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On Human Life: Humanae Vitae

"His genius proved prophetic: he had the courage to stand against the majority, to defend moral discipline, to exercise a 'brake' on the culture, to oppose present and future neo-Malthusianism."

—Pope Francis

Revisiting the most controversial and prescient encyclical of the modern age...

Pope Paul VI On Human Life

Humanae Vitae

Foreword by Mary Eberstadt

Afterword by James Hitchcock

Postscript by Jennifer Fulwiler

Ignatius



Synopsis

The papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (On Human Life) made headlines worldwide. Many talked about the encyclical when it was issued in 1968, but few actually read it. Why is it perhaps the most controversial document in modern Church history? *On Human Life* combines *Humanae Vitae* with commentary by popular and respected Catholic authors Mary Eberstadt, James Hitchcock, and Jennifer Fulwiler in order to address this question and to shed light on the document's enduring wisdom. *Humanae Vitae* is Pope Paul VI's explanation of why the Catholic Church rejects contraception. The pope referred to two aspects, or meanings, of human sexuality—the unitive and the procreative. He also warned of the consequences if contraception became widely practiced—consequences that have since come to pass: greater infidelity in marriage, confusion regarding the nature of human sexuality and its role in society, the objectification of women for sexual pleasure, compulsory government birth control policies, and the reduction of the human body to an instrument of human manipulation. The separation of sexuality from its dual purpose has also resulted in artificial reproduction technologies, including cloning, that threaten the dignity of the human person. Although greeted by controversy and opposition, *Humanae Vitae* has continued to influence Catholic moral teaching. St. John Paul II's popular "theology of the body" drew deeply on the insights of Paul VI. Pope Benedict and now Pope Francis have upheld the long-standing teaching, and a new generation of Catholics, as well as non-Catholics, is embracing the truths of the encyclical.

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Customer Reviews

Pope Paul VI led the Catholic Church from 1963 until his death in 1978. The former Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, he succeeded Pope John XXIII and oversaw the Second Vatican Council, bringing it to completion in 1965. In October, 2014, Pope Francis beatified Paul VI, the first step toward his recognition as a saint. Mary Eberstadt, author of *Adam and Eve after the Pill*, is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and a consulting editor of *Policy Review*. Her writing has been published in *First Things*, the *Weekly Standard*, the *Claremont Review of Books*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *National Review*. Jennifer Fulwiler, author of *Something Other Than God*, chronicles her experiences of faith and family life on her popular blog, *ConversionDiary.com*. Her articles have appeared in *America*, *Our Sunday Visitor*, and *National Review Online*. James Hitchcock is a professor emeritus of history at St. Louis University. He received his master's and doctoral degrees at Princeton University. His books include *The Supreme Court and Religion in American Life*, *Catholicism and Modernity*, and *History of the Catholic Church*.

This is a fresh look at a Church Document that has no doubt been surrounded by controversy. The cover itself indicates this. This new look with new commentators (one of whom, Jennifer Fulwiler, is a convert from atheism and a necessary read: A *Something Other Than God: How I Passionately Sought Happiness and Accidentally Found It*) comes to us from Ignatius Press only days after the man, whose name has been attached to it all along, was beatified on October 19, 2014 and who is now considered and called "Blessed" by the Universal Church. It's been a long time coming since Janet E. Smith produced a precursor to this back in 1987: A *Humanae Vitae: A Challenge to Love*. What are we to make of this? So much has been said about this Church Document, taught in terms of it, referenced in condemnation of it, all of which has influenced, or maybe better prejudiced, society to the extent that to just hear the words of the Latin title is to evoke a stream of negative reactions. This condemnation has reached beyond the document to the person behind it. It is unfortunate, that being seen in such a negative light, many people fail to realize the positive aspects and teaching of the document. But now that this man has been fully recognized as a saintly man of heroic virtue, called "genius" "prophet" and "courageous" by Pope Francis, doesn't his work deserve a similar recognition and attention as the writings of other saints? How many times have we known others who, having truly fallen in love, having found their soul-mate, having settled down, and in doing so have realized, or let surface, their desire for family life, children, and also the Kingdom of God, in their search for happiness and in their longing to fulfill this? In this very brief document, one can find the beginnings of a map for life, and a host of positive ideas that we can hold as ideals. For instance, children in today's world can often be seen so negatively. Yet, that is far from the way that

they are presented in Church Teaching, something we can all profit from. Fertility and children were intended as a blessing from the beginning. Yes, we all know children who came about as complete surprises! And yes, children can thwart our plans, but we must ask ourselves, "Who created this child?" Ourselves or God? "Who are we living for?" Ourselves or God? "What are we living for?" Fruit or goods that will eventually perish or those that will endure to eternal life? God has not created us to live as families only for a number of decades here, but forever! Think of the happiness involved that we are called to share in as families! A few years ago, in a newsletter I received from Dr. Scott Hahn's St. Paul's Center for Biblical Theology; there was a short study of the readings from the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B, where it was mentioned how, in the Gospel (Mk 10:2-16), Jesus moves from a debate about marriage to the blessing of children. The conclusion, it says, is: "Children are the blessing the Father bestows on couples who walk in his ways, as we sing in today's Psalm [Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6]." The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium Et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council (see also: *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Vatican Council II)) instructs that "Children, as active members of the family, contribute in their own way to the holiness of their parents" (n. 48), i.e., each child is custom-made by God for his or her parents--custom-made for the individual growth that each parent needs. Can we then conclude from this that a marriage is working because we see children? Hardly! But it is a good indicator. We must also remember that having children is something that is supposed to be done responsibly. In his encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI, in the opening paragraph stated, "The most serious duty of transmitting human life, for which married persons are the 'free' and 'responsible' collaborators of God the Creator, has always been a source of great joys to them, even if sometimes accompanied by not a few difficulties and by distress" [Emphasis is mine]. He also added that, "At all times the fulfillment of this duty has posed grave problems to the conscience of married persons" and said that this is a matter that the Church could not ignore, since it was "a matter which so closely touches upon the life and happiness of men [and women]." Can something so controversial really lead to happiness? Is this A Challenge to Love as Janet Smith once claimed? Can it be, as the word "prescient" on the cover implies, Prophetic? Could there possibly be wisdom, food we do not know of, to be found here? What's to lose? It's such a short document. Why not see for yourself?

The classic work which restated the Church's position on sexuality and was the seen for Saint John Paul II great homilies on the Theology of the Body. Most definitely worth a read.

Every single person that professes to be pro life and pro woman should read and reflect on the encyclical Humane Vitae. So beautiful!

Everyone should read this from all faiths before making decisions on contraception in order to be informed about aspects of the issue not discussed in popular culture and main line media outlets. It is prophetic.

Every Catholic should read this. No. Every household should read this. Seriously and without prejudice.

Every Christian must read this very prophetic work from Blessed Paul VI.

Beautiful stating of the sanctity of Life.

Good book.

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