

A Study of Humanae Vitae and Where We are Today

Dr. Bill Keimig -- 2024-10-10

INTRODUCTION: Dr Bill Keimig gave his 54th TASTE talk on St. Paul VI's encyclical Humanae Vitae (HV), on human life. As usual, Bill included a beautiful handout that will be referenced throughout this writeup - a link can be found at the talk webpage or [HERE](#). HV was not well received when it first came out, and to this day it remains controversial and badly misunderstood. Bill put it in the context of the larger church for us, in which it not only makes perfect sense, but also draws us to greater holiness.

HV is famous for teaching that artificial contraception is immoral in all circumstances. There are additional teachings to HV as well. Bill wanted to give HV a larger context. St. John Paul II gave us, among many things, the Theology of the Body. Theology of the Body gives us a positive context for HV, a sense of the simplicity of thought that creates a way to understand HV as the gift that it is to the church.

THREE QUESTIONS: Bill pointed us to the front page of his handout which he titled "Training Your Human Freedom for the Gift of Self." This title is probably not the title we expected for a talk on HV! The first section of the handout has three questions – 1) What is the most powerful thing a human being can do? 2) What is the next most powerful thing a human being can do? 3) And what is the next most powerful thing a human being can do? The answers in order are: 1) Accept the Father's invitation to save your soul. We are given self-determination to save ourselves, and the most powerful thing we can do with our freedom is to choose to allow God the Father to save our soul; 2) In some way, influence someone else's salvation; and 3) To bring forth a human life capable of salvation. Like angels, we are made in the image and likeness of God, but unlike them, we can procreate, and therefore we co-create with God.

THE LAW OF THE GIFT: Everything that gets us into trouble with HV is because we step outside the mentality that all is gift, and start deciding that we have rights to things. This is the context of HV: that all is gift, nothing is a right. The Theology of the Body is a simple teaching, that has lots of pieces, not because God is complex, but because we are and we make lots of messes that He has to sort out.

Theology of the Body comes down to one simple idea – the Law of the Gift. Everything in our Catholic faith comes down to the principle of seeing all as gift, and nothing as a right. Only then does the human soul relate properly to God. The Law of the Gift can be understood in the quote from Second Vatican Council's Gaudium et Spes: "[The human body] includes... the capacity of expressing love... in which the person becomes a gift and by means of this gift fulfills the meaning of his being and existence. Man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself." This is Vatican II's way of expressing this concept, prior to Theology of the Body, prior to HV, what would become John Paul II's Law of the Gift, in a consistency of church teaching. The Law of the Gift presumes we are not made for ourselves, we are not made to own ourselves, we are made to give ourselves away as the way we discover what it means to be human.

IMAGE AND LIKENESS: If we are made in God's image and likeness, how are we made? This is a question that is profound and deep, and yet the simple answer is God is a family of persons whose life is love. This is an invitation for us. God the Father pours Himself to the Son and to the Spirit in love. The Son, always in imitation of the Father, spends his entire being in pouring himself out in love to Father and to Spirit, and the Spirit exists as the principle of love between the Father and the Son, and pours Himself out to the Father and to the Son. The definition of the Trinity is a family of persons whose life is love, who exist in a state of absolute, unconditional self-gift. That is who God is. And out of an overflow of generosity, He decides to create. So, He creates many things, including human and angelic beings made in His image with free choice. We are made to find our joy, our fulfillment, our purpose, our being exactly the way God is, and He is self-gift in His own inner life. We exist for the joy of self-gift. We are made for self-gift. We find ourselves in self-gift, or we don't find ourselves. This is great news that the world wants to distract us from. In a materialistic culture, the world wants us to believe that life is about having, getting, wanting, as opposed to giving up, offering and sacrificing. The world addicts us to an illusory joy of taking, obsessed with what we can have, what we can get, what we can gain, not with what we can give, what we can offer and what we can sacrifice, which is how we are actually made to be happy. There is nothing about rule or dogma here, it is about joy. God knows how to make us happy, so does the Church following on God's lead, and happiness for the human being comes in the same form that it comes for God: God is given joy by self-gift, so are we, only in the context where all is gift. The Law of the Gift is firstly that all is a gift, nothing is a right. We are made to find ourselves by self-gift only. Everything else flows from that. Secondly, the Law of the Gift tells us we have purpose.

WE HAVE A PURPOSE: Self-gift is a calling, not just a preference, an opinion, a feeling or self-satisfaction. We are purposed, we have a particular mission. If we have a purpose (and our ultimate purpose is to get to heaven), then everything in our lives is about getting there in the most efficient way possible. If we do not have heaven as our goal, and just exist in the world, then the doctrines of the church become impediments, restrictions, that get in the way of our desires. If we do have a purpose, the doctrines enable our efforts. If we want to get to heaven, we want the surest, clearest way there, doctrine and the teachings of the church give us this clarity. Doctrine is enabling if we want to get to heaven, otherwise doctrine is a hindrance to our desires, dogma becomes a negative word.

KINGDOM BUILDING: Everything in God's plan has a purpose subordinate to the plan to get to heaven. A priestly vocation is a subordinate purpose to get to heaven. The vocation given means purpose given. The two sacraments of matrimony and priesthood are paired together as the sacraments at the service of building the kingdom. Their joint mission is to build up the kingdom by their gift of self. Though very different in their particulars, both are a purposed way of life. Both sacraments' missions are under the authority of the church who guides them to what their purpose is. Matrimony thrives because it exists in the mental state that everything is gift, nothing is right. We are not owed anything. The sacraments are for this life, for the Church Militant, they are combatants' tools. We have responsibilities and duties within the marriage; they are given as gift. The Law of the Gift devolves down to every detail of the Christian life, both how we exist within a marriage, and even prior to marriage. The state of bodily union with another person exists to foster the kingdom of God and to grow it. We are made in God's image and are given the example of what it means to be under authority, to be undistracted in purpose for giving life to another when someone else decides where we are led and how much we will suffer. The model for the priest is also the model for the spouse. Christ declared Himself not just the priest, but the bridegroom.

HUMANAE VITAE – IN CONTEXT: So much of the context discussed above is not understood by the world, and so HV is not understood. We are here as people who do not put our rights before our duties in the Church Militant. We are here as a self-gift, and we are not here to decide its terms or its timing, or its depth or its degree of sacrifice. In our handout, Bill gave us some examples of models to follow, people with the right heart set to accept what God offers. On the front page of the handout, we learn that to be made in the image and likeness of God means the body is good, sex is good, marriage is divinely missioned. Why is sacrifice necessary for love? It will not be so in heaven, but is required in the Church Militant because of sin. There is a whole section on the front page addressing this question, and it is all about deepening the relationship of the spouses within the marriage, about thinking about marriage in a different way. The heart of HV is on procreative (babies) and unitive (bonding) ideas.

Openness to life is about trust. Ultimately everything in faith is about trust. We are trusting an unknown future to a known God. Paul VI included a list of predictions in HV of what would happen to society if the teachings of HV were not followed. Many of these predictions have come to pass – a lowering of morality, increase in divorce rate, devaluation of women, increasing extra-marital affairs, increasing abortions, growing acceptance of euthanasia.

EVERYTHING BELONGS TO GOD: When we make pleasure our sole purpose, we distort the faith. Think of sleep and eating. The purpose of sleep is to rest. Too much sleep leads to sloth. The purpose of eating is to nourish the body. Too much eating leads to gluttony. When the purpose of an activity is lost, the activity leads to sin. Or when pleasure becomes the only purpose, it becomes sin. The purpose of sex is to bond and to procreate, and build up the kingdom of God. If we remove these purposes, and pleasure becomes the only goal, sex becomes a sin. For anything that is purposed by God, like sleeping, eating and sex, when we remove its purpose and seek only for its pleasure, it is a sin.

Every moment is God's, every moment is His gift, our next heartbeat, our next breath is His gift. The question is what do we do with that gift? Are we on target or are we distracted? All HV was saying in the mess of a culture that could not see it is that sex and marriage is no different than every other thing under the Law of the Gift. All has purpose.