

## CANADIAN BISHOPS' STATEMENT ON THE ENCYCLICAL

### "HUMANAE VITAE"

(The text of the statement on Pope Paul VI's Encyclical Letter "Humanae Vitae," issued by the Bishops of Canada, Sept. 27, 1968, at their Plenary Assembly held at St. Boniface-Winnipeg, Canada).

Editor's note: please carefully read Paragraph #17, 25, 26 and 34. These paragraphs represent the most objectionable parts of the Statement, especially paragraph 26.

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1. Pope Paul VI in his recent encyclical "On Human Life" has spoken on a profound human problem as is clearly evidenced by the immediate and universal reaction to his message. It is evident that he has written out of concern and love, and in a spirit of service to all mankind. Conscious of the current controversy and deep differences of opinion as to how to harmonize married love and the responsible transmission of life, we, the Canadian bishops, offer our help to the priests and Catholic people believing it to be their pastoral duty.

#### I - Solidarity with the Pope

2. We are in accord with the teaching of the Holy Father concerning the dignity of married life, and the necessity of a truly Christian relationship between conjugal love and responsible parenthood. We share the pastoral concern which has led him to offer counsel and direction in an area which, while controverted, could hardly be more important to human happiness.

3. By divine commission clarification of these difficult problems of morality is required from the teaching authority of the Church(1). The Canadian Bishops will endeavor to discharge their obligation to the best of their ability. In this pursuit we are acting consistently with our recent submissions to the federal government on contraception, divorce and abortion, nor is there anything in those submissions which does not harmonize with the encyclical.

#### II - Solidarity with the Faithful

4. In the same spirit of solidarity we declare ourselves one with the People of God in the difficulties they experience in understanding, making their own, and living this teaching.

5. In accord with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the recent encyclical (2) recognizes the nobility of conjugal love which is "uniquely expressed and perfected through the marital act" (3). Many married people experience a truly agonizing difficulty in reconciling the need to express conjugal love with the responsible transmission of human life. (4)

6. This difficulty is recognized in deep sympathy and is shared by bishops and priests as counselors and confessors in their service of the faithful. We know that we are unable to provide easy answers to this difficult problem made more acute by the great variety of solutions proposed in an open society.

7. A clearer understanding of these problems and progress toward their solution will result from a

common effort in dialogue, research and study on the part of all, laity, priests and bishops, guided by faith and sustained by grace. To this undertaking the Canadian bishops pledge themselves.

### III - Christian Conscience and Divine Law

8. Of recent years many have entertained doubts about the validity of arguments proposed to forbid any positive intervention which would prevent the transmission of human life. As a result there have arisen opinions and practices contrary to traditional moral theology. Because of this many had been expecting official confirmation of their views. This helps to explain the negative reaction the encyclical received in many quarters. Many Catholics face a grave problem of conscience.

9. Christian theology regarding conscience has its roots in the teaching of St. Paul (5). This has been echoed in our day by Vatican II: "Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths." (6) "On his part man acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God for whom he was created" (7). The dignity of man consists precisely in his ability to achieve his fulfillment in God through the exercise of a knowing and free choice.

10. However this does not exempt a man from the responsibility of forming his conscience according to truly Christian values and principles. This implies a spirit of openness to the teaching of the church which is an essential aspect of the Christian's baptismal vocation. It likewise implies sound personal motivation free from selfishness and undue external pressure which are incompatible with the spirit of Christ. Nor will he succeed in this difficult task without the help of God. Man is prone to sin and evil and unless he humbly asks and gratefully receives the grace of God this basic freedom will inevitably lead to abuse.

### IV - Teaching Office of the Church

11. Belief in the Church which is the prolongation of Christ in the world, belief in the Incarnation, demands a cheerful readiness to hear that Church to whose first apostles Christ said: "He who hears you hears me" (8). True freedom of conscience does not consist, then, in the freedom to do as one likes, but rather to do as a responsible conscience directs.

12. Vatican Council II applies this concept forcefully. Christians "Therefore must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself and should be submissive towards the Church's teaching office which authentically interprets that law in the light of the gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love and impels it towards truly human fulfillment." ((9).

13. Today, the Holy Father has spoken on the question of morally acceptable means to harmonize conjugal love and responsible parenthood. Christians must examine in all honesty their reaction to what he has said.

14. The Church is competent to hand on the truth contained in the revealed word of God and to interpret its meaning. But its role is not limited to this function. In his pilgrimage to salvation, man achieves final happiness by all his human conduct and his whole moral life. Since the Church is man's guide in this pilgrimage, she is called upon to exercise her role as teacher, even in those matters which do not demand the absolute assent of faith.

15. Of this sort of teaching Vatican II wrote: "This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*. That is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme teaching service is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will" (10).

16. It follows that those who have been commissioned by the Church to teach in her name will recognize their responsibility to refrain from public opposition to the encyclical; to do otherwise would compound confusion and be a source of scandal to God's people. However, this must not be interpreted as a restriction on the legitimate and recognized freedom of theologians to pursue loyally and conscientiously their research with a view to greater depth and clarity in the teaching of the Church.

17. It is a fact that a certain number of Catholics, although admittedly subject to the teaching of the encyclical, find it either extremely difficult or even impossible to make their own all elements of this doctrine. In particular, the argumentation and rational foundation of the encyclical, which are only briefly indicated, have failed in some cases to win the assent of men of science, or indeed of some men of culture and education who share in the contemporary empirical and scientific mode of thought. We must appreciate the difficulty experienced by contemporary man in understanding and appropriating some of the points of this encyclical, and we must make every effort to learn from the insights of Catholic scientists and intellectuals, who are of undoubted loyalty to Christian truth, to the Church and to the authority of the Holy See. Since they are not denying any point of divine and Catholic faith nor rejecting the teaching authority of the Church, these Catholics should not be considered or consider themselves, shut off from the body of the faithful. But they should remember that their good faith will be dependent on a sincere self-examination to determine the true motives and grounds for such suspension of assent and on continued effort to understand and deepen their knowledge of the teaching of the Church.

18. The difficulties of this situation have been felt by the priests of the Church, and by many others. We have been requested to provide guidelines to assist them. This we will endeavor to accomplish in a subsequent document. We are conscious that continuing dialogue, study and reflection will be required by all members of the Church in order to meet as best we can the complexities and exigencies of the problem.

19. We point out that the particular norms which we may offer will prove of little value unless they are placed in the context of man's human and Christian vocation and all of the values of Christian marriage. This formation of conscience and this education in true love will be achieved only by a well balanced pastoral insistence upon the primary importance of love which is human, total, faithful and exclusive as well as generously faithful (11).

#### V - Preliminary Pastoral Guidance

20. For the moment, in conformity with traditional Christian morality, we request priests and all who may be called to guide or counsel the consciences of others to give their attention to the following considerations.

21. The pastoral directives given by Pope Paul VI in the encyclical are inspired by a positive sacramental approach. The Eucharist is always the great expression of Christian love and union. Married couples will always find in this celebration a meeting place with the Lord which will never fail

to strengthen their own mutual love. With regard to the sacrament of penance the spirit is one of encouragement both for penitents and confessor and avoids both extremes of laxity and rigorism.

22. The encyclical suggests an attitude towards the sacrament of penance which is at once less juridical, more pastoral and more respectful of persons. There is real concern for their growth, however slow at times, and for the hope of the future.

23. Confession should never be envisaged under the cloud of agonizing fear or severity. It should be an exercise in confidence and respect of consciences. Paul VI invited married couples to "...have recourse with humble perseverance to the mere; of God, which is poured forth in the Sacrament of Penance' (1 ). Confession is a meeting between a sincere conscience and Christ Our Lord who was "indeed intransigent with evil, but merciful towards individuals" (13)

24. Such is the general atmosphere in which the confessor and counsellor must work. We complete the concept with a few more particular applications.

25. In the situation we described earlier in this statement (par. 17) the confessor or counsellor must show sympathetic understanding and reverence for the sincere good faith of those who fall in their effort to accept some point of the encyclical.

26. Counsellors may meet others who, accepting the teaching of the Holy Father, find that because of particular circumstances they are involved in what seems to them a clear conflict of duties, e.g., the reconciling of conjugal love and responsible parenthood with the education of children already born or with the health of the mother. I accord with the accepted principles of moral theology, if these persons have tried sincerely but without success to pursue a line of conduct in keeping with the given directives, they may be safely assure that, whoever honestly chooses that course which seems right to him does so in good conscience.

27. Good pastoral practice for other and perhaps more difficult cases will be developed in continuing communication among bishops, priests and laity, and in particular in the document we have promised to prepare. In the meantime we earnestly solicit the help of medical scientists and biologists in their research into human fertility. While it would be an illusion to hope for the solution of all human problems through scientific technology, such research can bring effective help to the alleviation and solution of problems of conscience in this area.

## VI - Invitation to Social Pastoral Action

28. The whole world is conscious of the growing preoccupation with the social impact of all men's thoughts, words and actions. Sexuality in all its aspects is obviously an area of the greatest human and social impact. The norms and values which govern this so vital human concern merit the attention and cooperation of all. Our world evolves at a frightening rate, creating at once a vivid sense of unity and a set of conflicting forces which could destroy us.

29. This concern will be fruitful only if it leads all of us to recognize our true human worth in the possession of our inner powers by which we are distinctively ourselves with the full recognition of our complementary sexual differences on the physical, the psychological and the spiritual plane. Only in this manner will we achieve marriages that are truly unions of love in the service of life.

30. To this end there must be brought into play all the positive forces of the family, the school, the state,

the Church. No one may stand aloof, nor are there really national boundaries in a matter of such universal application. With this in mind we call on all members of the Church to realize on every level from the very youngest to the various possibilities of adult education.

31. Without wishing to specify in detail we single out for special mention a few aspects which may have richer possibilities. We place first the dialogue and cooperation, which have been so encouraging, among all members of the Church and, through the ecumenical movement with other Churches.

32. We note with deep satisfaction the spread and strength of so many activities calculated to prepare for marriage or to deepen the appreciation of married persons of this sublime state. For example, marriage preparation courses, family apostolates, discussion groups, etc.

33. Educators, too, are to be commended for their growing attention to the question. Everywhere the problem of sex education and family life is being studied. And this education is happily being deepened by scientific research and diffused through the creative use of mass media. Nothing less than this mobilization of all human forces will suffice to meet the challenge of divisive and destructive forces which begin deep in the willful selfishness of man and inhibit the true expression of his love. We pledge ourselves to the pastoral priority of encouraging and promoting these programs whenever and wherever possible.

34. We conclude by asking all to pray fervently that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide his Church through all darkness and suffering. We, the People of God, cannot escape this hour of crisis but there is no reason to believe that it will create division and despair. The unity of the Church does not consist in a bland conformity in all ideas, but rather in a union of faith and heart, in submission to God's will and a humble but honest and ongoing search for the truth. That unity of love and faith is founded in Christ and as long as we are true to Him nothing can separate us. We stand in union with the Bishop of Rome the successor of Peter, the sign and contributing cause of our unity with Christ and with one another. But this very union postulates such a love of the Church that we can do no less than to place all of our love and all of our intelligence at its service. If this sometimes means that in our desire to make the Church more intelligible and more beautiful we must, as pilgrims do, falter in the way or differ as to the way, no one should conclude that our common faith is lost or our loving purpose blunted. The great Cardinal Newman once wrote: "Lead kindly light amidst the encircling gloom We believe that the Kindly Light will lead us to a greater understanding of the ways of God and the love of man."

#### FOOTNOTES

- (1) On Human Life, n. 4 & 18
- (2) On Human Life, n. 8
- (3) The Church Today, n. 49
- (4) The Church Today, n. 51
- (5) Rom. 14:23 and I Cor. 10
- (6) The Church Today, n. 16
- (7) On Religious Freedom, n. 3; the Church Today, nn. 16, 17
- (8) Luke 10:16 (9) Const. on the Church, n. 50
- (10) Constitution on the Church, n. 25
- (11) On Human Life, n. 9
- (12) On Human Life, n. 25
- (13) On Human Life, n. 29