



Having attentively sifted the documentation laid before us, after mature reflection and assiduous prayers, we now intend by virtue of the mandate entrusted to us by Christ, to give our reply to grave questions... Pope Paul VI

The complete text of HUMANAE VITAE, ("Of Human Life"), the seventh encyclical of Pope Paul VI, made public by the Vatican on July 29, 1968

**Venerable Brothers and Beloved Sons:
The Transmission of Life**

1. The most serious duty of transmitting human life, for which married persons are the free and responsible collaborators of God the Creator, has always been a source of great joys to them even if sometimes accompanied by not a few difficulties and by distress.

At all times the fulfillment of this

duty has posed grave problems to the conscience of married persons, but with the recent evolution of society changes have taken place that give rise to new questions which the church could not ignore, having to do with a matter which so closely touches upon the life and happiness of men.

I. New Aspects of the Problems and Competency of the Magisterium

NEW FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

2. The changes which have taken place are in fact noteworthy and of varied kind. In the first place, there is the rapid demographic development. Fear is shown by many that world population is growing more rapidly than the available resources, with growing distress to many families and developing countries, so that the temptation for radical measures is great. Moreover, working and lodging conditions, as well as increased exigencies both in the economic field and in that of education, often make the proper education of an elevated number of children difficult today.

A change is also seen both in the manner of considering the person of woman and her place in society, and in the value to be attributed to conjugal love in marriage, and also in the appreciation to be made of the meaning of conjugal acts in relation to that love.

Finally and above all, man has made

stupendous progress in the domination and rational organization of the forces of nature, such that he tends to extend this domination to his own total being: to the body, to psychical life, to social life and even to the laws which regulate the transmission of life.

3. This new state of things gives rise to new questions. Granted the conditions of life today, and granted the meaning which conjugal relations have with respect to the harmony between husband and wife and to their mutual fidelity, would not a revision of the ethical norms in force up to now seem to be advisable, especially when it is considered that they cannot be observed without sacrifices, sometimes heroic sacrifices?

And again: by extending to this field the application of the so-called "principle of totality," could it not be admitted that the intention of a less abundant but more rationalized fecundity might transform into a licit and wise control of birth? Could it not be admitted, that is,

that the finality of procreation pertains to the ensemble of conjugal life, rather than to its single acts? It is also asked, whether, in view of the increased sense of responsibility of modern man, the moment has not come for him to entrust to his reason and his will, rather than to the biological rhythms of his organism, the task of regulating birth.

4. Such questions require from the teaching authority of the church a new and deeper reflection upon the principles of the moral teaching on marriage: a teaching founded on the natural law, illuminated and enriched by divine revelation.

No believer will wish to deny that the teaching authority of the church is competent to interpret even the natural moral law. It is, in fact, indisputable, as our predecessors have many times declared (1), that Jesus Christ, when communicating to Peter and to the Apostles His divine authority and sending them to teach all nations His Commandments (2), constituted them as guardians and authentic interpreters of all the moral law, not only that of the law of the Gospel, but also of the natural law, which is also an expression of the will of God, the faithful fulfillment of which is equally necessary for salvation (3).

Conformably to this mission of hers, the church has always provided — and even more amply in recent times — a coherent teaching concerning both the nature of marriage and the correct use of conjugal rights and the duties of husband and wife (4).

SPECIAL STUDIES

5. The consciousness of that same mission induced us to confirm and enlarge the study commission which our prede-

cessor Pope John XXIII of happy memory had instituted in March, 1963. That commission, which included, besides several experts in the various pertinent disciplines, also married couples, had as its scope the gathering of opinions on the new questions regarding conjugal life, and in particular on the regulation of births, and of furnishing opportune elements of information so that the Magisterium could give an adequate reply to the expectation not only of the faithful but also of world opinion (5).

The work of these experts, as well as the successive judgments and counsels spontaneously forwarded by or expressly requested from a good number of our brothers in the episcopate, have permitted us to measure more exactly all the aspects of this complex matter. Hence with all our heart we express to each of them our lively gratitude.

REPLY OF THE MAGISTERIUM

6. The conclusions at which the commission arrived could not, nevertheless, be considered by us as definitive, nor dispense us from a personal examination of this serious question; and this also because, within the commission itself, no full concordance of judgments concerning the moral norms to be proposed had been reached, and above all because certain criteria of solutions had emerged which departed from the moral teaching on marriage proposed with constant firmness by the teaching authority of the church.

Therefore, having attentively sifted the documentation laid before us, after mature reflection and assiduous prayers, we now intend, by virtue of the mandate entrusted to us by Christ, to give our reply to these grave questions.