

ARTICLE 28

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

Marriage a gift from God

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Marriage – *Humanae Vitae*

Humanae Vitae did not teach anything new

As stated in my last article I am now going to delve into what has become one of the most controversial topics in recent Church history, that is, the encyclical *'Humanae Vitae'* and the after effects of its release to the world in July 1968. At the outset it is very interesting to note that *'Humanae Vitae'* did not teach anything new to the Church or to the world at large and therefore if we desire to understand the controversy we need to look at what happened after its release rather than just at the contents of the document itself.

There is a need for me to make a couple of provisos before we get down to brass tacks on this most interesting and divisive of subjects the main one being that, in dealing with this encyclical and the reaction to its release here in Ireland, I am not going to name any names. I have a few reasons for this decision to which I have given a lot of thought.

Avoiding the Blame Game

Our human nature is fallen and we forget this at our peril. One of the consequences of this is that we are loath to take responsibility for the failures we come across in the world and we are constantly seeking to point the finger at others and to lay blame where we think that blame belongs rather than expending all of our efforts in identifying and correcting what causes the problems we come across. In the garden of Eden, when God sought out Adam and Eve to ask why they were hiding, Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent and so it has continued ever since. This is one of the reasons why I do not wish to give the names of certain individuals who had a bearing on what happened in Ireland after the release of *'Humanae Vitae'*. It would serve no purpose in trying to analyse our current situation and would in fact distract from it. I want to look at the actions of men rather than focus on who these men were, so that we can see more clearly the problems that have been caused by these actions with a view to outlining what the solution might be.

Detraction is a Sin

I am also very much aware that some of these men are still alive and that therefore there is the danger of committing the sin of detraction in their regard. I try to give the benefit of the doubt and I am sure that many of the actions that were taken in the wake of *'Humanae Vitae'* were taken with the best of intentions even though they were seriously misguided. I cannot judge the state of any man's soul and it is best to leave these judgements to God who is both just and merciful.

Let he who is without sin...

Another reason why I do not want to mention names is, that like the Pharisees who brought Mary Magdalene to Jesus, I too am not without sin. I abandoned my faith in my late teens and lived a sinful life very far away from God. Even today I fall into sin, thankfully not as frequently as heretofore, nevertheless I am not in a position to point my fingers at anyone for I have not yet managed to clear the log from my own eye and therefore I am not in a position to remove the splinter from my brother's eye. Thank God for the grace of the sacraments through which I may eventually become holy, God willing.

Correctly identifying the problem is the first step in fixing it

My purpose in dealing with this subject matter rather than with the individuals involved is that I believe that it is critical to understanding the decline in the faith in the western world and here in Ireland in particular, and I also believe that we will not arrest the decline in the faith until we first of all correctly identify the problem and then deal directly with that problem rather than simply try to deal with the after effects which is what we have been doing ever since '*Humanae Vitae*'.

Let me give a simple analogy by way of explanation. Suppose I arrive home with my family one day to find that the kitchen is flooded with water. We all get out our mops and begin mopping, eventually clearing up all of the water. But the next morning I discover to my horror that the kitchen is still flooded. Now I have a choice. I can buy bigger and better mops or I can decide that I need to find out where the water is coming from in order to resolve the problem.

Or supposing when we had arrived home that first time and started trying to mop up the water only to discover that the water was rising faster than we could mop it up. This would clearly indicate that there was probably a burst water main somewhere about the house and all efforts at mopping would be futile until the water main was fixed. What would people think if we just kept on mopping?

Seek the source of the problem

Sometimes this is how I feel about life as a Catholic in Ireland. We are great at buying and deploying mops but nobody seems to be looking for the real source of the problem. That the water main has burst in terms of faith practice in Ireland is obvious from the Irish Bishop's conference summary of data of the European Social Survey published by them in March 2011 and available from their website. It shows that of the 18 – 24 age group of Catholics in the republic of Ireland only 18.6% of them attend Mass weekly or more often. In other words 81.4% of our 18 – 24 year olds no longer practice their faith. In the 25 – 34 age cohort 23.4% attend Mass weekly or more often, that is, 76.6% of them no longer practice their faith.

We are haemorrhaging our Young

As these young people become parents this situation whereby the young people of Ireland are haemorrhaging from the Church will only get worse. We need to find the source of the problem if we are to correct it. The source cannot be God for He is perfect. The source cannot be the Catholic Church founded by Christ, for she too is perfect. It is my contention that the source of these problems which have led to this catastrophic decline in the practice of the faith and which is leading to a collapse in marriage and family life and therefore to a collapse in our society is none other than the sin of Adam and Eve, namely disobedience.

Disobedience to the Magisterium, damages the Church

In this case, disobedience to the magisterial teachings of the Catholic church with regard to marriage and family life as outlined in the encyclical '*Humanae Vitae*', is the leading cause of the collapse of the life of faith in our country, and this downward spiral, which is affecting all aspects of our Catholic life, will continue until once again we learn to be humble and to obey. Over the course of the next few articles I will make the case for this point of view in the hope that having identified the cause of our problems we may begin to fix that which is broken and to truly begin a new evangelisation in this once proud Catholic country of ours.

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