

Church's Position on Transmission of Life

Pope John Paul II

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF WEDNESDAY, 22 AUGUST [1984]

Pope John Paul, at the 22 August general audience in St Peter's Square, continued his reflections on the encyclical "Humanae Vitae" of Paul VI regarding the Church's teaching on the transmission of life in marriage.

The following is our translation of the Pope's address.

1. What is the essence of the Church's doctrine concerning the transmission of life in the conjugal community, of that doctrine of which we are reminded by the pastoral Constitution of the Council *Gaudium et Spes*, and by the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Pope Paul VI?

The problem consists in maintaining an adequate relationship between what is defined as "domination...of the forces of nature" (HV 2), and the "mastery of self " (HV 21) which is indispensable for the human person. Modern man shows a tendency to transfer the methods proper to the former to those of the latter. "Man has made stupendous progress in the domination and rational organization of the forces of nature," we read in the encyclical, "to the point that he is endeavoring to extend this control over every aspect of his own life—over his body, over his mind and emotions, over his social life, and even over the laws that regulate the transmission of life" (HV 2).

This extension of the sphere of the means of "domination of the forces of nature" menaces the human person for whom the method of "self-mastery" is and remains specific. The mastery of self corresponds to the fundamental constitution of the person; it is indeed a "natural" method. On the contrary, the resort to artificial means destroys the constitutive dimension of the person. It deprives man of the subjectivity proper to him and makes him an object of manipulation.

Meaning of "language of the body"

2. The human body is not merely an organism of sexual reactions. But it is, at the same time, the means of expressing the entire man, the person, which reveals itself by means of the language of the body. This language has an important interpersonal meaning, especially in reciprocal relationships between man and woman. Moreover, our previous analyses show that in this case the language of the body

should express, at a determinate level, the truth of the sacrament. Participating in the eternal plan of love ("sacrament hidden in God"), the language of the body becomes a kind of prophetism of the body.

It may be said that the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* carries to the extreme consequences, not merely logical and moral, but also practical and pastoral, this truth concerning the human body in its masculinity and femininity.

Sacramental and personal dimension

3. The unity of the two aspects of the problem—the sacramental (or theological) dimension and the personalistic one—corresponds to the overall revelation of the body. From this derives also the connection of the strictly theological vision with the ethical one, which appeals to the natural law.

The subject of the natural law is man, not only in the "natural" aspect of his existence, but also in the integral truth of his personal subjectivity. He is shown to us, in revelation, as male and female, in his full temporal and eschatological vocation. He is called by God to be a witness and interpreter of the eternal plan of love, by becoming the minister of the sacrament which from the beginning was constituted by the sign of the union of flesh.

4. As ministers of a sacrament which is constituted by consent and perfected by conjugal union, man and woman are called to express that mysterious language of their bodies in all the truth which is proper to it. By means of gestures and reactions, by means of the whole dynamism, reciprocally conditioned, of tension and enjoyment—whose direct source is the body in its masculinity and its femininity, the body in its action and interaction—by means of all this, man, the person, "speaks."

Man and woman carry on in the language of the body that dialogue which, according to Genesis, chapter 2, vv.24, 25, had its beginning on the day of creation. Precisely on the level of this language of the body—which is something more than mere sexual reaction and which, as authentic language of the persons, is subject to the demands of truth, that is, to objective moral norms—man and woman reciprocally express themselves in the fullest and most profound way possible to them. By the corporeal dimension of masculinity and femininity, man and woman express themselves in the measure of the whole truth of the human person.

5. Man is precisely a person because he is master of himself and has self-control. Indeed, insofar as he is master of himself he can give himself to the other. And it is this dimension—the dimension of the liberty of the gift—which becomes essential and decisive for that language of the body, in which man and woman reciprocally express themselves in the conjugal union. Granted that this is communion of persons, the language of the body should be judged according to the criterion of truth. It is precisely this criterion which the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* recalls, as is confirmed by the passages quoted previously.

6. According to the criterion of this truth, which should be expressed in the language of the body, the conjugal act signifies not only love, but also potential fecundity. Therefore it cannot be deprived of its full and adequate significance by artificial means. In the conjugal act it is not licit to separate the unitive aspect from the procreative aspect, because both the one and the other pertain to the intimate truth of the conjugal act. The one is activated together with the other and in a certain sense the one by means of the other. This is what the Encyclical teaches (cf. HV 12). Therefore, in such a case the conjugal act, deprived of its interior truth because it is artificially deprived of its procreative capacity, ceases also to be an act of love.

7. It can be said that in the case of an artificial separation of these two aspects, a real bodily union is carried out in the conjugal act, but it does not correspond to the interior truth and to the dignity of personal communion: communion of persons. This communion demands that the language of the body be expressed reciprocally in the integral truth of its meaning. If this truth be lacking, one cannot speak either of the truth of self-mastery, or of the truth of the reciprocal gift and of the reciprocal acceptance of self on the part of the person. Such a violation of the interior order of conjugal union, which is rooted in the very order of the person, constitutes the essential evil of the contraceptive act.

Reflections on "sign"

8. The above-given interpretation of moral doctrine expressed in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* is situated against the vast background of reflections connected with the theology of the body. The reflections on "sign" in connection with marriage understood as a sacrament are of special validity for this interpretation. The essence of the violation which upsets the interior order of the conjugal act cannot be understood in a theologically adequate way, without the reflections on the theme of the concupiscence of the flesh.