

TOWARD AN INTEGRAL PRESENTATION OF  
"HUMANAE VITAE" and "FAMILIARIS  
CONSORTIO" IN THE SEMINARY CURRICULUM

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*Humanae vitae*, Pope Paul VI's monumental and magnificent Encyclical, unquestionably sets forth the Church's certain and enduring doctrine on reverence for human life from the moment of conception, and on the sanctity of human sexuality and procreation. It is a doctrine which must form and bind conscience.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently *Humanae vitae* must be taught, studied, and pondered in the seminary; no priest can be doctrinally in union with his bishop and the Roman Pontiff unless he is capable of, willing, and ready to teach and defend this doctrine in his preaching, in his catechesis, in his counsel within the sacramental forum of Penance and outside it, in his role as pastor or religious educator, and, indeed, in his daily witness as a priest whose office cannot be clearly separated from his person. Such capability, willingness, and readiness begin in seminary academics and formation.<sup>2</sup>

Philosophy is the first major area wherein such formation takes place. In the course on the philosophy of man, for example, the view of man as unique, precious and unrepeatable must be set forth and analyzed. A human being can never be relegated merely to an "it"; on the contrary, always and everywhere, every human being is, in Martin Buber's celebrated phrase (one pioneered by the Catholic existentialist Gabriel Marcel), a "Thou" — always and everywhere someone and not something<sup>3</sup>.

Our *philosophia perennis* has a clear vision of man as "subject" not "object". As Shakespeare puts it in *Hamlet*: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite

in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god!"<sup>4</sup>

Such a vision of man underlies the doctrine of *Humanae vitae*. Thus it should be cast and focused early in the seminary philosophy curriculum.

This is of course an area in which His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, has been working since his early days as an ethicist. Reaching back into the thought of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the Holy Father has given Christian humanism a new existential interpretation. As one of his former students, Father Andrew Woznicki, now at the University of San Francisco, explains in his recently published *The Dignity of Man as a Person*:

Christian humanism as viewed by the then Karol Wojtyla and the present John Paul II is based on two sets of human values: a synthesis of existence and love, and a connection between truth and freedom. Based on these two sets of human values . . . (Karol Wojtyla) lays down a new foundation for Christian ethics. On the one hand, Christian ethics, based on Wojtyla's existential personalism, is fulfilling the requirements of "naturalistic" humanism, because it takes into account both the individual experience and personal freedom of man . . . In the words of John Paul II: "to speak of 'ethos' means to recall an experience that every man, not only the Christian, lives daily . . . This experience is always connected with that of his own freedom, that is, the fact that each one of us is truly and really the "cause of his/her own acts". On the other hand, an ethical system which stems from Wojtyla's existential personalism is grounded in one's own experience of "*divinum*" (the "divine"): "In the ethical experience, therefore, there is established a 'connection between truth and freedom', thanks to which the person becomes evermore himself, in obedience to the creative wisdom of God".

Mention of the Holy Father's academic contributions

prompts thoughts about the whole school of Lublin Personalism or Lublin Existentialism, an invaluable assist in reasoning as to the truth of *Humanae vitae*. Lublin Personalism or Existentialism, which constitutes the Polish philosophers' gift to their Church, was cradled in the 1950's when the best insights of existentialists like Gabriel Marcel, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Martin Buber, were incorporated within the framework of the perennial realist philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas as interpreted by the French thinkers Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson; then related, in various degrees, to valid aspects of the methodology of phenomenology, especially that employed by Max Scheler and Roman Ingarden. This new system, whose description in fifteen volumes by extraordinary thinkers is currently being translated into English under the direction of the Reverend Francis J. Lescoe of the Archdiocese of Hartford and the Rector of Holy Apostles Seminary in Cromwell, Connecticut, has drawn heavily from Marcel. As Father Lescoe explained in his address as outgoing President of the American Catholic Philosophical Association in Baltimore, in May 1986:

"Some (of these insights) include the famous I-Thou relationship (also found in Buber); the notion of intersubjectivity and disponibility, which denotes a loving relationship between two subjects who, in turn, make themselves mutually available to one another and thereby co-create a new entity, a "we" (*nous*). Lublin Personalism also subscribes to Marcel's insistence that "being" is superior to "having", that a person is always superior to the product or work which he/she performs"<sup>6</sup>.

It likewise belongs to philosophy, in the seminary studies, in metaphysics as well as in the philosophy of man, to demonstrate *that*, and *how*, Platonic dualism is inadequate to explain the body-soul relationship in man. Philosophy must help the seminarian understand that the human soul is not just a spiritual substance making use of a body. To be a human being is, it should be carefully explained, "to be spirit expressed and made active through the body" — as Romano Guardini once put it.<sup>7</sup>

To relate all this to each person's origins, St. Thomas held that the soul shares its being with the body. Etienne Gilson

plan and they "manipulate" and degrade human sexuality and with it themselves and their married partner by altering its value of "total" self-giving"<sup>12</sup>.

Pope John Paul goes on to explain that contraception opposes "the *innate language*" that *expresses* the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife". This *language* is then overlaid, "through contraception, by an objectively *contradictory language*; namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other"<sup>13</sup>.

Also on the philosophical level, the course in ethics, besides providing seminarians with the traditional analysis of the moral act, the principle of the twofold effect and that the end can never justify an evil means, the principle of totality, and the reasons as to why some actions are intrinsically wrong and are hence never ethically defensible options (in other words that evil in itself can never be viewed as good), should at least introduce seminarians to the various inadequate or erroneous ethical systems most often summoned today in medical-moral, bioethical and sexual issues in support of the morality of human acts. This should include Kantian ethics, utilitarianism, and so-called situation ethics. Without a background knowledge of these theories, the theology student later may not be equipped to respond to challenges to *Humanae vitae* raised in the world as it exists, a world deeply confused and tainted by situation ethics, utilitarianism and Kantian modes of ethical judgment.

Doubtless, the best way to approach the subject of ethics is by reference to Karol Wojtyla's epoch-making book, *The Acting Person*.

Most of all, in a sense, the seminarian still in the philosophy curriculum must be initiated into the concept of the natural moral law. In *Gaudium et spes* we are reminded to assess the conjugal act by standards "based on the nature of the human person and his or her acts" in order to "preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love"<sup>14</sup>.

The Church, it must be carefully explained to seminarians while still in philosophy, speaks of her fundamental moral doctrine as a "natural and gospel law". As Father Ronald D. Lawler summarized it during the first International Congress

taught that the soul "receives the body in the communion of its own act of being . . . Were it not so, the whole being of man would not be a substantial unity . . ."8.

The Lublin Personalists summarize this teaching thus: "The human soul, having an actual relation to matter, is expressed through the body organized for the soul"9.

All of the above means that one cannot realistically say, for example, "This is my body; I can do with it as I please." A similar protestation is made by some pro-abortion women's groups: "It's my body; consequently I can have an abortion if I so decide".

Also important here is a philosophical examination of, and a rejection of, Cartesian dualism.

Another discussion requiring a place in the seminary philosophical curriculum is an analysis of the creature, man, as contradistinguished from the Creator, God. To be a creature is not to be a being who finally rules and measures; God alone rules and measures. To be a man is to be one who *is ruled and measured*. As metaphysician Raymond Dennehy of the University of San Francisco has written:

" . . . the elan of post-Christian Prometheanism warns us that man's ontological reach extends beyond his ontological grasp. It induces in man a "*forgetfulness of his creaturehood and intrinsic limitation*". Secular humanism's failure to see that creaturehood is not a condition that can be overcome blinds their path"10.

In the course on the history of modern philosophy, the theory of phenomenology can also be of substantial help for the seminarian who must later grasp *Humanae vitae* and *Familiaris consortio*. Some of the expressions in *Humanae vitae* reflect the idiom of phenomenology; for example, those in Section 12, which speak about "the two *meanings* of the conjugal act: the *unitive* meaning and the *procreative* meaning"11.

And note these phenomenological nuances in *Familiaris consortio*, which develops the concept of the *meaning* of conjugal union:

"When couples, by means of recourse to contraception, separate these two *meanings* that God the Creator has *inscribed* in the being of man and woman and in the dynamism of their sexual communion, they act as arbiters of the divine

on Moral Theology in Rome in April 1986:

"It is a law rooted in our own natures, and in principle open to our own understanding. But it is also a divine law; through the prophets and Christ God himself has taught us how we are to live in love. There is no conflict in teaching that moral precepts are both naturally knowable and divinely revealed: the Church has always believed that the gift of revelation extends, to meet the needs of our fallen condition, to matters open in principle to our natural insight. Moral teaching in the Church has always been handed down primarily as a divine gift; the Church does not teach morality as a professor of ethics, judging that the precepts it hands on deserve respect only if the philosophical arguments that it offers in their defense seem persuasive to the hearer. She teaches morality prophetically, speaking for Christ"<sup>15</sup>.

Thus the natural law, the seminarian must know, can be known in two ways: by rational insight into the reasons supporting it, and by faith in the word of God, whose moral revelation "supplies," it as it were, for our limitations in grasping what is really good<sup>16</sup>.

Pope John Paul II, in his highly significant series of catecheses on *Humanae vitae* in 1984, made the point that — in his own words — "the norm of the encyclical concerns all men, insofar as it is a norm of the natural law and is based on conformity with human reason (when, it is understood, human reason is seeking truth)"<sup>17</sup>.

In these catecheses during 1984, the Holy Father, Pope John Paul, amplified the teachings of Pope Paul VI in *Humanae vitae*, for example, in Section 4. Herein Paul VI refers to the key doctrines of *Humanae vitae* as "founded on the natural law", which, he adds, "the Church is competent to interpret"<sup>18</sup>.

This is not to say, of course, that *Humanae vitae* is not part of the totality of Revelation. Paul VI, in the Encyclical, wrote of the natural law's in this case being "illuminated and enriched by divine Revelation"<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, Pope John Paul II, in his catecheses cited above, has stated:

"Even if the moral law, formulated in this way in *Humanae vitae*, is not found literally in Sacred Scripture, nonetheless, from the fact that it is contained in Tradition and — as Pope Paul VI writes — has been 'very often expounded by the

Magisterium' . . . to the faithful, it follows that this norm is in accordance with the sum total of revealed doctrine contained in biblical sources"<sup>20</sup>.

It is a question here, the Holy Father went on, "not only of the sum total of the moral doctrine contained in Sacred Scripture, of its essential premises and general character of its contents, but of that fuller context to which we have previously dedicated numerous analyses when speaking about the 'theology of the body'."

"Precisely against the background of this full context it becomes evident that the above-mentioned moral norms belong not only to the natural moral law but also to the *moral order revealed by God*; also from this point of view it could not be different, but solely what is handed down by Tradition and the Magisterium, and, in our days, the Encyclical *Humanae vitae* as a modern document of this Magisterium"<sup>21</sup>.

At this point of this paper, one is into theology, properly speaking, and here too an integral approach to *Humanae vitae* is essential. The doctrine of the Encyclical is covered from various aspects in several theological courses: human sexuality; marriage and family; bioethics; contemporary moral issues; moral virtues; the canon law of marriage; fundamental and moral theology, principles and precepts. It is also treated in the course on the Sacrament of Penance and in various pastoral courses.

It is in fundamental moral theology, clearly, that the full light of Revelation is cast upon objective morality; in this illumination it should become absolutely clear to the seminarian that so-called merely "ontic" or "pre-moral" acts are myths. Hence, the very assumptions of moral theories of proportionalism, which attempt to assess the morality of a proposed act exclusively by reference to the "good" or "bad" expected to proceed from it, and by "maximizing the good" while "minimizing the evil", are without validity. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger argued in the closing address to the American Bishops at Dallas on 10 February 1984:

"Since all moral questions have to do with persons, all moral theories should take the inseparability of the soul from the body into account. They should also take into account the fact that because it is only *people* who do actions describable as

moral or immoral, all actions are automatically and immediately inseparable from the person who performs them. They cannot, therefore, be adequately described as merely ontic, since they always involve the person who performs them.”<sup>22</sup>

In fundamental moral, too, divine truth illuminates the intrinsic immorality of directly taking innocent human life, as in direct abortion<sup>23</sup>. Here, also, in the basic moral courses, the principle of the twofold effect is studied, along with the norm that a good end cannot justify an evil means (example: direct abortion, sterilization, contraceptive intercourse). The principle of totality should also be restated here — a correct understanding of the “principle of totality” illustrated by Pope Pius XII in 1953 and 1956, for examples<sup>24</sup>.

Likewise, in fundamental moral theology, Scriptural witnesses in behalf of reverence for human life from the moment of conception, and for the sanctity of human sexuality should be studied: texts such as Jeremiah 1:4-5; Psalm 139:13 sqq.; Luke 1:15; Luke 1:39 sqq.; as regards the holiness of human life from conception; and texts such as Matthew 5:27-28; 15:19; Mark 7:21-22; First Corinthians 6:19 and Chapter 7; John 2; Ephesians 5; also Genesis 2:4b-24; Genesis 1:2-1, 4a; and Genesis 1:31; as regards the holiness of human sexuality.

Fundamental moral theology is also a key area for developing the truth that the Church can, and in fact does, speak for Christ the Lord in matters of morality.

The validity and force of *Humanae vitae* rests not only on the fact that it treats of natural law refined by Divine Revelation<sup>25</sup>. More than this, the Encyclical constitutes “a pronouncement which the Pope was duty bound to make by virtue of the ‘mandate entrusted to us by Christ’ ”<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, the doctrine here was not set forth in passing, as it were; on the contrary, Paul VI intended to provide a decisive answer<sup>27</sup>.

Surely there can be no questioning that the Church has irrevocably committed itself to the doctrine of *Humanae vitae*, which grounds the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, wherein the inner authenticity and logic of Paul VI’s Encyclical are developed in magnificent contemporary terms. Furthermore, the brilliantly structured and articulated “Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation”, issued by the

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 22 February 1987 and approved by Pope John Paul II, summons and marshals the enduring principles and norms of *Humanae vitae*, as well as those restated in *Familiaris consortio*.

Fundamental moral theology too is one locus for a discussion or dissent from Church moral doctrine: the validity, the limits, and the effect of such dissent. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger spoke eloquently on this subject at a workshop for bishops in Dallas in 1984. Among other things he said:

" . . . Important for us is the fact that private, personal dissent is to be distinguished from the dissent of a teacher, or the dissent of a theological specialist. Alienation from the community, even in the private, personal form, has grave implications for the spiritual life of the individual. On the other hand, because it is an individual, it is limited. Such is not the case for the teacher. A person who teaches in the name of the Church is taking what is basically a personal dissent and exaggerating its importance and its damage by propagating it. But the particular grave damage here is not simply that he teaches his dissent, but that he teaches it in the name of the Church. It is odd that people who have grave misgivings about the right of the Church to exist in any institutional form, seem to have no problem with the contradiction implicit in teaching in a Catholic school, which, after all, is an institution. Integrity seems to me to require that the person who dissents should not, precisely because he cannot, teach in the name of the Church, or even give that impression"<sup>28</sup>.

In the classes on human sexuality, moral virtues, bioethics and/or contemporary moral issues, the personalistic nature of sexuality is rightly studied and brought into sharp focus with Revelation. Catholic doctrine on human sexuality and marriage can only be adequately understood if its *genuinely personalistic character* is grasped first. This is to say that human sexuality, in authentic Catholic thought, respects the person; furthermore, sexuality involves the person, *the total person*, and not simply his or her physical nature.

Conjugal union is in Catholic doctrine a mystery entailing a communion of persons. Conjugal union is not merely a bodily union, much less the joining of gametes. Conjugal communion, which has a language given it by God, is expressed

through the body in accordance with God the Creator's will; John Paul II speaks of the "nuptial meaning" of the body.

Sexuality ultimately pertains to the *person*, therefore; masculinity and femininity go to the very soul of each man and woman. The human being must always be viewed in his totality, body and soul, soul and body. This is not to downgrade the body; the fact that Catholic theology considers the body so noble should not surprise anyone who reflects upon the meaning of the Incarnation. "Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh", declared Pope John Paul II in a General Audience, "the body entered theology — that is, the science, the subject of which is divinity, I would say — through the main door. The Incarnation — and the redemption that springs from it — became also the definitive source of the sacramentality of marriage . . ." <sup>29</sup>

Christians, therefore, are called to accept the theology of the body, including the nuptial meaning of the body. Again, though, a human being is a person, not merely a body; he or she is spirit expressed by body. Sexuality, thus, does not pertain to the body alone, but to the total person, body-spirit composite. Marriage is a union of persons united in life-giving and love-giving fidelity. When, therefore, it is taught that the life-giving (procreative) meaning of the conjugal act cannot morally be separated from the love-giving (unitive) meaning, the discussion proceeds from this personalistic basis, and not that of physicalism.

Finally, the doctrine of *Humanae vitae* also has its place in the courses in Mariology and eschatology, both of which remind us that, like Mary, we too are destined to be assumed to God, *body and soul*.

Teaching *Humanae vitae* in the seminary, therefore, is not simply a matter of a course or two. The doctrine in this profound and prophetic Encyclical rests upon a solid and dynamic vision of man, a vision which begins to emerge from reason — philosophy — and is refined and brought to completion in the divine light of Revelation. And even from the theological viewpoint, many courses, not just two or three, relate to *Humanae vitae*, courses which fit together as all truths meet in the overpowering luminescence of the Word of God, Light of the World.

The whole topic of reverence for human life from conception, as defended in *Humanae vitae*, is concretized in a news photograph of Pope John Paul II taken at Auschwitz, in the cell of the priest-martyr St. Maximilian Kolbe, during the Papal visit of June 1979. The photograph, which a columnist in the London Tablet described as surely one of the "pictures of the century", showed the Holy Father telling his beads. According to the caption, he was praying the fourth glorious mystery, *Maria Assumpta*. As in Mary's case, God has drawn us to himself too, in principle, all of us who keep faith. The Assumption is a sign, even now, that each human being, from conception, is unique, precious and unrepeatable, and meant to rest in God, as Augustine so magnificently once expressed it<sup>30</sup>.

## NOTES

1. Paul VI, *Humanae vitae*, trans. by NC News Service, St. Paul Editions, Boston 1968, Nos. 1-6; 19-31. No. 25 is especially significant. See also "Fidelity to the Truth in Love", Address of Pope John Paul II to Bishops of the United States Episcopal Conference at Quigley South Seminary, 5 October 1979, No. 6, in *The Message of Justice, Peace and Love*, St. Paul Editions, Boston 1979, pp. 183-84.
2. *Humanae vitae*, Nos. 28-30.
3. See Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's comments in the press conference presenting the "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation" by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 22 February 1987, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 16 March 1987. See also *The Gift of Life* by Liptak D.Q. and Duffy L.T., M.D., Liturgical Publications, Milwaukee, WI 1988, p. 9. A summary analysis of Buber's thought appears in *Existentialism With or Without God* by Lescoe F.J., Alba House, Staten Island 1974, pp. 135ff.
4. Shakespeare, *Hamlet II. ii.* 298-302, in *The New Hudson Shakespeare*, ed. and revised by Charlton E., Ginn and Co., Boston 1909.
5. Woznicki A.W., *The Dignity of Man as a Person*, The Society of Christ, San Francisco, pp. 128-29. See also Woznicki A.W., *A Christian Humanism: Karol Wojtyla's Existential Personalism*, Mariel, New Britain, Ct. 1980, pp. 6-17; 30-62.
6. I cite from a copy of the typewritten text used by Father Lescoe. The address is published in *Existential Personalism, Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, Vol. LX, ed. by Daniel Dahlstrom, The American Catholic Philosophical Association, Washington 1986, p. 5.
7. Guardini R., *The Last Things*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind. 1965, p. 61.
8. Gilson E., *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, Doubleday, New York 1960, pp. 222-29.
9. Krapiec M., *I-Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. by M. Lescoe, A. Woznicki, T. Sandok et al., Mariel, New Britain, Ct. 1983, p. 429.
10. Dennehy, R., *The Biological Revolution and the Myth of Prometheus*, in *Pope John Paul II Lecture Series in Bioethics*, Vol. II, ed. by Francis J. Lescoe and David Q. Liptak, Pope John Paul II Bioethics Center, Cromwell, Ct. 1986, p. 11. Italics added.
11. *Humanae vitae* No. 12. Italics added.

12. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, Apostolic Exhortation, 22 November 1981, English trans. in *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. XXVII (no. 1, 1982), sec. 32, pp. 26-27. Italics added.
13. *Ibid.* Italics added.
14. *Gaudium et spes* in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, Guild Press, New York 1966, sec. 51, p. 256.
15. Lawler, R.D., *The Magisterium and Catholic Moral Teaching*, in *Persona, Verità e Morale, Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Teologia Morale*, 7-12 April 1986, Citta Nuova Editrice, Roma 1987, pp. 222-23.
16. *Ibid.*, footnote. See also Denzinger-Schonmetzer 3005 and St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 1; 1-2, q. 91, a. 4.
17. John Paul II, *Catechesis of 18 July 1984*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 July 1984.
18. *Humanae vitae*, sec. 4., p. 5.
19. *Ibid.*
20. John Paul II, *Catechesis of 18 July 1984*.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Cardinal Ratzinger J., *Epilogue*, in *Moral Theology Today: Certitudes and Doubts*, Pope John Center, St. Louis 1984, p. 343.
23. *Humanae vitae*, No. 14.
24. *Ibid.*, No. 17, pp. 14-15. For Pope Pius XII, see AAS XLV (1953), pp. 674-75; AAS XLVIII (1956), pp. 461-62.
25. *Humanae vitae*, No. 4.
26. *Ibid.*, No. 6, p. 6.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Ratzinger, *Epilogue*, *cit.*, p. 340. See also *Ethics and Medics*, Pope John Center 9 (3), March 1984.
29. John Paul II, General Audience, 2 April 1980.
30. For this photograph see *w pielgrzymce do ojczystej ziemi, Jan Pawel II w Polsce 2 czerwca 1979. Nasza Rodzina paryz*, 1979, p. 168. *The London Tablet* commented on this photograph in the issue of 15 August, 1981, p. 787.