



DICASTERIUM
PRO LAICIS, FAMILIA ET VITA

***Brief Message from
His Eminence, Kevin Cardinal Farrell
To the Participants of the Kigali Seminar on *Humanae Vitae*
February 9-10, 2019***

It is with sense of fraternal encouragement that our Dicastery offers the participants of the Kigali Seminar on *Humanae Vitae* some reflections as we celebrate the relevance, prophetic and ever contemporary teachings of St. Paul VI's landmark Encyclical Letter, whose 50th anniversary we celebrated only last July.

No one can deny that when the encyclical was published on 25th July 1968, it caused an impressive stir in the world, with some describing the effects of St. Paul VI's letter as "the greatest shock to the Church since the Reformation".

Yet today, fifty years on, it is still relevant and is widely acknowledge as having been tremendously prophetic, with predictions on contraception and its effects which proved right, while forewarning far worse consequences than originally imagined by many.

The pastoral aim of the encyclical cannot be doubted; it was to reiterate the Church's teaching in modern-day language of marital love and of facing up to the recent developments affecting this sacred relationship at the time, especially in the area of artificial and medical contraceptives.

Everyone knows today that the overwhelming conclusion of those consulted was that the Magisterium of the Church should make pastoral room within the traditional views on conjugal acts, while avoiding also the need to create moral imperatives that equated to nothing less than a series of prohibitions for couples and families who were clearly struggling to make ends meet and to navigate through life with the difficult task of spacing births and raising the children of their union.

However, despite the final reflections that reached the Pope at the time, St Paul VI saw clearly that he was called to enunciate with clarity the splendor of Christ's teachings on matters that at the time had been more than ever challenged by the so-called 'sexual revolution' of the 60's. It was a time of seismic change against what society previously considered wrong, so that sexuality was now being seen as something to be exploited and a human activity devoid from any form of moral consequence or virtue. It was a mind-set that, with readily available artificial means of contraception, was increasingly and quickly becoming at a global level the accepted fashion. Indeed, with the invention of the pill and other means of contraception, and worse still, powerful interest at play to legalize the termination of life after conception, humanity had now entered the dawn of a new era for unmeasured sexual looseness and affronts to the sacred dignity of human life.

The encyclical therefore, illustrated an awareness that what was about to be unambiguously proposed by the Church would not be easy to accept within the wider and ever growing social environment of the day. Simultaneously, however, the words of St Paul VI's documents were highly sensitive to the yearnings of married couples, and aware of the fragility and weakness of people in their concrete lives, and who so much needed encouragement to grow to the heights of ever greater Christian love. The Pope's language therefore, resonated with paternal compassion and managed also to palpably articulate the Church's own maternal love for her children.

That is why the tone of the Encyclical's language showed that Saint Paul VI had kept in mind many of the objections that had been raised during the stage of gathering opinions from around the world, as he prepared to put on paper his apostolic teaching.

Given the nature of an encyclical, understandably the Pope could not argue each and every one of those objections in detail. Instead, he focused on the perennial moral principles at stake. That is why he spoke in general and readily acknowledged the difficult cultural and social conditions in which many married couples live; illustrating thereby a realistic recognition of the impact of weakness, moral fragility, and sin. In a sense, the Pope's teachings was not just speaking to Christ's faithful, but to all consciences that strive daily to take seriously the gift of God's strength, His presence in our lives and from there too, the call to learn, to develop and to grow.

The choice of St Paul VI's language therefore, places at the center a fundamental element of the moral life of every Christian: even if human freedom always adheres imperfectly to the salvation offered in the Gospel, the Church must always propose it with fidelity, completeness, and a mercy which gently integrates the individual soul or couple away from the illusion of ethical relativisms towards a fuller life of love and human fulfilment. It is, from this perspective, how Pope Francis himself calls us to rediscover the life and family message of Saint Paul VI's celebrated Encyclical (cf. *AL*, 222), so that our care of couples should encourage them towards a mutual yet natural respect in bestowing life, while seeking to integrate them into a fuller life of communion with God, Who reveals Himself in the sanctuary of their individual consciences, that they may become, not by force, but in true liberating freedom, responsible and loving spouses and parents (cf. *AL* 37).

Indeed, Saint Paul VI's pastoral concern highlights an indispensable, constant need for married couples to recourse to the support of divine Grace in the daily struggles they face in their moral life and human action, and in particular, to give room to God's assistance in grasping the beauty of the unitive and procreative conjugal act, the need to regulate births with conjugal chastity within the context of responsible parenthood, and to grow in that inherently exclusive and permanent total self-giving of each other for their mutual wellbeing and for the care and raising of their children.

However, in our task to promote the beauty of responsible married love and parenthood, we must acknowledge that the Church's resources should be primarily based upon the experiences of our own married couples, and whom often the Holy Spirit inspires to become "Christian apostles" in this apostolate, as St Paul VI's himself declared in *Humanae Vitae*, (cf. 26). It is by virtue of their vocation, and of their baptismal calling, that they are better suited to talk to others of their life experience and of their gradual path in embracing the Church's teaching of generating and caring for life within marriage. Their experiences can aid our pastoral care programs so that our youth and couples may gradually grow to embrace the Church's clear teaching on the beauty of married love, of the unitive and procreative conjugal act, of responsible parenthood, but to do so in the dynamic of God's pastoral logic of mercy that seeks to reach out to the concrete reality of each person,

aiding and accompanying them, casting light amid complex situations, that they may freely embrace God's personal and ongoing revelation in their pilgrimage of life.

Indeed, both the family and the Church have a great challenge in promoting married love and to concentrate our pastoral efforts not on the basis of abstract theological ideals which can often seem "far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families", but upon what each family member experiences in his or her unique domestic setting (cf. *AL* 31).

Our vision must be Christ's and His loving concern for each individual person; our language the language of the Holy Spirit, which reaches out to each person with simplicity and appeal.

Today we celebrate a document that turned 50 this past July. But truth never turns 50. It is perennial, immutable. Yet, it is up to us to always make intelligible for Christ's faithful the beauty and splendor of truth; to unfold its relevance in our lives.

St Paul VI wrote as many as seven encyclical letters within the first five years of his papacy. But when he promulgated *Humanae Vitae*, no one ever imagined that this would be his last encyclical in the nearly 15 years of his great pontificate. It is as if he deliberately made sure that *Humanae Vitae* should continue to echo the most of all his teaching for future generations. Whether providential or deliberate, seen in this perspective, as well as for its awesome beauty, his Magisterium therein constitutes an invaluable and perennial heritage for the Church and for humanity.

May God bless your efforts. May He enlighten the way forward for us, that we may in turn know how to transmit the beauty of our faith in married life and how to accompany every individual soul in the create reality of their lives.

With all the assurances of my prayers and closeness.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin Card. Farrell". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Kevin Card. Farrell
Prefect