

HUMANAE VITAE, THEOLOGY OF THE BODY AND WOMEN OF PEACE AND HOPE

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On July 25, 1968, in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (On the Regulation of Birth), Pope Paul VI restated the teaching of the church against contraception, sterilization and abortion. The encyclical was widely misinterpreted and misunderstood. *Humanae Vitae* had become necessary due to the growing contraception and abortion mentality and a disregard towards the church's teachings on human life in the developed world after World War II.

In secular society, contraception was praised as the answer to family planning, promising a life of material riches, particularly in Western Europe and North America. It became the norm for families to have one or two children. In Germany, where I was raised, a mentality of "the less children you have the less you can lose to another war and the better you can provide for them" manifested itself in those who had experienced World War II first-hand. Contraceptives, especially the "pill", could become a promoter of promiscuity because it promised pleasure without responsibility. Nobody spoke about the negative effects hormone-packed contraceptives might have. While the warnings of the church were brushed off as old fashioned and an attempt to control people, liberation of humanity was proclaimed in the secular world. When Pope Paul VI presented *Humanae Vitae*, he was ignored or derided.

Between 1979 and 1984, Pope John Paul II made another attempt to explain the importance of the real purpose of life, married and celibate vocations, love, and purity of heart. He wrote and presented 129 talks on what is now known as the *Theology of the Body*, which embraces a holistic approach to human life and relationships. The series became well known and popular, particularly among a growing number of young men and women worldwide. A better understanding of faith and moral values, the emphasis that all human beings are made in the image of God, as well as better access to global media and higher education led to an improved understanding of the issues at hand. Many authors wrote books and made presentations in cities around the world at universities, colleges, youth rallies, and conferences. It seems that people are beginning to listen, although, there is still a long way to go.

Abortions have been legalized in a number of countries; in Canada a legislative vacuum exists which allows abortion. The "morning after pill" is readily available to adults and also

to teens. The methods of contraception have taken on many different forms. Not only the pre-born but other groups are in danger of being regarded as suitable to discard, including the physically or mentally vulnerable and the elderly. It seems that human life has become a disposable item. The question needs to be asked: What is happening to humanity that killing has become widely accepted and people like Dr. Henry Morgentaler are rewarded with the highest award Canada has to offer? Given the devaluing of human life, it is no coincidence that there is such a high divorce rate, an increase in violence, random or targeted killings and, on the world scene, senseless war.

Peace and hope are gifts from God. *Women of Peace and Hope* are called to prayer and action to spread the message of *Humanae Vitae* and the *Theology of the Body*. The hurdles seem overwhelming. However, an atmosphere of peace and hope can be created, starting with our families. Instilling Catholic values and beliefs in children is key. By doing so, a non-threatening and safe environment at home is created that allows family members to become peace builders themselves. Furthermore, all are called to follow Jesus' example and sow the seeds of peace and hope. It will create a ripple effect, spreading as far as we can imagine and beyond, and if nurtured, it will not lose its intensity.

May Our Lady of Good Counsel guide our efforts for peace.

Some books have been written on *Humanae Vitae* and many on the *Theology of the Body*. Here are a few suggestions:

- *Humanae Vitae*, by Pope Paul VI
- *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later*, by Janet E. Smith
- *Theology of the Body*, by Pope John Paul II
- *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, by Christopher West
- *The Theology of the Body made simple*, by Fr. Anthony Percy
- *The Theology of the Body in John Paul II – What it Means, Why it Matters*, by Richard M. Hogan †

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