

Humanae Vitae: 50th Anniversary **Themes and Connections**

General considerations

- The transmission of life from one generation to the next has always been a source of both joy and trial (no. 1).
- Modern changes, such as population growth, economic and housing situations, an understanding of women's dignity and the importance of conjugal love, and the ability of science to intervene in human procreation, have all contributed to the need for the Church to examine a few questions anew (nos. 2-3).
- Questions about responsible procreation were examined by a commission who offered their considerations but were not in agreement; Pope Paul VI prayed constantly and "sifted carefully the evidence" before writing *Humanae vitae* (no. 5-6).

Transmission of Life—More than just biology

- "The question of human procreation, like every other question which touches human life, involves more than the limited aspects specific to such disciplines as biology, psychology, demography or sociology. It is the whole man and the whole mission to which he is called that must be considered: both its natural, earthly aspects and its supernatural, eternal aspects. And since in the attempt to justify artificial methods of birth control many appeal to the demands of married love or of responsible parenthood, these two important realities of married life must be accurately defined and analyzed" (no. 7).

Nature of Marriage

- "Marriage, then, is far from being the effect of chance or the result of the blind evolution of natural forces. It is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design. As a consequence, husband and wife, through that mutual gift of themselves, which is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives" (no. 8).
- Marriage is a sacrament that "represents the union of Christ and his Church" (no. 8).
- Married love is free, total, faithful, exclusive, and fruitful (no. 9).
- Married love carries with it the responsibility for procreation, which includes understanding the natural processes of the body, gaining self-control, and prudently discerning whether to engage in the conjugal act in light of the possibility of conception (no. 10).
- "The Church, nevertheless, in urging men to the observance of the precepts of the natural law, which it interprets by its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marital act

must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life” (no. 11).

- The sexual union of husband and wife “does not, moreover, cease to be legitimate even when, for reasons independent of their will, it is foreseen to be infertile. For its natural adaptation to the expression and strengthening of the union of husband and wife is not thereby suppressed” (no. 11).
- There is an “inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act” (no. 12).
- Forcing one’s spouse into sexual intercourse is wrong; so is thwarting the natural significance of the act by contraception (no. 13).

Responsible Parenthood

- “Married love, therefore, requires of husband and wife the full awareness of their obligations in the matter of responsible parenthood, which today, rightly enough, is much insisted upon, but which at the same time should be rightly understood” (no. 10).
- “With regard to the biological processes, responsible parenthood means an awareness of, and respect for, their proper functions. In the procreative faculty the human mind discerns biological laws that apply to the human person” (no. 10).
- “With regard to man's innate drives and emotions, responsible parenthood means that man's reason and will must exert control over them” (no. 10).

Immorality of specific acts

- Direct abortion, direct sterilization, and any action taken to actively prevent conception (whether before, during, or after intercourse) is illicit (no. 14).
- When there is a bodily disorder, and the treatment may involve infertility, this is licit so long as the infertility is not directly intended (no. 15).

Morality of Natural Family Planning

- When a married couple has good reasons to avoid conception, they may use the knowledge of the natural cycles of fertility in order to abstain from intercourse during fertile periods (no. 16).
- Periodic abstinence requires self-discipline but it can also enrich family life (no. 21).

Consequences of not honoring God’s plan for married love

- Pope Paul VI clearly saw many of the consequences of the adoption of contraceptive methods, including increases in marital infidelity, the general lowering of moral

standards, the loss of reverence due to women, and the passing of power “into the hands of those public authorities who care little for the precepts of the moral law” (no. 17).

- There are limits to the control that man and woman have over procreation (no. 17).

The Church’s competence over the morality of human sexuality and the transmission of life

- The teaching of the Church is based on the natural law, which the Church is competent to interpret (no. 4).
- The Church did not make this law, but rather conveys it, and urges her people to understand it (no. 18).
- The Church knows the weakness of humanity, has compassion on people, welcomes sinners, but cannot fail to teach the Divine law (no. 19).
- This teaching is from God, and though people may find it difficult to live, they ought to rely on grace (no. 20).
- “It is an outstanding manifestation of charity toward souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ” (no. 29).

Recommended actions

- People ought to work for a culture that supports chastity rather than immorality (no. 22).
- Governments ought not to support legislation that supports birth control (no. 23).
- Scientists can “advance the welfare of marriage and family” by learning more about the “conditions favorable to a proper regulation of births” (no. 24).
- Christian couples, mindful of their vocation and the graces of the Sacrament of Matrimony, should keep to the narrow way “that leads to life” (no. 25).
- Husbands and wives should pray constantly, draw strength from the Eucharist, and seek mercy when they fall (no. 25).
- Married couples ought to share their experiences with others, to be “apostles to other married couples” (no. 26).
- Christian doctors and nurses should always “support those lines of action which accord with faith and with right reason” and to “strive to win agreement and support for these policies among their professional colleagues” (no. 27).
- Priests have a duty to “to spell out clearly and completely the Church's teaching on marriage. In the performance of [their] ministry [they] must be the first to give an

example of that sincere obedience, inward as well as outward, which is due to the magisterium of the Church” (no. 28).

- Bishops are to lead the way, devoting themselves to “safeguarding the holiness of marriage, in order to guide married life to its full human and Christian perfection” (no. 30).
- “For man cannot attain that true happiness for which he yearns with all the strength of his spirit, unless he keeps the laws which the Most High God has engraved in his very nature. These laws must be wisely and lovingly observed” (no. 31).

HV in the current context

- HV is pro-environment. It is part of a “human ecology.” It respects the human body. There is much concern today about the environment and the “footprint” that man makes on it. Yet no one questions the widespread use of chemical contraception, that taints the waterways and has deleterious effects on wildlife. Natural family planning, on the other hand, respects nature.
- HV is pro-woman. The teaching of HV respects the dignity of woman, her body, and the gift of fertility. It presents a view of human sexuality that reminds everyone that the woman is never to be used as an object. This should speak to those who are calling for an end to sexual harassment and the fair treatment of women in the workplace and elsewhere.
- HV is pro-life: it emphasizes the goodness of the child as a gift of God and not a possession, accident, burden or “problem.”
- HV is pro-marriage: It reminds us that the gift of sexuality is meant to bring a man and a woman together into a partnership of life that encompasses their entire life, not just a part of it.
- Blessed Paul VI’s warnings about the consequences of contraception have proven to be remarkably prescient.