

## FIFTY YEARS AGO: RIGHT OR WRONG?

We know more now than we used to. Science has helped in a lot of areas. For example in the whole area of human DNA and how genetics is a truly significant part of each human life characterizing our uniqueness by a unique genetic string of characteristics which are mine and mine alone. Just what goes on in the human cell for instance? Intriguingly every single cell in the human body, billions of them—heart cells, skin cells, eye cells each has 46 chromosomes on which are all the genes of the body. Each cell, no matter how small, no matter what kind of cell, has 46 chromosomes. Each cell. Except one particular kind of cell. One in the male of the species. One in the female. In the male the sperm cell has only 23 chromosomes. In the female the egg cell has only 23 chromosomes. Our bodies take care of doing this in each person. Every egg cell. 23 chromosomes. Every sperm cell 23 chromosomes. It is not possible to put two male sperm cells together each with 23 chromosomes and make a new cell of 46 chromosomes. The same is true in the egg cell of the female. No two egg cells can be put together to make a new cell of 46 chromosomes. BUT, we all know that the egg cell and the sperm cell CAN come together and make a new cell, a new living unique genetic reality. We call that conception. It is the beginning of human life.

The design of man and woman by the Creator God is that conception, the creation of a new human life, is to take place in this way, via the union of man and woman. In particular, this man and this woman who have pledged, promised and vowed to live with and for each other for the rest of their lives. This is the revealed Old Testament teaching about marriage and it is the revealed New Testament teaching about marriage. Jesus perfected and transformed many things but he did not alter the basic design of marriage. He affirmed it. And so has the Catholic Church down through the centuries.

Fifty years ago last Wednesday Pope Paul VI issued a papal encyclical entitled Humanae Vitae, Of Human Life. It had been eagerly awaited for many reasons but also because in the mid 1960's each of the major Protestant denominations in the world had changed their teachings about birth control, artificial contraception, human sexuality and family planning. The whole world waited to see what the Catholics would do. There was even an Advisory Board of bishops, priests, religious and married Catholic men and women. And in the politics of that day—and this day—there were leaks of the reports before the final document was published all designed to put pressure on Pope Paul to align with the other Christian churches. Many, many Catholics believed and many, many Catholics were afraid that the Church was going to change her teaching in this area especially because of the emergence of the Birth Control Pill, as it was known.

Pope Paul VI tried to affirm the constant teaching of the Catholic Church for 1900 years. There were a couple of key points in the encyclical. There are two fundamental aspects of sexuality in marriage, the unitive and the procreative. Marriage is about life—life between man and woman, life in family, life in society and life everlasting. All those areas of life are part of human life. Pope Paul acknowledged that science had arrived at the point where it was now possible to separate these two dimensions from each other. One dimension, the procreative or life-creating dimension could be placed to the side or even eliminated altogether. But is this a good thing to do, a moral thing to do? This would leave just the unitive dimension of sexuality—it would be sexual expression intended to enhance the uniting but not the life-giving elements of sexual interaction of spouses. Paul VI understood that reasoning but also realized that if the two were separated then neither of them would flourish even though it looked like they would. The double helix of unity and procreation are inevitably intertwined. Rather than enhancing marital fidelity separating the unity and procreative aspects would do something else.

He spoke knowingly of the mindset of the man and these were his words: “Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to the woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.” That was 1968. Fifty years ago. Think Harvey Weinstein. Think Bill Cosby.

Think Matt Lauer. Think Bill O'Reilly. And the list goes on and on. This is actually what has happened many times.

Paul VI was a prophetic voice that was shouted down at the time. Look at what has been unleashed on our world in the 50 years since he wrote about the effect of contraception on our culture, our world—abortion on demand almost everywhere in the world. Broken marriages at a rate never before seen in the history of the world. Rampant sexual disease that no one wants to speak about. A pornographic culture that touches every family, every home, every life in some way. Wariness, mistrust and even animosity between men and women rather than genuine care. And unless I am greatly mistaken even with all the strides and advancements of some women in the market place I see an awful lot of women being reduced to mere instruments by way too many men.

Can it really be that Jesus has nothing to say in this most significant area of our human lives! There is a message of Jesus that applies in this area. His message has been discarded. There was a Sexual Revolution in the late 1960's. Basically it espoused two convictions. The highest good in relational life was the ecstatic moment in sex. There was no human good more important than that. Secondly, every man and woman has a right to this sexual pleasure—no matter their circumstances. They were the two tenets of the Sexual Revolution. Before this that is not how most men and women thought. Ask yourself if that is pretty much how an awful lot of men and women you know think about this issue today. AND there was a corollary: anything you can do to bring about these two realities is pretty much allowable and okay. Even good. Even moral. Even if it contradicts what the Creator God has established and designed. Even if it contradicted what Jesus affirmed and taught. The Sexual Revolution chooses to ignore what God has designed and chosen to replace it with what we humans are able to do. The message of Jesus Christ never does this, never teaches this, and never embraces this.

I do have several regrets in all of this and one is that the bishops and pastors of the Church did not do a better job of listening to the wives and husbands and families about their issues and struggles in the area of human sexuality in marriage. That there were not much better efforts made to work in harmony with couples to find ever more effective and moral ways to integrate both the procreative and unitive dimensions of our sexuality. That was surely a missed opportunity but the need is still real. Too many pastors and bishops lacked courage and lacked trust.

My friends, with regard to the so-called Sexual Revolution, we have been sold a bill of goods. The Sexual Revolution was a lie. Is a lie. The greatest good is not sexual ecstasy which is a good thing. God-given and God designed. But the greatest good is not just an ecstatic moment but authentic love, loving friendship, familial love, faithful love. And those things are not easy in a world where sin so often undermines and corrupts. But we who believe in Jesus have to keep our wits about us in all of this because our culture has lost its way. Our Church has its greatness and she has her flaws but other than the Catholic Church do you see anything that raises an alternative voice or puts forth a different viewpoint? Do you see our world, our country, our culture growing more wise, more caring, more humble? Or something else?

Humanae Vitae wasn't popular but it was right. It was true. It still is. It needed to go farther. It needed to do more. But if we have been sold a bill of goods then isn't it in our best interests to recognize that, rethink, recalculate and make the necessary course corrections in the way we look at our sexuality? If our GPS systems have to recalculate from time to time because of a wrong road taken then what about us. I think it's time. Maybe that which is most efficient isn't the best thing for us. Maybe we have to stop settling for the easy way and the short cut in the most important areas of our lives and do the moral thing and the right thing and do things the right way. The Lord Jesus left us the Eucharist for precisely moments such as these. It will provide you with the true nourishment you need to live His way. Let us turn to Him once again and ask his help.