornerstones of his pontificate and has written and spoken extensively on the topic.

## **III. Social Consequences of Contraception**

I think the experience of the last many decades has revealed that the Church has been very wise in its continual affirmation of this teaching for we have begun to see that contraception leads to many vicious wrongs in society; it facilitates the sexual revolution which leads to much unwanted pregnancy and abortion. It has made women much more open to sexual exploitation by men. In fact, *Humanae Vitae* predicted a general lowering of morality should contraception become widely available, and I think it is manifest that ours is a period of very low morality – much of it in the sexual realm. There is little need here to provide a full set of statistics to demonstrate the consequences of the sexual revolution, for who is not familiar with the epidemic in teenage pregnancies, venereal diseases, divorces, AIDS, etc.?

Western society has undergone a rapid transformation in terms of sexual behavior and few would argue that it is for the better. For instance, only ten years ago the divorce rate was one out of three marriages; now one out of two marriages end in divorce. Only ten years ago four out of ten teenagers were sexually active; now it is six out of ten.

Twenty-two percent of white babies are born out of wedlock; sixty-seven percent of African-American babies are born out of wedlock. The millions of abortions over the last decade and the phenomenal spread of AIDS alone indicate that we have serious problems with sexuality. The statistics of ten years ago were bad enough; many thought things could hardly get worse – as did many twenty years ago, and thirty years ago. In the last generation the incidence of sexual activity outside of marriage and all the attendant problems have doubled and tripled – or worse. We have no particular reason to believe that we have seen the peak of the growth in sexually related problems.

## **IV. Marriage**

Statistics do not really capture the pervasive ills attendant upon sexual immorality. Premature and promiscuous sexuality prevent many from establishing good marriages and a good family life. Few

deny that a healthy sexuality and a strong family life are among the most necessary elements for human happiness and well-being. It is well attested that strong and secure families are less likely to have problems with alcohol, sex, and drugs; they produce individuals more likely to be free from crippling neuroses and psychoses. Since healthy individuals are not preoccupied with their own problems, they are able to be strong leaders; they are prepared to tackle the problems of society. While many single parents do a worthy and valiant job of raising their children, it remains sadly true that children from broken homes grow up to be adults with a greater propensity for crime, with a greater tendency to engage in alcohol and drug abuse, with a greater susceptibility to psychological disorders.

## **V. Deepen Understanding of Marriage and Sexuality**

The Church, however, does not condemn the use of contraception because it is an act that has bad consequences. Rather, it teaches that since contraception is an intrinsically evil action, it is predictable that it will have bad consequences. The Church teaches that contraception is evil because it violates the very purpose and nature of the human sexual act, and therefore violates the dignity of the human person. The experience of the last several decades has simply served to reinforce the wisdom of the Church's teaching. But it is not only on a practical level that we have a better understanding of the Church's teaching; our theoretical understanding has also been much advanced. Often it happens that the Church does not know very fully the reasons for what it teaches until it is challenged. The Church's condemnation of contraception went unchallenged for centuries. In attempting to explain its condemnation, the Church has deepened its understanding of marriage and the meaning of the sexual act. Again, John Paul II, with his claim that the sexual act signifies total self-giving and his insight that contraception diminishes that self-giving, has made an enormous contribution to our understanding of the evil of contraception.

## **VI. Church Statements on the Evil of Contraception**

As we consider the reasons why contraception is evil, let us first consult a few Church statements that suggest the strength of its constant teaching against contraception. *Casti Connubii* states:

No reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose, sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.

It continues:

Any use whatsoever of matrimony, exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin.

*Humanae Vitae* 11 puts it this way:

But the Church, which interprets natural law through its unchanging doctrine, reminds men and women that the teachings based on natural law must be obeyed, and teaches that it is necessary that each and every conjugal act remain ordained to the procreating of human life.

Further on it states (*HV* 12):

The doctrine which the Magisterium of the Church has often explicated in this: There is an unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the conjugal

act, and both are inherent in the conjugal act. This connection was established by God and cannot be broken by man through his own volition.

## **VII. The Gift of Life**

The Church condemns contraception since it violates both the procreative and unitive meanings of the human sexual act. It diminishes an act that by its very nature is full of weighty meaning, meaning that is unique to the sexual act. To engage in an act of contracepted sexual intercourse is to engage in an act that has the potential for creating new life and an act that has the potential for creating tremendous emotional bonds between male and female and simultaneously to undercut those potentials. Sex is for babies and for bonding; if people are not ready for babies or bonding they ought not to be engaging in acts of sexual intercourse.

Our age is quick to express appreciation for the unitive meaning of the sexual act but has little understanding of the goodness of the procreative meaning of the sexual act. The modern age tends to treat babies as burdens and not as gifts. It tends to treat fertility as some dreadful condition that we need to guard against. We often speak of the "fear of pregnancy" – a very curious phrase. A fear of poverty or nuclear holocaust or tyranny is understandable but why a fear of pregnancy? We speak about "accidental pregnancies" as if getting pregnant were like getting hit by a car – some terrible accident has happened to us. But the truth is that if a pregnancy results from an act of sexual intercourse, this means that something has gone right with an act of sexual intercourse, not that something has gone wrong.

In our society we have lost sight of the fundamental truth that if you are not ready for babies, you are not ready for sexual intercourse. We have lost sight of the fact that sexual intercourse, making love, and making babies are inherently connected and for good reason. In our times, sexual relations are treated casually; no great commitment is implied in having sexual intercourse with another; babies are treated as an unwelcome intrusion on the sexual act. The Church opposes this attitude and insists that sexual intercourse and having children are intimately connected; that sexual intercourse implies a great commitment, that children are an inherent part of that commitment, and that both commitment and children are wonderful gifts.

## **VIII. The Negativity of Contraception**

It is good to keep in mind that fertility is a great good: to be fertile is a state of health for an adult person. It is those among us who are not fertile who need to be helped and who seek treatment for infertility. Women now take a "pill" to thwart their fertility, as if fertility were a disease against which we need a cure. Contraception treats the woman's body as if there were something wrong with it. The use of contraception suggests that God made a mistake in the way that He designed the body and that we must correct His error. In an age where we have become very wary of dumping pollutants into the environment it is ironic that we are so willing to dump pollutants into our bodies. The health risks of contraception to women are considerable – take a look at the insert pages in any package of the pill. The IUD is currently off the market because of so many lawsuits against manufacturers. Why do women expose themselves to such risks when natural methods of family planning are both safe and effective?

Let us not fail to mention that many forms of contraception are abortifacients; they work by causing an early term abortion. Rather than inhibiting ovulation, they work by preventing the fertilized egg, the tiny new human being, from implanting in the wall of the uterus. The IUD works in this fashion as do most forms of the pill (on occasion) and norplant. So those who are opposed to abortion and those

interested in protecting the well-being of women would certainly not want to be using these forms of contraception. The other forms have aesthetic drawbacks or are low on reliability.

Contraception, then, enters a note of tremendous negation into the act of sexual intercourse. But lovemaking should be a most wonderful act of affirmation, a tremendous "yes" to another person, a way of conveying to another that he or she is wonderful, and completely accepted; this is conveyed by making a total gift of one's self to another. The contracepting lover says I want to give myself to you but not to the extent of sharing my fertility with you; I want you but not your sperm (or your egg)!

Just think of the words for contraception. Contraception means "against the beginning" – here against the beginning of a new life. So a contracepting couple is participating in an act that is designed to bring about new life and they are acting against that new life. Or they put their barrier methods in place – for "protection": as if they were making war, not love. Or they use a spermicide – to kill the sperm. This is an act of love?

## **IX. Spouses as Cocreators with God**

But we forget what a marvelous thing it is to be able to bring forth a new human being. God chooses to bring forth new human life through the love of spouses. The entire world was created for us and for others like us. God wishes to share His creation with new human souls, and He brings new souls into the world through the love of men and women for each other. God created the world as an act of love, and the bringing forth of new human life is, quite appropriately, the product of another kind of loving act. When a man and woman have a child together, it's an act that changes the cosmos: something has come into existence that will never pass out of existence; each soul is immortal and is destined for immortal life.

And whenever a new human life comes into existence, God performs an entirely new act of creation, for only God can create an immortal soul. In sexual intercourse, spouses provide God with an opportunity to perform His creative act. As the first line of *Humanae Vitae* states, God gives spouses the mission (*munus*) of transmitting human life to spouses. Contraception says no to God; it says those using it want to have the wonderful physical pleasure of sex but do not want to allow God to perform His creative act.

## **X. Contraception Violates the Unitive Meaning of Sexual Intercourse**

But contraception is wrong not only because it violates the procreative meaning of the sexual act but also because it violates the unitive meaning of the sexual act. Pope John Paul II has been most energetic in explaining how couples do not achieve true spousal union in sexual intercourse when they use contraception. He explains that the sexual act is meant to be an act of total self-giving and that in withholding their fertility from one another spouses are not giving totally of themselves. He has developed an interesting line of argument where he speaks of the "language of the body." He claims bodily actions have meanings much as words do and that unless we intend those meanings with our actions we should not perform them any more than we should speak words we don't mean. In both cases, lies are being "spoken."

Sexual union has a well-recognized meaning; it means "I find you attractive"; "I care for you"; "I will try to work for your happiness"; "I wish to have a deep bond with you." Some who engage in sexual intercourse do not mean these things with their actions; they wish simply to use another for their own sexual pleasure. They have lied with their bodies in the same way as someone lies who says "I love you" to another simply for the purposes of obtaining some favor from him or her.

It is easy for us to want to have sexual intercourse with lots of people; but we generally want to have babies with only one person. One is saying something entirely different with one's body when one

says "I want only to have sexual pleasure with you" and when one says "I am willing to be a parent with you." In fact, one of the most certain ways to distinguish simple sexual attraction from love is to think about whether all you want from another person is sexual pleasure, or whether you would like to have a baby with him or her. We generally are truly in love with those with whom we want to have babies; we do want our lives totally tied up with theirs. We want to become one with them in the way in which having a baby makes us one with another – our whole lives are intertwined with theirs; we buy diapers with them, and give birthday parties, and pay for college and plan weddings. A noncontracepted act of sexual intercourse says again just what our marriage vows say "I am yours for better or worse, in sickness and health, till death do us part." Having babies with another is to share a lifetime endeavor with another.

A sexual act open to the possibility of procreation ideally represents the kind of bond to which spouses have committed themselves. Contraceptives, however, convey the message that while sexual intercourse is desired, there is no desire for a permanent bond with the other person. The possibility of an everlasting bond has been willfully removed from the very act designed to best express the desire for such a relationship. It reduces the sexual act to a lie.

Contraception, then, is an offense against one's body, against one's God, and against one's relationship with one's spouse.

## **XI. Natural Methods of Family Planning**

But must spouses have as many children as is physically possible? This has never been the teaching of the Church. Spouses are expected to be responsible about their childbearing, to bring forth children that they can raise well. But the means used to limit family size must be moral. Methods of Natural Family Planning are very effective means and moral means for planning one's family; for helping spouses to get pregnant when they want to have a child and for helping them to avoid having a child when it would not be responsible to have a child. NFP allows couples to respect their bodies, obey their God, and fully respect their spouses.

Natural Family Planning is not the outmoded rhythm method, a method which was based on the calendar. Rather, NFP is a highly scientific way of determining when a woman is fertile based on observing various bodily signs. The couple who want to avoid a pregnancy, abstain from sexual intercourse during the fertile period. The statistics on the reliability of NFP rival the most effective forms of the Pill. And NFP is without the health risks and it is moral.

Couples using NFP find that it has positive results for their marital relationships and their relationship with God. When couples are abstaining during the fertile period they are not thwarting the act of sexual intercourse since they are not engaging in sexual intercourse. When they are engaging in sexual intercourse during the infertile period they are not withholding their fertility since they do not have it to give at that time. They learn to live in accord with the natural rhythms of their body. In a word, use of NFP may involve non-procreative acts, but never, as with contraception, antiprocreative acts.

Many find it odd that periodic abstinence should be beneficial rather than harmful to a marriage. But abstinence can be another way of expressing love, as it is between those who are not married, or between those for whom engaging in sexual intercourse involves a significant risk. Certainly most who begin to use NFP, especially those who were not chaste before marriage and who have used contraception, generally find the abstinence required to be a source of some strain and irritability. Abstinence, of course, like dieting or any form of self-restraint, brings its hardships; but like dieting and other forms of self-denial, it also brings its benefits. And after all, spouses abstain for all sorts of reasons – because one or the other is out of town or ill, for instance.

Spouses using NFP find that the method helps them learn to communicate better with each other – and abstinence gives them the opportunity to do so. As they learn to communicate their affection in non-genital ways and as they learn to master their sexual desires, they find a new liberation in the ability to abstain from sexual intercourse. Many find that an element of romance reenters the relationship during the times of abstinence and an element of excitement accompanies the reuniting. They have gained the virtue of self-mastery since now they can control their sexual desires rather than being controlled by their sexual desires.

Women using NFP generally feel revered by their husbands since their husbands do not make them use unhealthy and unpleasant contraceptives. Men using NFP generally have greater self-respect since they have gained control over their sexual desires and can now engage in sexual intercourse as an act of love not as an act of mere sexual urgency. A proof that NFP is good for a marriage is that whereas in the U.S. over fifty percent of marriages end in divorce (and it is safe to assume that most of these couples are contracepting), very, very few couples who use NFP ever divorce; they seem to bond in a deeper way than those who are contracepting.

## **XII. Conclusion**

The Church condemns contraception not because it wants to deny spouses sexual pleasure but because it wants to help them find marital happiness and to help them have happy homes for without these our well being as individuals and as a society is greatly endangered. Section 18 of *Humanae Vitae* states:

. . .it is not surprising that the Church finds herself a *sign of contradiction* – just as was Christ, her Founder. But this is not reason for the Church to abandon the duty entrusted to her of preaching the moral law firmly and humbly, both the natural law and the law of the Gospel.

Since the Church did not make either of these laws, she cannot change them. She can only be their guardian and interpreter; thus it would never be right for her to declare as morally permissible that which is truly not so. For what is immoral is by its very nature always opposed to the true good of Man.

By preserving the whole moral law of marriage, the Church knows that she is supporting the growth of a true civilization among men.

In teaching that contraception is intrinsically immoral, the Church is not imposing a disciplinary law on Catholics; she is preaching only what nature and the gospel preach. By now we should have learned – the hard way – that to defy and overindulge our sexual nature, to go against the laws of nature and God, is to inflict terrible damage on ourselves as individuals and our society as a whole.

# FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO – “THE FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD”

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION – NOVEMBER 22, 1981

## SUMMARY

### *PART ONE - BRIGHT SPOTS AND SHADOWS FOR THE FAMILY TODAY*

Marriage and family life touch the human person in the realities of daily existence. The Church is called to be a prudent observer of the challenges and opportunities which face today's family. In order to accomplish this mission, the Church must listen to the questions and concerns of married couples. In responding to the needs of young married couples and families, the Church must offer the truth of the Gospel as a source of inexhaustible grace rather than follow majority opinion. This truth is urgently needed today because of the challenges faced by families: divorce, abortion, sterilization, contraception, the decay of parental authority, and a general weakening of the marriage bond between husband and wife. The spiritual and moral renewal of marital and family life brings about a much-needed elevation of society in general.

### *PART TWO - THE PLAN OF GOD FOR MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY*

The human person was created by God out of love, and each is called to love within his or her vocation. Love is the calling of each person. Marriage and family life are special opportunities to live the vocation of love. The love between husband and wife mirrors the love between Christ and his Church - that is, this love is sacrificial and life - giving. A person's freedom, far from being restricted by this fidelity, is secured against every form of subjectivism or relativism and is made a sharer in creative Wisdom. Married life is enriched and becomes a family, with the gift of children. Virginity and celibacy do not deny the dignity of married and family life; rather, they highlight the call to love and the need to wait in patient hope for the Bridegroom - Jesus Christ.

### *PART THREE - THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY: BECOME WHAT YOU ARE*

The family is more than an economic, biological, and sociological entity. The family is part of God's plan for creation and salvation. It is within the family that the human person comes to be whom he or she is and comes to know the living God. Love within the family reveals in a special way the unbounded love of God. Family love involves four general callings: **forming a community of persons; sharing a love which serves life; participating in the development of society; and sharing in the life and mission of the Church\***. In being faithful to these four callings to love, the family is a living proclamation of the Gospel and the truth of Jesus Christ. The family, likewise, helps to morally renew the social order. To bear witness to the inestimable value of the indissolubility and fidelity of marriage is one of the most precious and most urgent tasks of Christian couples in our time.



## **PART FOUR - PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY**

The family is called to grow through a constant conversion to the will of God. Such a process of conversion challenges the Church to be a pastoral Church. That is, the Church is called to care, in the name of Jesus, for married couples and for families. The Church must encourage and support those preparing for marriage and those who daily accept the challenges to be faithful to their marital vows. Those who find themselves in difficult marital and family situations (mixed marriages, trial marriages, divorce, separation, and domestic violence) are in need of special pastoral care by the Church. Pastoral ministry to those in difficult situations flows from the words and example of Jesus to love and be close to the broken-hearted, rejected, and suffering.

## **CONCLUSION**

The encyclical ends on a highly personal note from John Paul II to married couples and families throughout the world. In this time of trial and grace, the Pope pledges the full ministry of the Church in service of marriage and family life. In conclusion, the model of true marriage and family life is the Holy Family: St. Joseph is the upright guardian of the family; Mary is the one entrusted with the Word made flesh; and Jesus is the child who perfectly does the will of the Father. The Pope prays that each Family will be a holy family to the glory of God.

## **INFORMATION ON THE FOUR GENERAL CALLINGS OF THE FAMILY**

### ***FORMING A COMMUNITY OF PERSONS***

- Love is the center of a community – without love a community does not exist.
- The most urgent task for the husband and wife in the family is to bear witness to the great value of fidelity in marriage. The love between the spouses is the foundation of the family.
- The spouses have the obligation to serve each other and care for and love their children.
- Children contribute to their family by the love, respect and obedience shown to their parents.
- Parents have authority over their children which they cannot give up.
- The rights and roles of women must be given special attention.
- Women are capable of being more than wives and mothers. Yet, the roles of wife and mother should never be dishonored or viewed as less important than roles found outside the home.
- Women have equal dignity with men. They are to always be seen as persons to love rather than objects of pleasure.
- Husbands are called to have a profound respect for their wives' equal dignity.
- Husbands are called to be involved in their family – absence of the father is a detriment to the family.
- Both parents have an equal share in the education of their family.
- Within the family, children have the right to be loved from the moment of conception.

## ***SERVING LIFE***

- Spouses are to give themselves totally to each other in the conjugal act by honoring God's inseparable union of love and life. The love between husband and wife must be fully human, exclusive and open to new life.
- Serving life includes recognition that contraception and natural methods of family planning are very different. Natural methods invite spouses into dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and mutual self-control.
- Spouses are called to be generous to life.
- Husbands and wives are the first and foremost educators of their children. Parents must recognize that they are the first and foremost educators for their children. Their role is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it.
- Parents are to create a family atmosphere that is animated with love and reverence for God and others.
- Parents are to teach their children to live a simple lifestyle and recognize that material goods are not as important as people.
- It is the parents' privilege and duty to share the details of sex education with their children in such a way that sex is viewed as an enrichment of the whole person and an opportunity to give oneself in a gift of love.
- Parents are to work cooperatively with Christian and public institutions, maintaining a cordial and active relationship with teachers and school authorities. Those in society who are in charge of schools must never forget that the parents have been appointed by God Himself as the first and principal educators of their children and that their right is completely inalienable.
- Serving life also includes caring for those outside the immediate family who are society's outcasts.

## ***PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY***

- The family is the first and vital cell of society.
- Humanity passes by way of the family.
- This begins in the family by teaching all to give service to others.
- The family is to aid the poor and others in need.
- Families need to monitor their government to ensure that political intervention works to instill laws that support and defend family rights.
- The Church strongly defends these rights of the family
  - the right to exist and progress as a family, that is to say, the right of every human being, even if he or she is poor, to found a family and to have adequate means to support it;
  - the right to exercise its responsibility regarding the transmission of life and to educate children; family life;
  - the right to the intimacy of conjugal and family life; the right to the stability of the bond and of the institution of marriage;
  - the right to believe in and profess one's faith and to propagate it;
  - the right to bring up children in accordance with the family's own traditions and religious and

cultural values, with the necessary instruments, means and institutions;

- the right, especially of the poor and the sick, to obtain physical, social, political and economic security;
- the right to housing suitable for living family life in a proper way;
- the right to expression and to representation, either directly or through associations, before the economic, social and cultural public authorities and lower authorities;
- the right to form associations with other families and institutions, in order to fulfill the family's role suitably and expeditiously;
- the right to protect minors by adequate institutions and legislation from harmful drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.;
- the right to wholesome recreation of a kind that also fosters family values;
- the right of the elderly to a worthy life and a worthy death;
- the right to emigrate as a family in search of a better life.

### ***SHARING IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH***

- Families are called to be believing and evangelizing communities.
- Families are called to become communities in dialogue with God.
- Families are to become communities in service of people.
- The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in education their children to pray.
- While certain forms of prayer are expressly encouraged, veneration to the Blessed Virgin Mary – especially through the recitation of the family rosary – is strongly recommended.

# Donum Vitae

## Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its origin and on the Dignity of Procreation Summary

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### FOREWARD

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith has been approached by various Episcopal conferences or individual bishops, by theologians, doctors and scientists, concerning biomedical techniques which make it possible to intervene in the initial phase of the life of a human being and in the very processes of procreation, and their conformity with the principles of Catholic morality. The present instruction, which is the result of wide consultation and in particular of a careful evaluation of the declarations made by episcopates, does not intend to repeat all the Church's teaching on the dignity of human life as it originates and on procreation, but to offer, in the light of the previous teaching of the magisterium, some specific replies to the main questions being asked in this regard.

### Teachings of the Magesterium

Human procreation requires on the part of the spouses responsible collaboration with the fruitful love of God: the gift of human life must be actualized in marriage through the specific and exclusive acts of husband and wife, in accordance with the laws inscribed in their persons and in their union.

### Respect for Human Embryos

The human being must be respected as a person from the very first instant of his existence. From the moment of the union of sperm and egg the DNA pattern is established and there is no longer the father or the mother but new life.

### Prenatal Diagnosis

If prenatal diagnosis respects the life and integrity of the embryo and the human fetus and is directed towards its safeguarding or healing as an individual, then the answer is affirmative. But in a case where the fetus is found to be with disability the decision to discontinue the pregnancy would be morally wrong.

### Techniques and procedures connected to the 'techniques of human reproduction'

- Techniques of human reproduction procedures are contrary to the human dignity proper to the embryo, and at the same time they are contrary to the right of every person to be conceived and to be born within marriage and from marriage. Also, attempts or hypotheses for obtaining a human being without any connection with sexuality through "twin fission" cloning or parthenogenesis are to be considered contrary to the moral law, since they are in opposition to the dignity both of human procreation and of the conjugal union.
- In vitro fertilization – eggs are withdrawn from the female, fertilized, 'selective reduction' and then transferred into the genital tracts of the woman.
- *Heterologous* artificial fertilization - Human conception is achieved through the fusion of gametes of at least one donor other than the spouses who are united in marriage. This is **contrary** to the unity of marriage to the dignity of the spouses to the vocation proper to parents, and to the child's right to be conceived and brought into the world in marriage and from marriage.

- Conception *in vitro* is the result of the technical action which presides over fertilization. *Such fertilization is neither in fact achieved nor positively willed as the expression and fruit of a specific act of the conjugal union. In homologous IVF and ET, therefore, even if it is considered in the context of de facto existing sexual relations, the generation of the human person is objectively deprived of its proper perfection: namely, that of being the result and fruit of a conjugal act in which the spouses can become "cooperators with God for giving life to a new person."*<sup>50</sup>
- *Homologous* artificial fertilization – In this case conception is between husband and wife although through technical action outside the conjugal act. Thus moral conscience "does not necessarily proscribe the use of certain artificial means destined solely either to the facilitating of the natural act or to ensuring that the natural act normally performed achieves its proper end."<sup>53</sup> If the technical means facilitates the conjugal act or helps it to reach its natural objectives, it can be morally acceptable. If, on the other hand, the procedure were to replace the conjugal act, it is morally illicit.
- Criteria: medical act should be at the service of conjugal union

***If the technical means facilitates the conjugal act or helps it to reach its natural objectives, it can be morally acceptable. If, on the other hand, the procedure were to replace the conjugal act, it is morally illicit.***

# EVANGELIUM VITAE

## The Vatican's Summary

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From its very title, *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), the new encyclical of Pope John Paul II demonstrates its highly positive character and its great spiritual thrust. While realistically countering unprecedented threats to life and the spread of a "culture of death," the primary intention of the papal document is to proclaim the good news of the value and dignity of each human life, of its grandeur and worth, also in its temporal phase. The cause of life is in fact at the same time the cause of the Gospel and the cause of man, the cause entrusted to the church.

The encyclical is presented with great doctrinal authority: It is not only an expression, like every other encyclical, of the ordinary magisterium of the pope, but also of the episcopal collegiality which was manifested first in the extraordinary consistory of cardinals in April 1991 and subsequently in a consultation of all the bishops of the Catholic Church, who unanimously and firmly agree with the teaching imparted in it (No. 5). This teaching is in substance "a precise and vigorous reaffirmation of the value of human life and its inviolability," and also "a pressing appeal addressed to each and every person in the name of God: Respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness" (No. 5).

### **1. Present-day Threats to Human Life**

The first chapter of the papal document is devoted to an analysis of the lights and the shadows of the present-day situation with regard to human life.

First there is a denunciation of the proliferation and increased intensity of threats to life, especially when life is weak and defenseless at its very beginning and at its end: abortion, immoral experimentation on human embryos, euthanasia. There is a clear description of the unprecedented and specific features of these crimes against life: At the level of public opinion they are claimed to be rights based on individual freedom; there is a trend toward their recognition in law; they are carried out with the help of medical science. This involves a distortion of society's nature and purpose and of the constitutional state itself: Democracy, if detached from its moral foundations and linked to an unlimited ethical relativism, risks becoming the pretext for a war of the stronger against the weaker; the roles of health care personnel tend to be subverted: Instead of respectful service of life, they lend themselves to actions which bring about death.

The causes of this "culture of death" which threatens man and civilization are traced by the Holy Father to a perverse idea of freedom, which is seen as disconnected from any reference to truth and objective good, and which asserts itself in an individualistic way, without the constitutive link of relationships with others. Associated with this is a practical materialism which gives priority to having over being, the satisfaction of personal pleasure over respect for those who are weak, and which ends by considering life worthwhile only to the extent that it is productive and enjoyable; suffering is considered useless, sacrifice for the sake of others unjustified. Underlying all this is a loss of the sense of God. But "when the sense of God is lost, there is also a tendency to lose the sense of man" (No. 21).

These threats are interpreted by the pope in the context of that perennial conflict between life and death which emerged at the very beginning of human history and which sacred Scripture testifies to in the events of Cain, who because of envy "rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (Gn. 4:8); of the ancient pharaoh who, viewing as a threat the increasing numbers of the children of

Israel, ordered that every newborn male of the Hebrew women should be put to death; of Herod who, out of fear for his throne, "sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem" (Mt. 2:16); and finally of the apocalyptic conflict in which "the dragon stood before the woman ...that he might devour her child when she brought it forth" (Rv. 12:4). Human life, especially when weak and defenseless, has always been threatened by the forces of evil.

Although the blood of Abel and of all innocent victims of violence cries out to God, the precious blood of Christ, the sign of his self-gift (Jn. 13:1), "speaks more eloquently" (Heb. 12:24). It reveals the value of human life in the eyes of God, who for the sake of life gave his only Son, "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). This is the basis of the absolute certainty that, according to God's plan, the victory will belong to life. In fact there are already signs of this victory, signs of hope, sometimes more hidden, less obtrusive, but significant: families which freely accept abandoned children and older people; volunteer work in the service of life; movements and programs of social consciousness raising in support of life; generous and respectful involvement in the medical profession and in scientific research; sensitivity to bioethical questions and ecology; a growing aversion to the death penalty. Above all, the daily gestures of welcome, sacrifice and selfless concern shown to the "little ones" and to the most needy are spreading around the world "the civilization of life and of love." In this dramatic conflict, which has lasted throughout history and is taking on new characteristics in our time, God's call is heard clearly and powerfully: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil.... Therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live" (Dt. 30:15, 19).

## **2. Life as Gift**

The second chapter is in the form of a meditation on the Christian message regarding life. In fact, "the Gospel of life is something concrete and personal, for it consists in the proclamation of the very person of Jesus" (No. 29). As St. Paul says, it was "our Savior Christ Jesus who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." (2 Tm. 1:10).

The light of revelation, which reaches its fullness in Jesus Christ, confirms and completes all that human reason can grasp concerning the value of human life. Precious and fragile, full of promises and threatened by suffering and death, man's life on earth bears within itself that seed of immortal life planted by the Creator in the human heart (cf. No. 31). That life is the object of God's tender and intense love, especially in the poor, the weak and the defenseless: "Truly great must be the value of human life if the Son of God has taken it up and made it the instrument of the salvation of humanity!" (No. 33). At this point we come to the decisive question, Why is life a good? Why is it always a good? The answer is simple and clear: because it is a gift from the Creator, who breathed into man the divine breath, thus making the human person the image of God. While sin darkens life by threatening it with death and throwing into doubt its nature as a gift, redemption, achieved in the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, redeems its worth, lifting it up to unheard-of heights in the prospect of the gift of eternal life. Gratuitously the Father calls each individual, in his Son, to partake of the fullness of divine life by becoming "sons and daughters in the Son." The sublime dignity of human life thus shines forth not only in the light of its origin, but even more so in the light of its destiny.

Earthly life, which is at once both relativized and given new value, opens up to the prospect of eternal life. It is not an absolute value in itself: It is entrusted to man as a beginning to be made fruitful for eternity as a first gift which will reach its fullness if, after the example of Christ and with his power, it succeeds in becoming a gift of love of God and of others. This is the truest and most profound meaning of life: The gift is accomplished in self-giving. "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it" (Mk. 8:35). The martyrs freely gave their lives out of love, showing that our earthly existence is not something

absolute to which we should cling at all costs. "No one, however, can arbitrarily choose whether to live or die; the absolute master of such a decision is the Creator alone, in whom 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28)" (No. 47).

### **3. Life as Responsibility**

As a precious and fragile gift which is meant to bear fruits of love, life is entrusted to man's responsibility. From its very beginning until its natural end, life is sacred and inviolable: It belongs to the Lord, it is under his special protection and individuals cannot dispose of it at their own whim. "From man in regard to his fellowman (the Lord) will demand an accounting for human life" (Gn. 9:5). This original truth, testified to by all of humanity's great religious and philosophical traditions, his truth which lies in the depths of every individual's conscience like an echo of the voice of the Creator, is also at the center of the covenant between God and the people of Israel. The commandment "you shall not kill," which expresses it in the form of a concise command, is at the heart of the Ten Commandments given at Sinai (cf. Ex. 34:28). In the New Testament, Jesus not only repeated this commandment as the first to be kept in order to enter into life (cf. Mt. 19:16- 18), but also showed its positive implications (cf. Mt. 5:21ff), which involve the heart and which extend to everyone, to the point of loving even one's enemies (cf. Mt. 5:44). Thus, "only when people are open to the fullness of the truth about God, man and history will the words 'you shall not kill' shine forth once more as a good for man in himself and in his relations with others" (No. 48).

It is this commandment not to kill, in the light of the Gospel of life, that the third chapter of the encyclical seeks to put forward once more, applying it to the unprecedented situations in which life is being threatened today. The pope wishes to reaffirm the absolute and permanent value of the commandment not to kill which is at the heart of God's covenant with man. He shows that the commandment is not a limit but a gift, which invites freedom to follow the paths of respect, service and love of life. The negative formulation of the moral imperative indicates the outer limit which can never be crossed, but implicitly it encourages a positive and constructive attitude, one of commitment in favor of man.

After recalling certain traditional moral distinctions concerning the legitimacy of self- defense against an unjust aggressor and concerning capital punishment, of which morally justifiable applications today are said to be "very rare, if not practically nonexistent" (No. 56), the papal document proposes certain moral truths in relation to respect for human life.

In the first place it declares "the direct and voluntary taking of all innocent human life" as "always gravely immoral" (No. 57). This principle is then applied to abortion and euthanasia. Regarding procured abortion (defined as "the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth" [No. 58]), the encyclical affirms that "direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder" (No. 62). This moral judgment is also to be applied to forms of intervention on human embryos which, although carried out for purposes legitimate in themselves, inevitably involve the killing of those embryos, either in experimentation or their use and the use of human fetuses as "biological material" or as providers of organs or tissue for transplants (cf. No. 63). Euthanasia, which is defined as "an act or omission which of itself and by intention causes death with the purpose of eliminating all suffering," and is carefully distinguished from so-called "aggressive medical treatment" and from "methods of palliative care," is called "a grave violation of the law of God" (No. 65).

Here we are speaking of doctrinal affirmations of very high magisterial authority, presented with particular solemnity by the supreme pontiff. Exercising his own magisterial authority as the successor of Peter, in communion with the bishops of the Catholic Church, he "confirms" (or also, in the case of abortion, "declares") a doctrine "based upon the natural law and upon the written word of



God," "transmitted by the church's tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal magisterium." In this connection, in the case of each of the three doctrinal formulations there is a significant reference in a note to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, which in Paragraph 25 declares that the bishops, "even though dispersed throughout the world, but preserving for all that among themselves and with Peter's successor the bond of communion," when "in their authoritative teaching concerning matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement that a particular teaching is to be held definitively," "proclaim infallibly the doctrine of Christ."

Pope John Paul II does not fail to mention the tragic circumstances and the pressures from the family, the living conditions and social environment which sometimes mark those very serious choices against life and thereby diminish the moral responsibility of the person making them. These choices are sometimes also cloaked with specious justifications and "false mercy," while choices in favor of life sometimes appear not only difficult but even heroic. It is for this reason that the pope is urging a proclamation of the Gospel concerning life, its sacred value and inviolability, the duty to respect and care for it, and its value even in suffering and in the face of death.

The relationship between civil law and the moral law is next examined. Indeed, "one of the characteristics of present-day attacks on human life ... consists in the trend to demand a legal justification for them" (No. 68). The encyclical recognizes that the task of civil law is different and more limited than that of the moral law. Civil law cannot take the place of conscience or dictate moral norms, but it has the specific role of "ensuring the common good of people through the recognition and defense of their fundamental rights, and the promotion of peace and of public morality" (No. 71). Therefore, although it sometimes has to choose not to put a stop to something which, were it prohibited, would cause more serious harm, it can never presume to legitimize, as the right of individuals, the offense inflicted on other persons through the disregarding of so fundamental a right as the right to life. In this sense, while taking different situations into account, civil law must safeguard the moral foundation of justice and of respect for everyone's inviolable and inalienable rights, without which the will of the stronger replaces the import of the rights of each individual. Democracy cannot be defined simply by reference to the formal principle of the majority, but must be characterized by a moral basis of respect for all and especially for the rights of the weakest and the most defenseless, those who have no voice and no vote.

The legal norms legitimizing abortion and euthanasia, which are radically opposed to justice, the common good and the fundamental rights of the individual, lack authentic juridical validity. In the face of these laws, the right to conscientious objection at least must be recognized, this being a serious obligation for the Christian, who cannot formally cooperate in evil. Consequently, there remains the commitment of everyone to promote more just legislation, which will change laws contrary to the right to life and its inviolability.

#### **4. Life as a Task to Be Promoted**

But the commandment "you shall not kill" establishes only the point of departure of a journey to true freedom, a journey which must lead to the active promotion of life, the development of attitudes and modes of behavior which serve life. It is to this positive and constructive prospect that the fourth and final chapter of the document of Pope John Paul II is devoted: "for a new culture of human life."

First of all, the pope points out that the "Gospel of life" is at the heart of the evangelizing mission of the church, which must proclaim Jesus, the "Word of life" (1 Jn. 1:1), the one in whom "the life was made manifest" (1 Jn. 1:2). The church, defined in a new and expressive way as "the people of life," has the task of proclaiming, celebrating and serving life.

Against doubts, skepticism, obscurity and falsehoods, it is a question of proclaiming in its entirety

the joyful message of the value of life; the commandment "you shall not kill" is also part of this message. Ever nourished by the word of God, the church has the primary task of ensuring that the Gospel of life reaches the heart of every man and woman, and that it finds its way into the hidden recesses of the whole of society.

She is called also to celebrate the gift of life, considering it with a contemplative and grateful spirit in the light of God's love made manifest in his Son Jesus. The sacraments of the church in an eminent manner, but also the many rituals of various popular and cultural traditions as well as those of everyday life must be means of experiencing joy for this gift, means which help to sustain people in moments of trial and by which their gaze is fixed on the Creator, from whom life comes and to whom it returns. The mission of the Christian and of the church on behalf of life is fulfilled through the service of charity because charity leads us "to show care for all life and for the life of everyone" (No. 87), with a profound attitude of solidarity in every condition and situation, without prejudice or discrimination. Mention is made of the extraordinary history of charity in the church, which introduced into society a host of organizations at the service of life. The Holy Father exhorts us to strengthen and continue today the numerous projects which have been undertaken in this regard, calling for creative innovation in responding adequately to new challenges. In the area of professional health care, volunteer services, education, social involvement and political commitment and in the face of complex demographic problems, it is a question of fostering mature attitudes and finding solutions which respect life.

In particular, at the center of attention must be the family, the "sanctuary of life," in which life is welcomed, nourished, brought up and supported, and taken care of in sickness. However, the family needs to be helped by a social context which is favorable to these values and by policies which promote its primary and irreplaceable role.

It is a question, the pope affirms, of bringing about a true transformation of culture: the promotion of a "culture of life," in which human freedom will find its authentic meaning by joining forces with truth, life and love. This culture needs new lifestyles which will show respect for the dignity of every individual, especially the weakest, which will recognize the value of human sexuality in the development of the person, and which will accept the mysterious meaning of suffering and of death. A very special task is entrusted to women, who are particularly close to the mystery of life, who are called to be its guardians and to reveal its fruitfulness when that task matures into relationships marked by unselfish giving and willing service. These are the demands of a "new feminism," which, free from individualism, will favor the culture of life. The pope addresses particularly moving words to women who have had abortions. He invites them to be open to repentance, with humility and trust (cf. No. 99). Prayer and fasting, finally, are the great resources which will bring about the purification of all hearts in this great undertaking of proclaiming the Gospel of life on behalf of the whole of human society and for the sake of peace (No. 101).

This important magisterial document of Pope John Paul II closes with a trusting appeal to Mary, the "mother of life." Contemplating the scene in the Book of Revelation of the struggle between the woman who is about to give birth and the dragon which sets a snare for the life of the child, the pope invites us to recognize that throughout history "life is always at the center of a great struggle" (No. 104). But in the mutual relationship between the motherhood of Mary and her own motherhood toward all men and women, the church finds a source of great hope. Mary is the "living word of consolation" on history's difficult journey: To her, with filial confidence, the pope entrusts the cause of life.

# ***Lumen Fidei* - The Light of Faith**

## **Of The Supreme Pontiff Francis – June 29, 2013**

Outline of the document

Chapter 1 – We Have Believed in Love (cf. 1 John 4:16)

Chapter 2 – Unless You Believe, You Will Not Understand (cf. Isaiah 7:9)

Chapter 3 – I Delivered to You What I Also Received (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3)

Chapter 4 – God Prepares a City for Them (cf. Hebrews 11:16)

Summary of the introduction:

The encyclical starts with what the ancients put their faith in and proceeds to move directly to what our culture believes about faith – that it is something for the blind, those driven by emotion. But, at the same time, our culture is discovering that reason is not enough. Confusion has set in on what is good and evil, right and wrong. Faith in Jesus and love in Him gives us a new vision to see the world.

Summary of Chapter 1:

Chapter 1 reviews Salvation History—the story of God’s people—to see faith throughout history. It begins with Abraham who St. Paul often quotes and uses as an example in the New Testament. It is noted that God speaks and acts towards Abraham as one in a relationship, not as a god who is far away. Our faith in Him calls us to make a step forward—to go on a journey with Him, just like Abraham. In this journey, our relationships with God are not just about our faith in Him, but in His faith in us! We can jeopardize this relationship with idolatry. The story of Israel points to the temptation of idolatry—to worship that which we make with our own hands. Finally, the story of faith finds its summation in Jesus. He is the fulfillment of all of God’s promises and at the same time shows us why we can trust Him—He died for us! Because He came into our reality, we can now truly see reality. God is not something beyond us; He is someone who acts in the here and now.

Summary of Chapter 2:

Chapter 2 seeks to understand the relationship between faith and several other aspects—reason, love, truth, and theology. *Lumen Fidei* shows that truth is necessary for faith so that it can remain grounded. Faith is rooted in reality when it is rooted in truth. Similarly, our love for God has to have this truth as well or it be fleeting like emotions. Love is needed with faith so that truth does not become cold and impersonal.

Our culture often believes that truth that is meant for everyone is by its very nature like a dictator. But, truth for everyone can reveal a common good for everyone and when it is done in love it can be personalized to each individual.

In the end, truth in the Catholic faith possesses us; we do not possess truth. As we become more possessed by truth, we grow in humility and in the knowledge of the faith. By taking on knowledge and humility, we are more capable of sharing this truth with others who are seeking it. A truth that will truly fulfill what they are ultimately searching for.

Summary of Chapter 3:

Ultimately, faith and truth are received in community. The nature of our lives forces us to have faith in the truth others are giving us—from our names to our language. The same is for our Christian faith which is passed on from one generation to the next. We accept this faith in a community and in the communion of the Church.

Specially, the sacraments allow us to experience this faith. We are received into the community of the Church through Baptism and encounter the love and gift of Jesus in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, we experience the past gift that God has given us while seeing the future of our eternal home. In addition to the sacraments, the Our Father and the Decalogue gives us a new vision and a new path to live while united to our community. This community stays unified through the apostolic tradition and apostolic succession which safeguards truth and allows our faith to be handed on. Believers must believe in all of what the Church teaches or they endanger unity.

## Summary of Chapter 4

In this final chapter, *Lumen Fidei* shows how faith should be the foundation of our society. Faith is needed for the foundation of our society, marriage and family. In marriage, men and women have faith in a common good and a hope beyond themselves. In this faith and in this love, they provide a model of faith and a place with faith grows as children place their trust in their parents.

This foundation of family helps form our other relationships as well. Men and women cannot have true brotherhood without a common father. Faith in God provides this common faith so that our societies can endure. It also provides the dignity of the human person which is needed in our societies as well.

Faith also provides strength in suffering. Faith does not answer every question, but provides a lamp to help us navigate through the darkness and the presence of God who is with us personally in our suffering.

In the end, faith should provide us with joy. Just as Mary accepted Jesus with joy, we too should follow her example. The sign of our faith lives should be a joy in Jesus.

*(Ed. The following paragraphs are taken from the encyclical in order to share what Pope Francis has to say on Baptism)*

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### ***The sacraments and the transmission of faith***

40. The Church, like every family, passes on to her children the whole store of her memories. But how does this come about in a way that nothing is lost, but rather everything in the patrimony of faith comes to be more deeply understood? It is through the apostolic Tradition preserved in the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that we enjoy a living contact with the foundational memory. What was handed down by the apostles — as the Second Vatican Council states “comprises everything that serves to make the people of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes”. Cf. *De Baptismo*, 20, 5: CCL 1, 295.55.

Faith, in fact, needs a setting in which it can be witnessed to and communicated, a means which is suitable and proportionate to what is communicated. For transmitting a purely doctrinal content, an idea might suffice, or perhaps a book, or the repetition of a spoken message. But what is communicated in the Church, what is handed down in her living Tradition is the new light born of an encounter with the true God, a light which touches us at the core of our being and engages our minds, wills and emotions, opening us to relationships lived in communion.

There is a special means for passing down this fullness, a means capable of engaging the entire person, body and spirit, interior life and relationships with others. It is the sacraments, celebrated in the Church's liturgy. The sacraments communicate an incarnate memory, linked to the times and places of our lives, linked to all our senses; in them the whole person is engaged as a member of a living subject and part of a network of communitarian relationships. While the sacraments are indeed sacraments of faith, it can also be said that faith itself possesses a sacramental structure. The awakening of faith is linked to the dawning of a new sacramental sense in our lives as human beings and as Christians, in which visible and material realities are seen to point beyond themselves to the mystery of the eternal. (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum*, 8. 56)

41. The transmission of faith occurs first and foremost in baptism. Some might think that baptism is merely a way of symbolizing the confession of faith, a pedagogical tool for those who require images and signs, while in itself ultimately unnecessary. An observation of Saint Paul about baptism reminds us that this is not the case. Paul states that “we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (*Rom* 6:4). In baptism we become a new creation and God's adopted children. The Apostle goes on to say that Christians have been entrusted to “standard of teaching” (*týpos didachés*), which they now obey from the heart (cf. *Rom* 6:17). In baptism we receive both a teaching to be professed and a

specific way of life which demands the engagement of the whole person and sets us on the path to goodness. Those who are baptized are set in a new context, entrusted to a new environment, a new and shared way of acting, in the Church. Baptism makes us see, then, that faith is not the achievement of isolated individuals; it is not an act which someone can perform on his own, but rather something which must be received by entering into the ecclesial communion which transmits God's gift. No one baptizes himself, just as no one comes into the world by himself. Baptism is something we receive.

42. What are the elements of baptism which introduce us into this new "standard of teaching"?

First, the name of the Trinity — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit — is invoked upon the catechumen. Thus, from the outset, a synthesis of the journey of faith is provided. The God who called Abraham and wished to be called his God, the God who revealed his name to Moses, the God who, in giving us his Son, revealed fully the mystery of his Name, now bestows upon the baptized a new filial identity. This is clearly seen in the act of baptism itself: immersion in water. Water is at once a symbol of death, inviting us to pass through self-conversion to a new and greater identity, and a symbol of life, of a womb in which we are reborn by following Christ in his new life. In this way, through immersion in water, baptism speaks to us of the incarnational structure of faith. Christ's work penetrates the depths of our being and transforms us radically, making us adopted children of God and sharers in the divine nature. It thus modifies all our relationships, our place in this world and in the universe, and opens them to God's own life of communion. This change which takes place in baptism helps us to appreciate the singular importance of the catechumenate — whereby growing numbers of adults, even in societies with ancient Christian roots, now approach the sacrament of baptism — for the new evangelization. It is the road of preparation for baptism, for the transformation of our whole life in Christ. To appreciate this link between baptism and faith, we can recall a text of the prophet Isaiah, which was associated with baptism in early Christian literature: "Their refuge will be the fortresses of rocks... their water assured" (*Is 33:16*).<sup>37</sup> The baptized, rescued from the waters of death, were now set on a "fortress of rock" because they had found a firm and reliable foundation. The waters of death were thus transformed into waters of life. The Greek text, in speaking of that water which is "assured", uses the word *pistós*, "faithful". The waters of baptism are indeed faithful and trustworthy, for they flow with the power of Christ's love, the source of our assurance in the journey of life.

43. The structure of baptism, its form as a rebirth in which we receive a new name and a new life, helps us to appreciate the meaning and importance of infant baptism. Children are not capable of accepting the faith by a free act, nor are they yet able to profess that faith on their own; therefore the faith is professed by their parents and godparents in their name. Since faith is a reality lived within the community of the Church, part of a common "We", children can be supported by others, their parents and godparents, and welcomed into their faith, which is the faith of the Church; this is symbolized by the candle which the child's father lights from the paschal candle. The structure of baptism, then, demonstrates the critical importance of cooperation between Church and family in passing on the faith. Parents are called, as Saint Augustine once said, not only to bring children into the world but also to bring them to God, so that through baptism they can be reborn as children of God and receive the gift of faith. Thus, along with life, children are given a fundamental orientation and assured of a good future; this orientation will be further strengthened in the sacrament of Confirmation with the seal of the Holy Spirit.

44. The sacramental character of faith finds its highest expression in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a precious nourishment for faith: an encounter with Christ truly present in the act of his love, the life-giving gift of himself. In the Eucharist we find the intersection of faith's two dimensions. On the one hand, there is the dimension of history: the Eucharist is an act of remembrance, a making present of the mystery in which the past, as an event of death and resurrection, demonstrates its ability to open up a future, to foreshadow ultimate fulfillment. The liturgy reminds us of this by its repetition of the word *hodie*, the "today" of the mysteries of salvation. On the other hand, we also find the dimension which leads from the visible world to the invisible. In the Eucharist we learn to see the heights and depths of reality. The bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, who becomes present in his Passover to the Father: this movement draws us, body and soul, into the movement of all creation towards its fulfillment in God.

# ***Amoris Laetitia*: On Love in the Family**

**March 19, 2016**

**Summary from [Zenit](#)**

It is not by chance that *Amoris Laetitia* (AL), “The Joy of Love”, the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation “on Love in the Family”, was signed on 19 March, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph. It brings together the results of the two Synods on the family convoked by Pope Francis in 2014 and 2015. It often cites their *Final Reports*; documents and teachings of his Predecessors; and his own numerous catecheses on the family. In addition, as in previous magisterial documents, the Pope also makes use of the contributions of various Episcopal Conferences around the world (Kenya, Australia, Argentina...) and cites significant figures such as Martin Luther King and Erich Fromm. The Pope even quotes the film *Babette’s Feast* to illustrate the concept of gratuity.

## ***Introduction* (1-7)**

The Apostolic Exhortation is striking for its breadth and detail. Its 325 paragraphs are distributed over nine chapters. The seven *introductory paragraphs* plainly set out the complexity of a topic in urgent need of thorough study. The interventions of the Synod Fathers make up [form] a “multifaceted gem” (AL 4), a precious polyhedron, whose value must be preserved. But the Pope cautions that “not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium”. Indeed, for some questions, “each country or region ... can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For ‘cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle ... needs to be enculturated, if it is to be respected and applied’” (AL 3). This principle of enculturation applies to how problems are formulated and addressed and, apart from the dogmatic issues that have been well defined by the Church’s magisterium, none of this approach can be “globalized”. In his address at the end of the 2015 Synod, the Pope said very clearly: “What seems normal for a bishop on one continent, is considered strange and almost scandalous – almost! – for a bishop from another; what is considered a violation of a right in one society is an evident and inviolable rule in another; what for some is freedom of conscience is for others simply confusion.”

The Pope clearly states that we need above all to avoid a sterile juxtaposition between demands for change and the general application of abstract norms. He writes: “The debates carried on in the media, in certain publications and even among the Church’s ministers, range from an immoderate desire for total change without sufficient reflection or grounding, to an attitude that would solve everything by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations” (AL 2).

## ***Chapter One: “In the light of the Word”* (8-30)**

Following this introduction, the Pope begins his reflections with the Holy Scriptures in the *first chapter*, which unfolds as a meditation on Psalm 128 (which appears in the Jewish wedding liturgy as well as that of Christian marriages). The Bible “is full of families, births, love stories and family crises” (AL 8). This impels us to meditate on how the family is not an abstract ideal but rather like a practical “trade” (AL 16), which is carried out with tenderness (AL 28), but which has also been confronted with sin from the beginning, when the relationship of love turned into domination (cf. AL 19). Hence, the Word of God “is not a series of abstract ideas but rather a source of comfort and companionship for every family that experiences difficulties or suffering. For it shows them the goal of their journey...” (AL 22).

## **Chapter two: “The experiences and challenges of families” (31-57)**

Building on the biblical base, in the *second chapter* the Pope considers the current situation of families. While keeping “firmly grounded in [the] reality” of family experiences (AL 6), he also draws heavily on the final Reports of the two Synods. Families face many challenges, from migration to the ideological denial of differences between the sexes (“ideology of gender” AL 56); from the culture of the provisional to the anti-birth mentality and the impact of biotechnology in the field of procreation; from the lack of housing and work to pornography and abuse of minors; from inattention to persons with disabilities, to lack of respect for the elderly; from the legal dismantling of the family, to violence against women. The Pope insists on concreteness, which is a key concept in the Exhortation. And it is concreteness, realism and daily life that make up the substantial difference between acceptable “theories” of interpretation of reality and arbitrary “ideologies”.

Citing *Familiaris Consortio*, Francis states that “we do well to focus on concrete realities, since ‘the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history’, and through these ‘the Church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage and the family’” (AL 31). Conversely, if we fail to listen to reality, we cannot understand the needs of the present or the movements of the Spirit. The Pope notes that rampant individualism makes it difficult today for a person to give oneself generously to another (cf. AL 33). Here is an interesting picture of the situation: “The fear of loneliness and the desire for stability and fidelity exist side by side with a growing fear of entrapment in a relationship that could hamper the achievement of one’s personal goals” (AL 34).

The humility of realism helps us to avoid presenting “a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families” (AL 36). Idealism does not allow marriage to be understood for what it is, that is, a “dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment”. It is unrealistic to think that families can sustain themselves “simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace” (AL 37). Calling for a certain “self-criticism” of approaches that are inadequate for the experience of marriage and the family, the Pope stresses the need to make room for the formation of the conscience of the faithful: “We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (AL 37). Jesus proposed a demanding ideal but “never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery” (AL 38).

## **Chapter three: “Looking to Jesus: The vocation of the family” (58-88)**

The *third chapter* is dedicated to some essential elements of the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family. This chapter is important because its 30 paragraphs concisely depict the vocation of the family according to the Gospel and as affirmed by the Church over time. Above all, it stresses the themes of indissolubility, the sacramental nature of marriage, the transmission of life and the education of children. *Gaudium et Spes* of VaticanII, *Humanae Vitae* of PaulVI, and *Familiaris Consortio* of John Paul II are widely quoted.

The chapter provides a broad view and touches on “imperfect situations” as well. We can read, in fact: “‘Discernment of the presence of ‘seeds of the Word’ in other cultures (cf. *Ad Gentes* 11) can also apply to the reality of marriage and the family. In addition to true natural marriage, positive elements exist in the forms of marriage found in other religious traditions’, even if, at times, obscurely” (AL 77). The reflection also includes the “wounded families” about whom the Pope – quoting the *Final Report* of the 2015 Synod extensively

– says that “it is always necessary to recall this general principle: ‘Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations’ (*Familiaris Consortio*, 84). The degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases and factors may exist which limit the ability



to make a decision. Therefore, while clearly stating the Church's teaching, pastors are to avoid judgements that do not take into account the complexity of various situations, and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition" (AL 79).

#### **Chapter four: "Love in marriage" (89-164)**

The *fourth chapter* treats love in marriage, which it illuminates with Saint Paul's *Hymn to Love* in 1 *Corinthians* 13:4-7. This opening section is truly a painstaking, focused, inspired and poetic exegesis of the Pauline text. It is a collection of brief passages carefully and tenderly describing human love in absolutely concrete terms. The quality of psychological introspection that marks this exegesis is striking. The psychological insights enter into the emotional world of the spouses – positive and negative – and the erotic dimension of love. This is an extremely rich and valuable contribution to Christian married life, unprecedented in previous papal documents.

This section digresses briefly from the more extensive, perceptive treatment of the day-to-day experience of married love which the Pope refuses to judge against ideal standards: "There is no need to lay upon two limited persons the tremendous burden of having to reproduce perfectly the union existing between Christ and his Church, for marriage as a sign entails 'a dynamic process..., one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God'" (AL 122). On the other hand, the Pope forcefully stresses the fact that conjugal love by its very nature defines the partners in a richly encompassing and lasting union (AL 123), precisely within that "mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures" (AL 126) which indeed make up a marriage.

The chapter concludes with a very important reflection on the "transformation of love" because "Longer life spans now mean that close and exclusive relationships must last for four, five or even six decades; consequently, the initial decision has to be frequently renewed" (AL 163). As physical appearance alters, the loving attraction does not lessen but changes as sexual desire can be transformed over time into the desire for togetherness and mutuality: "There is no guarantee that we will feel the same way all through life. Yet if a couple can come up with a shared and lasting life project, they can love one another and live as one until death do them part, enjoying an enriching intimacy" (AL 163).

#### **Chapter five: "Love made fruitful" (165-198)**

The *fifth chapter* is entirely focused on love's fruitfulness and procreation. It speaks in a profoundly spiritual and psychological manner about welcoming new life, about the waiting period of pregnancy, about the love of a mother and a father. It also speaks of the expanded fruitfulness of adoption, of welcoming the contribution of families to promote a "culture of encounter", and of family life in a broad sense which includes aunts and uncles, cousins, relatives of relatives, friends. *Amoris Laetitia* does not focus on the so-called "nuclear" family" because it is very aware of the family as a wider network of many relationships. The spirituality of the sacrament of marriage has a deeply social character (cf. AL 187). And within this social dimension the Pope particularly emphasizes the specific role of the relationship between youth and the elderly, as well as the relationship between brothers and sisters as a training ground for relating with others.

#### **Chapter six: "Some pastoral perspectives" (199-258)**

In the *sixth chapter* the Pope treats various pastoral perspectives that are aimed at forming solid and fruitful families according to God's plan. The chapter uses the *Final Reports* of the two Synods and the catecheses of Pope Francis and Pope John Paul II extensively. It reiterates that families



should not only be evangelized, they should also evangelize. The Pope regrets “that ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families” (AL 202). On the one hand, the psycho-affective formation of seminarians needs to be improved, and families need to be more involved in formation for ministry (cf. AL 203); and on the other hand, “the experience of the broad oriental tradition of a married clergy could also be drawn upon” (AL 202).

The Pope then deals with the preparation of the engaged for marriage; with the accompaniment of couples in the first years of married life, including the issue of responsible parenthood; and also with certain complex situations and crises, knowing that “each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart” (AL 232). Some causes of crisis are analyzed, among them a delay in maturing affectively (cf. AL 239).

Mention is furthermore made of accompanying abandoned, separated or divorced persons. The Exhortation stresses the importance of the recent reform of the procedures for marriage annulment. It highlights the suffering of children in situations of conflict and concludes: “Divorce is an evil and the increasing number of divorces is very troubling. Hence, our most important pastoral task with regard to families is to strengthen their love, helping to heal wounds and working to prevent the spread of this drama of our times” (AL 246). It then touches on the situations of a marriage between a Catholic and a Christian of another denomination (mixed marriages), and between a Catholic and someone of another religion (disparity of cult). Regarding families with members with homosexual tendencies, it reaffirms the necessity to respect them and to refrain from any unjust discrimination and every form of aggression or violence. The last, pastorally poignant part of the chapter, “When death makes us feel its sting”, is on the theme of the loss of dear ones and of widowhood.

### ***Chapter seven: “Towards a better education of children” (259-290)***

The *seventh chapter* is dedicated to the education of children: their ethical formation, the learning of discipline which can include punishment, patient realism, sex education, passing on the faith and, more generally, family life as an educational context. The practical wisdom present in each paragraph is remarkable, above all the attention given to those gradual, small steps “that can be understood, accepted and appreciated” (AL 271).

There is a particularly interesting and pedagogically fundamental paragraph in which Francis clearly states that “obsession, however, is not education. We cannot control every situation that a child may experience... If parents are obsessed with always knowing where their children are and controlling all their movements, they will seek only to dominate space. But this is no way to educate, strengthen and prepare their children to face challenges. What is most important is the ability lovingly to help them grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and real autonomy” (AL 260).

The notable section on education in sexuality is very expressively entitled: “Yes to sex education”. The need is there, and we have to ask “if our educational institutions have taken up this challenge ... in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialized and impoverished”. Sound education needs to be carried out “within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving” (AL 280). The text warns that the expression ‘safe sex’ conveys “a negative attitude towards the natural procreative finality of sexuality, as if an eventual child were an enemy to be protected against. This way of thinking promotes narcissism and aggressivity in place of acceptance” (AL 283).

### ***Chapter eight: “Guiding, discerning and integrating weakness” (291-312)***

The *eighth chapter* is an invitation to mercy and pastoral discernment in situations that do not fully match what the Lord proposes. The Pope uses three very important verbs: *guiding, discerning*

and *integrating*, which are fundamental in addressing fragile, complex or irregular situations. The chapter has sections on the need for gradualness in pastoral care; the importance of discernment; norms and mitigating circumstances in pastoral discernment; and finally what the Pope calls the “logic of pastoral mercy”.

Chapter eight is very sensitive. In reading it one must remember that “the Church’s task is often like that of a field hospital” (AL 291). Here the Holy Father grapples with the findings of the Synods on controversial issues. He reaffirms what Christian marriage is and adds that “some forms of union radically contradict this ideal, while others realize it in at least a partial and analogous way”. The Church therefore “does not disregard the constructive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to her teaching on marriage” (AL 292).

As far as discernment with regard to “irregular” situations is concerned, the Pope states: “There is a need ‘to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations’ and ‘to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition’” (AL 296). And he continues: “It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community, and thus to experience being touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous’ mercy” (AL 297). And further: “The divorced who have entered a new union, for example, can find themselves in a variety of situations, which should not be pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for a suitable personal and pastoral discernment” (AL 298).

In this line, gathering the observations of many Synod Fathers, the Pope states that “the baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more fully integrated into Christian communities in the variety of ways possible, while avoiding any occasion of scandal”. “Their participation can be expressed in different ecclesial services... Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church... This integration is also needed in the care and Christian upbringing of their children” (AL 299).

In a more general vein, the Pope makes an extremely important statement for understanding the orientation and meaning of the Exhortation: “If we consider the immense variety of concrete situations, ... it is understandable that neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases. What is needed is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases, one which would recognize that, since ‘the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases’, the consequences or effects of a rule need not necessarily always be the same” (AL 300). The Pope develops in depth the needs and characteristics of the journey of accompaniment and discernment necessary for profound dialogue between the faithful and their pastors.

For this purpose, the Holy Father recalls the Church’s reflection on “mitigating factors and situations” regarding the attribution of responsibility and accountability for actions; and relying on St. Thomas Aquinas, he focuses on the relationship between rules and discernment by stating: “It is true that general rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded or neglected, but in their formulation they cannot provide absolutely for all particular situations. At the same time, it must be said that, precisely for that reason, what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule” (AL 304).

The last section of the chapter treats “The logic of pastoral mercy”. To avoid misunderstandings, Pope Francis strongly reiterates: “To show understanding in the face of exceptional situations never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal, or proposing less than what Jesus offers to the human being. Today, *more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages* and thus to prevent their breakdown” (AL 307).

The overall sense of the chapter and of the spirit that Pope Francis wishes to impart to the pastoral work of the Church is well summed up in the closing words: “I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord. They may not always encounter in them a confirmation of their own ideas or desires, but they will surely receive some light to help them better understand their situation and discover a path to personal growth. I also encourage the Church’s pastors to listen to them with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church.” (AL 312).

On the “logic of pastoral mercy”, Pope Francis emphasizes: “At times we find it hard to make room for God’s unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel” (AL 311).

### **Chapter nine: “The spirituality of marriage and the family” (313-325)**

The *ninth chapter* is devoted to marital and family spirituality, which “is made up of thousands of small but real gestures” (AL 315). The Pope clearly states that “those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union” (AL 316). Everything, “moments of joy, relaxation, celebration, and even sexuality can be experienced as a sharing in the full life of the resurrection” (AL 317). He then speaks of prayer in the light of Easter, of the spirituality of exclusive and free love in the challenge and the yearning to grow old together, reflecting God’s fidelity (cf. AL 319). And finally the spirituality of *care, consolation and incentive*: the Pope teaches that “all family life is a ‘shepherding’ in mercy. Each of us, by our love and care, leaves a mark on the life of others” (AL 322). It is a profound “spiritual experience to contemplate our loved ones with the eyes of God and to see Christ in them” (AL 323).

In the final paragraph the Pope affirms: “No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love ... All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. (...) May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us” (AL 325).

The Apostolic Exhortation concludes with a Prayer to the Holy Family.

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As can readily be understood from a quick review of its contents, the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* seeks emphatically to affirm not the “ideal family” but the very rich and complex reality of family life. Its pages provide an openhearted look, profoundly positive, which is nourished not with abstractions or ideal projections, but with pastoral attention to reality. The text is a close reading of family life, with spiritual insights and practical wisdom useful for every human couple or persons who want to build a family. Above all, it is patently the result of attention to what people have lived over many years. The Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia: On Love in the Family* indeed speaks the language of experience and of hope