

HUMANAE VITAE: The Cure for the Anti-Life Virus

*Bishop Victor Galeone at the Florida Respect Life Conference
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By Bishop Victor Galeone

This morning I invite you to come back with me to an incident that took place in August of 1967. I was spending a week of my vacation with five other Baltimore priests in Ocean City, MD. One balmy afternoon that week, while the six of us were relaxing on the beach – playing cards, reading, or dozing – Fr. Joe turned the mood quite serious with the remark, “Hey guys, won’t it be great when Pope Paul comes out with his decision allowing birth control?”

Playing Devil’s Advocate, Fr. Jack Hooper, retorted, “But what if he doesn’t?”

– “Come on, Jack, he has to. The Majority Report from his Birth Control Commission gave compelling reasons why it’s time for the Church to change her position.”

– “I’m well aware of that Report. But still, what if he doesn’t?”

– “Well, Jack, most Catholic theologians are in agreement with the Majority Opinion.”

– “Yes, I’m aware of that too. But still, what if he doesn’t?”

Somewhat exasperated, Fr. Joe countered with:

– “Look, man, use your head! The latest polls tell us that over 50% of Catholics are already using some form of birth control.”

– “I’ve heard of those polls, and I suspect that they’re pretty accurate. But still, what if he doesn’t?”

At this point – before Fr. Joe had a chance to respond – I jumped in:

“Well, Joe, if he does, my Roman collar comes off, and I’m heading to a quiet little hermitage in Western Maryland. I’m going to tell the Lord, “OK, Jesus, from now on it’s just you and me. Because the Church I thought you had founded to teach the truth in your name until the end of time has let us down. She has led us – into error.”

– “Hey Vic, don’t let that hot Latin blood get the better of you.

You’re going to be eating those words before too long.”

– “No, I won’t, Joe. If the Holy Father changes this teaching, I’m leaving. But I’m certain that I won’t have to leave, because he can’t change it. Pope Paul could issue a document tomorrow, making celibacy optional, if he wanted to. That’s Church discipline – in the same league as fish on Friday or Latin in the Mass. But he can no more allow contraception than he can permit abortion or homosexual activity. Frankly, I’m a little puzzled by the long delay in his decision – This is one Church teaching that’s non-negotiable.”

The following summer, Pope Paul issued his landmark encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, in which he reiterated the Church’s traditional ban against contraception. I can still recall my reaction as I read the various newspaper accounts of the angry storm of dissent that greeted his encyclical. One article, in particular, caused me great concern. It reported how 87 Catholic theologians had signed a document

dissenting from Paul Paul's decision, alleging that the Pope was in error. I was very dismayed when I noticed among the signers, the name of Fr. John Cronin, a professor of Moral Theology at the local seminary. To see his name listed among the dissenters came as a crushing blow to me. For Fr. Cronin had been instrumental in my own spiritual formation through a moving retreat he had given while I was a seminarian. I immediately dashed off a letter to him, which initiated a written debate between the two of us.

I would like to highlight two items from that debate. First, I asked Fr. Cronin what he meant to accomplish by his statement of dissent: "After years of patiently awaiting the Pope's decision, why did you and your fellow theologians take it on yourselves to fan the fires of confusion all over again?"

He responded: "Why did I do it? I suppose primarily because of what would happen if the other side is not presented. Seminarians here face a real identity crisis. If the theologians' side had not been presented, our already critical vocations' crisis would turn into an utter rout. Younger priests are most uneasy. Had we kept silent, then hundreds, perhaps thousands would have voted with their feet. The laity is upset. Silence would have driven them by the thousands from the Church."

The second point I'd like to highlight from my correspondence with Fr. Cronin is that the dissenters want to refashion the Church as a democracy. Their desire is to demolish the Church as the Bride of Christ – our Bridegroom – who speaks to us through a living, binding Magisterium.

I quote from one of my letters:

"The greatest point of confusion caused by your dissenting ("non-serviam") statement, Fr. Cronin, lies in the implication that the Church, as established by the Lord Jesus, can better function in our modern world if reorganized along democratic lines. Accordingly, in order to support your present position, you would have to rewrite certain passages of Scripture as follows:

1. When the Lord's followers voted with their feet in John 6, objecting, 'This is an intolerable teaching. Who can accept it?' instead of asking the Twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' you would have Jesus tell them: 'Call them back. I'll restate my teaching to conform to their preconceived notions of what they feel it should be.'
2. Jesus' words to Peter, 'Your name is Rock and on this rock I will build my Church,' (Mt 16:18) will now have to read, 'Your name is Theology, and on whatever the latest theological trend happens to be, I will build my Church.'
3. Jesus' commission to his apostles to teach the nations 'to observe all things, whatever I have commanded you.' (Mt 28:20) must now read: 'Teach them to observe whatever the majority opinion happens to be at the time.'"

Towards the end of one of his letters, Fr. Cronin wrote: "I could hardly close without a scripture quotation, since you amassed so many against me. 'By their fruits you shall know them.' Vic, wait and see a year from now if the dissent now

did not save the Church from a sea of troubles.” Well, many years have passed since we concluded our correspondence, and it’s safe to say that the dissent was the cause – not the preventative – of a sea of troubles.

No, the Church is not a democracy. Thirty-five years ago, Peter, the Rock, in the person of Paul VI refused to bend his knee to the Baal of modern-day sensuality. Instead, he reminded the world that the love embrace between husband and wife must reflect the love union between Jesus and his Bride the Church. Of one thing I am absolutely convinced: Either *Humanae Vitae* is the bedrock for the future of the human race or the human race has no future at all.

If anyone feels that I am overstating my case, I ask you to consider these facts: Europe is dying. All European countries are below the replacement level rate of 2.1 children per couple.

Italy and Spain vie for the lowest birthrate in Europe with 1.2 children per couple. Italy's present population of 55 million citizens will be reduced to 40 million by the year 2050 – and that with their present rate of immigration! By then, that is, in less than 50 years, all developed countries will average just one child per couple, assuring that their populations will decrease by half every two generations!

In the midst of these sobering statistics, can anyone explain the paradox that impoverished Third World nations are more than replacing themselves, while in all the developed nations, the higher the per-capita income, the lower the birth-rate? The United States is no exception. Without our influx of immigrants – both legal and illegal – our birthrate is only 1.7 children per couple. Aren't we First World Nations becoming like Israel of old, who in times of hardship were faithful to God but in times of prosperity repeatedly forgot the Lord? This passage from Deuteronomy is indicative of many others:

“Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and gold increase, and all you have is multiplied, then you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, that land of slavery.” (Dt 8:11-14)

John Paul II has been trying to alert the world of its suicidal behavior. On more than one occasion he has repeated that the future of civilization passes through the prism of the family. From 1979 to 1984 he made the theme of his Wednesday audience addresses what has come to be known as the Theology of the Body. The Holy Father began these talks in the book of Genesis: “God created man in his own image and likeness, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.”

I'd now like to elaborate this idea, which I briefly touched on in my pastoral letter. Since we have been created in God's own image, we are to reflect God's life in this world – we are to act in the same manner as he acts. Jesus came to reveal God's inner life to us: “No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is

always at the Father's side, came to reveal him." (Jn 1:18) Let's take a moment to examine God's inner life. (This is a mini course in Trinity 101.)

God is Pure Spirit. From all eternity, this Pure Spirit realizes who he is. Through this self-knowledge, God communicates himself to the eternal Concept that he conceives – the Word, as John names him in the Prologue of his Gospel. In conceiving this Word, God did not give just a part of himself, as a human father does with the sperm, or a human mother with the ovum. No, he gives his entire self to the Word that he conceives. So from all eternity, we have two separate Persons in one and the same being: the Conceiver/the Concept – the Thinker/the Thought – the Speaker/the Spoken Word – the Father/the Son.

From all eternity, the Father always loves the Son. From all eternity, the Son always loves the Father. There was never an instant that they did not love each other. This mutual love between the Father and the Son is the third Person – the Holy Spirit. As we pray in the Creed every Sunday, "We believe in the Holy Spirit...who proceeds from the Father and the Son..."

Now then, we human beings have been called to imitate the inner love of the Trinity. God created us in his own image and likeness – male and female he created us, so that through the love embrace between husband and wife, we can do what not even the angels on high can do. We can procreate – that is, we become partners with God in creation! Unless husband and wife come together in mutual love as a total offering of self to each other, God will not create the immortal soul that forms part of the unique person destined to live in his love forever. How awesome! This is what our Holy Father is challenging us to live up to with his teaching on the theology of the body.

Against this backdrop, one comes to realize the evil of contraception. Nothing strikes a deeper blow to the fullness of human reality than contraception. All that is human – all human endeavors, the ordering of cultures, the make-up of the Church, even the promise of heaven itself – flows from conception. Conception is the foundation upon which all else is built. Once the foundation is destroyed, as it largely has been, all human structures will ultimately crumble. The Father has ordered the whole cosmos as a garden for man, so that through us, he may extend his love and incorporate countless members of the human family into the Trinitarian embrace. This is the authentic, beautiful purpose of human sexuality.

In my Pastoral Letter on Marriage, I say basically the same thing in more prosaic terms. I quote from Section 8: "Since God fashioned our bodies male and female to communicate both life and love, every time that husband and wife deliberately frustrate this twofold purpose through contraception, they are acting out a lie. The body language of the marital act says, "I'm all yours," but the contraceptive device adds, "except for my fertility." So in actual fact, they are lying to each other with their bodies. Even worse, they are tacitly usurping the role of God. By thwarting the purpose of the marital love embrace, they are telling God, "You may have designed our bodies to help you transmit life to an immortal soul, but you made a mistake – a mistake we intend to correct. You may be the Lord of our lives – but not of our fertility."

Some people who read my pastoral letter mentioned how helpful they found the analogy I used in the pastoral, where I likened contraceptives in sexual communication to earplugs and mouth muzzles in verbal communication. This analogy dates back to the mid-1970s when I was preparing couples for marriage. To encourage couples to take NFP classes, I would innocently ask them: "I'd like to pose an example for your comments. Let's say that a husband is excitedly telling his wife about an incident that took place at work, when she opens a drawer, takes out two wads of cotton and without saying a word – jams them into her ears. What's that action communicating to her husband?" – "Gee, Father Vic, she's telling him to get lost. She's bored." – "Precisely, but in a manner that's abnormal. The normal person that wants silence simply asks for it: 'Honey, I've got a splitting headache right now. Could we continue this conversation later on?'"

"Now then, the same scenario, except this time, the wife is all ears, hanging on her husband's every word. Without warning, her husband muffles his mouth with both hands while he continues speaking. Puzzled, his wife asks, 'What's wrong? Are you feeling nauseated?' – No, he's feeling perfectly fine. He just does not want his wife to understand what he's saying. Again, what do make of this behavior?" – "Fr. Vic, it's even weirder. It can't happen unless the man has flipped." – "You're right! It's abnormal behavior. Again, the normal person who wants silence asks for it: 'Darling, I have a terrible rasp in my throat. Could we talk about this later?'"

I'd then tell the couples: "Isn't it strange? When it comes to verbal communication, we consider blocking one's ears or muffling one's mouth abnormal behavior – and rightly so. Yet in sexual communication we've come to accept the lie that it's the most natural thing in the world. For what else is a diaphragm or the Pill or a condom than the deliberate attempt to block the finality of the sexual union? And if you question the appropriateness of my analogy, when you get home, please check out the first meaning of intercourse in your dictionary. It means an exchange of ideas. The Bible uses the verb to know as a euphemism for sexual relations. And to this day, to conceive refers to both verbal as well as sexual conception."

To reinforce my message, I'd now like to quote from an interview that was conducted last week with Professor Janet Smith, who made the blockbuster tape, "Contraception: Why Not?" The interviewer began by asking Professor Smith, "Do you see any connection between the rejection of the Church's teaching on contraception and the push for homosexual marriages?"

Smith: Not so many years ago, at a conference on homosexuality, Russell Hittinger argued that there is not much ground for opposing homosexual marriages in a culture where most unions are contraceptive. He said we were already blessing unions whose primary reason for existence was sexual pleasure.

Rather than the Christian and common sense view that sex belongs within marriage between a male and a female committed to each other for life and open to children, our culture thinks that sex is quite simply for pleasure. And thus

almost any combination of consenting individuals may morally seek that pleasure without any commitment, and without openness to children.

The interviewer went on to ask Professor Smith, “Dissent from the Church's teaching on contraception is still widespread. How has that changed dating and courtship over the last 40 years?”

Smith: There basically is no such thing as dating and courtship except in the smallest of religious circles. Now there is “coupling” and “hooking up” and “living together,” but little really careful selection of dating partners followed by a slow and careful process of getting to know the other and to let oneself be known.

The pattern of marriages in the United States is often something like this: multiple sexual partners before marriage; a two- or three-year period of cohabitation, all the while contracepting; two or three years of contracepted sex after marriage; suspending with contraception for a short period of time in order to conceive the first child; return to contraception; suspending contraception to conceive the second child; then the wife or husband gets sterilized; then they get divorced.”

In the midst of the moral chaos surrounding us, we must not lose hope. Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* and John Paul's “Theology of the Body” are the foundation on which to build for the future. I am encouraged by some bright signs of hope that are surfacing. As just one instance, I'd like to quote from an e-mail that I received from a young physician by the name of Damon Cudihy.

“On the feast of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, November 13, 2002, I was scheduled to give a noon conference on the scientific foundations of the Creighton model of Natural Family Planning to the Ob/Gyn department at Shands Hospital in Gainesville...Six months earlier, this same department had accused me...of exhibiting a serious lack of professionalism for refusing to provide Spanish translation for post-partum ‘contraception counseling’ ...

“As a medical student, this was the first presentation that I would be giving not to my peers but to my professional superiors, a group of residents and attending physicians...Had the topic been completely unrelated to any moral issues, I would have been intimidated by such an audience. Given that the topic I would present completely contradicted the attitudes and practices of these well-respected physicians, I knew that only God's grace would carry me through the hour without being thrown out of the room. As I prepared the projectors...I overheard comments mocking Christian physicians. I then realized that without God's assistance, I was helpless.

“To my great disbelief, the presentation was amazingly well received. I received nothing but compliments, gratitude, and encouragement. Several of the physicians even stated that this was the first they had ever heard of such extensive scientific research in the field of NFP. Others commented that the information I presented would help them in the care of their patients. With my lack of skill and

inexperience in public speaking, the success was clearly the result of divine intervention...”

There's a lesson for all of us in Damon Cudihy's moving example. Let us always be prepared to speak the truth with love. And never let us be reluctant to defend the culture of life for fear of being mocked – or alleging that we're not professionals. All of us can do something, however insignificant: passing on a positive piece of information to that co-worker contemplating a vasectomy, or mailing an appropriate pamphlet to your grandson who is thinking about moving in with his girlfriend. On a personal note, after working on my pastoral letter for a few days, I was tempted to abort the effort for fear that I might be labeled a reactionary. Recall what St. Paul told the Galatians, “If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”(Gal. 1:10)

I would like to conclude with two anecdotes. The first took place last spring at a parish presentation for NFP in my diocese of St. Augustine. During the refreshment break, I chatted with the Shannons who had done a masterful job relating what NFP had done for their marriage. They are the parents of two children, Kaven, age 3, and Hannah, just six months old. During our conversation I asked, “Tell me, did Kaven become jealous when Hannah came along, since he was no longer in center stage?” Ken said to his wife, “Shelley, tell the bishop what Kaven said when we asked him what he wanted for his birthday.” Shelley beamed as she related, “Kaven said, ‘I want another Hannah.’” I was reminded of what John Paul said in an audience last year: “Deprive your children of anything except another brother or sister.”

The second anecdote is quite personal. It never took place, since it's based on a fantasy. I'm sure most of you have heard of the movie genre “Back to the Future,” where the protagonist – fully aware of how his life has evolved – is permitted to return to his youth in order to alter certain incidents, if he chooses. With that in mind, I would like to create a fictitious back-to-the future scenario with myself as the protagonist.

I am the fifth of six children. The youngest is my sister, Rose Marie – three years my junior. I grew up at the tail end of the Great Depression. Money was tight. One Christmas I recall that Santa redelivered the previous year's toys under a fresh coat of enamel paint.

This December, I'll be ordained forty-three years – years filled with immense happiness and unimaginable joys. Looking back, I cannot conceive of myself being anything other than a priest. For me, life would not be worth living.

Now then, let's pretend that the Depression had lasted a decade longer. Let's further pretend that I am permitted to return to the year 1937 when I was just two years old – fully realizing all the joys that life has in store for me as a priest. Let's say that an angel appears to me one night with the message: “Victor, God wants you to make an important decision. Your sister Rose Marie is about to be conceived. If she's born, your parents will never be able to send you off to college, and consequently, you'll never be able to study for the priesthood. If

she's not born, you will be able to fulfill your dreams as a priest. Now then – what is your answer?"

Fantasy or reality – my answer would have been the same. I would have told the angel: "Though I cannot imagine myself as anything other than a priest, still, I am willing to give all that up and more, provided that I won't be deprived of my beautiful sister Rose Marie. My answer is: Let her be conceived!"

My good friends, we stand at the threshold of a formidable era – an era that will be dominated either by the culture of life or the culture of death. The culture of death is suicidal, because it views children as mere commodities, competing for the disposable wealth available. The culture of life is nurturing, because it views children as irreplaceable treasures – blessings from a loving heavenly Father. Our task appears daunting. But we have nothing to fear, provided that we continue to heed the voice of Peter, the Rock, speaking out fearlessly through his successors, like Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*, and John Paul II in his "Theology of the Body."