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## POPE PAUL VI – PROPHETIC DIMENSION OF PONTIFICATE IN DIFFICULT TIMES

### Abstract

The article discusses Pope Paul VI's encyclicals *Eccelsiam suam* and *Humanae vitae* and their relevance for the Church teaching on moral principles concerning procreation, marital love and human sexuality. Pope Paul VI expressed his opposition to the corruption of morality and his words resonate with striking prophetic relevance. The Pope called for conversion and opening to Christ again by showing to the confused generation the joy of Christianity and Christ as the true source of happiness. His pontificate teaches us fidelity to the Gospel and to traditional Church teaching by reminding man's call to holiness.

**Keywords:** Paul VI, the Second Vatican Council, aggiornamento, Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, the moral decay, difficult time of the Church

## PAPIEŻ PAWEŁ VI – PROFETYCZNY WYMIAR PONTYFIKATU TRUDNYCH CZASÓW

### Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł omawia encykliki Pawła VI *Eccelsiam suam* i *Humanae vitae* i ich znaczenie w nauczaniu zasad moralnych Kościoła w odniesieniu do prokreacji, miłości małżeńskiej i seksualności człowieka. Papież Paweł VI wyraził swój sprzeciw wobec moralnego zepsucia, a jego słowa uderzają profetycznym charakterem. Nawoływał do nawrócenia i ponownego otwarcia się na Chrystusa poprzez ukazywanie zagubionemu pokoleniu radości chrześcijaństwa i Chrystusa jako źródła prawdziwej szczęśliwości. Jego pontyfikat jest lekcją wierności Ewangelii i tradycyjnemu nauczaniu Kościoła poprzez przypomnienie o powołaniu człowieka do zbawienia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** papież Paweł VI, Sobór Watykański II, *aggiornamento*, encyklika *Humanae vitae*, upadek moralności, trudne czasy Kościoła

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Giovanni Battista Montini<sup>2</sup> held his pontificate during particularly difficult times for the Church. It seems that John XXIII, who initiated the conciliar reforms, could, unlike his successor, enjoy fairly peaceful pontificate. Vivid discussions and polemics among the Fathers of *Vaticanum II*, even ferocious arguments between certain groups,<sup>3</sup> heralded the unavoidable twilight of the existing pastoral model and the end to a certain era in the Western Church. Despite that, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was going home to the Heavenly Father hoping for new horizons opening for the Church, which would bring *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* closer to people by way of finding a new, better language of discourse, more adequate for the challenges of modern times.

Those hopes were in a way left by John XXIII as a testament to the Council Fathers as well as to Montini who at that time served in the College of Cardinals and carefully observed the epochal discussions. What person was John XXIII's successor, what did he bring into the Church and what challenges he faced?

Paul VI stood at the helm of Peter's Boat during the Second Vatican Council which was opened in 1962. The task that Montini was facing was made even more challenging by the fact that the Council Fathers were far from unanimous on the direction that the "renewed" or, to use a term characteristic of the Council "modernised";<sup>4</sup> Church should take and the consequences of conciliar reforms could not easily be predicted.

On the one hand the "aggiornamento"<sup>5</sup> gave the Church Shepherds hopes for the breath of fresh air after years of fossilisation; on the other, it evoke doubts and reserve among conservative groups. There appeared voices of strong dissent, especially when the reforms begun to touch upon the sacred liturgy. Another issue that many bishops and cardinals objected to was the question of opening the Church to other religions and the problem of so-called ecumenical dialogue.

As controversies multiplied, some people thought that the Church, which they had known to stand firmly on traditional foundations, was starting to have its pillars shaken. Paul VI was fully aware of the great responsibility resting on his shoulders and how much the future Church's fate depended on his vigilance and consideration. John XXIII's successor carefully looked at the zeal and ardour of the younger, progressive generation of the Council Fathers to whom *Vaticanum II* was an opportunity to build a ministry deprived of historical remnants of the centuries;

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<sup>2</sup> Cardinal Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria Montini (born 26th September 1897 in Concesio, died 6<sup>th</sup> August 1978 in Castel Gandolfo).

<sup>3</sup> Those included: the conservative wing and the progressive wing also called *progressives* or *modernists*.

<sup>4</sup> An Italian word frequently used by the council fathers: *aggiornamento* (*it.*: modernisation, making sth contemporary, actualization; literally it means *adjusted to the present day*, derived from the Italian word *giorno* – *day*).

<sup>5</sup> *Aggiornamento*. In the contemporary catholic theology and publication, this term means ministerial tasks of the Second Vatican Council in relation to renewal of liturgy, organisation (the Canon Law), ecumenical relations, relation towards other religions and towards the contemporary civilization (*ABC chrześcijanina* 1999, 12).

a ministry oriented towards a return to the roots of Christianity. It could be that at that time Pope Paul VI foreknew, directed by the light of the Holy Spirit, that the Council could risk too audacious contravention of boundaries delimited throughout centuries, putting the Church in peril of leaving the proven and safe path. In the Encyclical *Eccelsiam suam*, issued soon after the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of conciliar deliberations in 1964, Pope Paul VI laid out the papal understanding of *aggiornamento*:

“We cannot forget Pope John XXIII’s word *aggiornamento* [see author’s annotation] which We have adopted as expressing the aim and object of Our own pontificate. Besides ratifying it and confirming it as the guiding principle of the Ecumenical Council, We want to bring it to the notice of the whole Church. It should prove a stimulus to the Church to increase its ever growing vitality and its ability to take stock of itself and give careful consideration to the signs of the times, always and everywhere ‘proving all things and holding fast that which is good’ with the enthusiasm of youth.” (Paul VI 1964, 50)

A few years later, in the homily delivered by Paul VI on June 29, 1972 to cardinals, diplomatic corps and the faithful in St Peter’s Basilica on the feast day of Sts Peter and Paul, and at the same time his 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary of election to the Throne of St Peter, he confirmed his earlier concerns he had during the turbulent conciliar deliberations. Unfortunately, the word spoken at the time by the Holy Father included a lot of bitterness and disappointment. According to eye witnesses’ words, he said with emotion:

“We get the impression that through some rift Satan has infiltrated God’s Church. It is doubt, uncertainty, questioning, anxiety, dissatisfaction, discussion. The Church is no longer trusted. Any first pagan ‘prophet’ who speaks in newspapers or through some social movement is trusted, and is followed by many people who request from him formulas for true life, people who at the same time are not aware that we already own those formulas!” (Paul VI 1972)

Further on in his homily the Pope recalls the issues of *Vaticanum II*:

“Also, there is an atmosphere of uncertainty within the Church. We should have expected that after the Council the sun would shine over the Church, but instead of the sun we have clouds, storms, darkness, searching, and uncertainty. We speak about ecumenism and yet we drift away even more each day. We open up chasms instead of bridging them! How could this happened?” (Paul VI 1972)

In his statement, the Pope officially admitted that the Church found itself in a great crisis as a result of incorrect perception of the Council and deformation of conciliar documents by the modernists.<sup>6</sup> Numerous bishops and priests noticed

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<sup>6</sup> The issue of modernism became vividly discussed during Pius X pontificate in particular.

this dramatic fact. Some of them, as for example Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, openly stated their dissent for the new, disastrous in their view, path that the Church took following the Second Vatican Council. Consequently, many priests conflicted with the Vatican by defending the existing pre-conciliar model.

John Paul II referred to the Pope Paul VI's memorable homily from 1972 by admitting Montini was right that the direction taken by the Church after the Second Vatican Council diverged from the Council Fathers' intentions:

“It must be realistically admitted, with deep and uneasy concern, that that many today's Christians feel lost, confused, insecure and even disappointed. Ideas that have been contrary to the Truth and always taught have proliferated; some true and real heresies in the dogmatic and moral sphere have dispersed raising doubts, confusion and revolts; the liturgy has been distorted. Laden in intellectual and moral relativism, therefore also in permissivism, the Christians are enticed by atheism, agnosticism, morally doubtful illuminism, sociological Christianity without set dogmas and objective morality.” (John Paul II 1981)

Fifteen years of Pope Paul VI's pontificate were on the one hand laden with the “conciliar problem”, precisely speaking with accounts of repetitive modernist abuses reported from around the world but predominantly found in Western Europe. On the other, he witnessed serious political upheaval in the world, i.e. the Vietnam War, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, the wars and conflicts in Latin America and Africa.

However, what became the great challenge for Paul VI was the year 1968 when he had to address the social revolution, otherwise called “the sexual revolution”. The old order in the scope of customs and morality fell almost within a day and its place was vehemently taken by trends that pushed young people towards promiscuity and breaking sexual taboos. The 1960s generation, as if in a collective hallucination, liberated from the moral limits set by their parents, the school and the Church, revelled themselves in the false freedom. Also the young in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, regrettably so familiarised with the fallen morality, undoubtedly

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Modernism was condemned in the Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* and in the decree *Lamentabili Sane*. In the latter document, Pius X defined modernism as a sum of all heresies. He referred to 19th century concepts, in particular to scientific and philosophical achievements of those times; it was often associated with Henri Bergson. One of the main concepts that made modernism be finally condemned by the Pope, was the assumption that Catholic Church's dogma can evolve, have only historical characteristic and changed in the past along with the whole Church. Following this principle, the modernists were opened to alterations in the Church's doctrine, and even to modifications in dogma. According to the modernists, the doctrine should correspond with its times. In the conciliar and post-conciliar time, the modernists perceived the *Aggiornamento* as a useful tool to open the Church for another phase of internal evolution. Pius X's ‘Oath against modernism’ (*Iusurandum contra errores modernismi*) was in use until *Vaticanum II*. Every bishop, priest or catechist was required to take it before ordination or being allowed to teach. For unknown reasons, Pope Paul VI rescinded it in 1967. Perhaps he did not perceive all elements of modernism as detrimental for the Church or he considered some of the modernist proposals as part of *aggiornamento* (O'Connell 1994, 394; Ratté 1968, 370).

do not understand Pope Paul VI's fear and anxiety when he pensively witnessed the changes taking place in front of his eyes. A person living in 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be shocked by nudity, omnipresent eroticism, vulgarity or sexualisation of the public space. The media, press, TV and internet seem to be devoid of borders of decency and the sane, traditional morality, still taught by the Church, is treated as superstition or bigotry. Things that used to shame or distaste people are a norm today, exacting a toll on the times that we live in, and especially on young people. It was that generation that Holy Father Paul VI was concerned with in particular, as were his successors, especially John Paul II and the present Pope Francis.

Witnessing the unavoidable fall of the existing moral order, Paul VI realised that he had to say a firm “No” to rampant moral decay and declining values as he was the keeper of morally sane teachings and of the Revealed Truth.

The sexual revolution was not just a mere coincidence of events. It was a carefully prepared strategy that was aimed at destroying traditional Christian social order, which constituted the heart of Church's moral teaching. Plans of the old order destruction by means of liberating the human being in his sexuality were shrewdly overseen by socialists, such as Wilhelm Reich<sup>7</sup> (Sigmund Freud's disciple), Herbert Marcuse,<sup>8</sup> so-called Frankfurt School and some French circles. That disgraceful revolution was going to indirectly take control of human masses and the fathers of social revolution sought in sexuality and awakened passions an effective tool for social engineering. It is certainly easier to manage a human being subjugated by his passions. Revolutionary deceit was also aiming to make the young challenge the existing authority figures and repudiate them. Alas, among the losers of those times was in many instances the Church, the last bastion of sound morality.

For Paul VI that was an evident sign that the Church cannot passively look at the downfall of the existing traditional moral order. On one hand, the conciliar “aggiornamento” whose aim was to reach the contemporary people and their problems more effectively could be helpful in bringing the young closer to the Church through new evangelical forms. On the other though, the Council did not achieve all of its intended goals. It was difficult to retain young people within the Church. Catholic communities appeared as unattractive, old-fashioned and incongruent with the times to many of those young. Hippie movements, artistic avant-garde cinema,<sup>9</sup> interest in the instantly created new rock bands,<sup>10</sup> fashion

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<sup>7</sup> Austrian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, who studied human libido. Main publications: *Der Einbruch der Sexualmoral* (1932), *Die Sexualität im Kulturkampf: Zur sozialistischen Umstrukturierung des Menschen* (1936), *Die Bione* (1938).

<sup>8</sup> German-American philosopher of Jewish descent, an ideologist of student revolt in 1968 and Marxist sociologist, a representative of the Frankfurt School. Flagship publication: *Eros and Civilization A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955).

<sup>9</sup> The well-known scandal-seeking filmmakers, directors and scriptwriters include: Ingmar Bergman, Rus Meyer, Bernardo Bertolucci, Paul Verhoeven or Ernst Hofbauer.

<sup>10</sup> The Beatles, The Doors, The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, Queen, The Animals and others.

to vulgarise the language – all these attracted and fascinated young people. They felt that there had started an era of liberation, deprived of any commands, interdictions, barriers or boundaries. Imbibed with the revolutionary wave, they drifted to false freedom, independence and self-realisation. The generation of the 1960s opened without inhibition to all forms of experiments with life, both in the moral domain and by reaching for stimulants, drugs and alcohol. It seemed that a dam had crashed and a wave of revolutionary flood became the natural force of cultural changes that could not be stopped anymore by anything or anyone.

In this difficult and unfavourable atmosphere and a general relaxation of social norms, the Pope Paul VI like a prophet of his times made a decision of arduous debate with the revolutionists.

The Encyclical *Humanae vitae* is one of the most important documents of the Church, which laid the foundation of the most sound moral teachings in scope of the procreation of human life, marital love and woman's and man's sexuality until today. This document was the reason why Pope Paul VI was later bullied on many occasions and even literally spat on at St Peter's Square in Rome.

The Encyclical was published in print on July 25, 1968, exactly in the year of revolutionary upheaval. This publication is small in volume but it provides the quintessence of the Church's traditional teachings in the scope of morality of marital sexual life and continues with the teachings opened at the Second Vatican Council. It is not a secret today that the bishop of Cracow at the time, Karol Wojtyła, largely contributed to the appearance of *Humanae vitae*. His ample work: *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* [*Love and Responsibility*] was well-known to Paul VI. Probably Wojtyła's courageous and deepened approach to the issues such as libido or human sexuality must have fascinated the Pope and the young Cardinal from Cracow was recognized by him as a providential man for the Church in the years of revolutionary moral disorder. The value and importance of this ethics study by Wojtyła is proven by the facts that, for example, within a short period of time it was translated into many languages and published not only in Poland but also in the USA, Italy, Germany, Japan, Spain and France. Today, this book is even more popular in the world. What could have inspired Paul VI in the book written by a bishop from Cracow? Surely, the key issues constituted an antidote to the sexual revolution proposals that stroke at the very foundations of the Christian order.

Wojtyła begins his book with an analysis of the person as the subject and object. That must have been important for Paul VI as the sexual revolution drove towards redefining the existing order, including dignity of human life. In consequence, the man was no longer to be treated as a human being having his own dignity and value, and was becoming an object that satisfies passions and desires (Reich 1974, 28). A conclusion that was accurate and corresponding to the dangers of the 1960s ideologies. On this foundation the future Pope John Paul II reflected upon the ethics in sexuality. He went on to define the term *love*:

“When two different people consciously choose a common aim this puts them on a footing of equality and precludes the possibility that one of them might be subordinated to the other. Both (...) are as it were in the same measure and to the same extent subordinated to that good which constitutes their common good.” (Wojtyła 1993, 28)

The paragraph on sexual urge and desire must have been a very visionary one to Pope Paul VI. At those times, the Church people spoke on such subjects with certain embarrassment, discomfort and reluctance (if they raised such subjects at all). That was rather a domain of secular groups, sexologists and psychologists. The courage of a cardinal from Poland must have impressed and amazed many, including the Pope who was looking for ideas on guiding his people safely as a shepherd through those turbulent times.

The author of *Love and Responsibility* broadly discussed in his work the issues of chastity reflecting upon Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas. He also discussed the less popular at the modern times virtue of modesty. He reflected upon the issues concerning marriage, such as marital act and procreation:

“Thus, in the sexual relationship between man and woman two orders meet: the order of nature, which has as its object reproduction, and the personal order, which finds its expression in the love of persons and aims at the fullest realisation of that love. We cannot separate the two orders, for each depends upon the other. In particular, the correct attitude to procreation is a condition of realisation of love.” (Wojtyła 1993, 226)

It is not surprising that the Pope gave to the Metropolitan of Cracow the task of appointing a special commission that would produce materials for the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*. Father Andrzej Bardecki was a member of that commission at that time. In his book *Wojtyła* (Bujak and Rożek 1997) we find an interesting backroom account on how this Encyclical was created:

“Together, during multiple meetings we were preparing materials that Cardinal Wojtyła then handed over to Paul VI. When I later compared the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* with our own materials, I concluded that at least sixty per cent of the materials brought from Cracow were included in the Encyclical.” (Bujak and Rożek 1997, 165)

It is difficult to unequivocally define to what extent the Encyclical is the work of Pope Paul VI and to what extent it was the fruit of works conducted collectively by representatives of the Cracow environment. Undoubtedly, the fact that Paul VI asked Wojtyła's assistance proves the Pope's great wisdom, responsibility and prudence, his great concern for the human being and the Church and also the trust he gave to the future Pope from Poland.

Encyclical *Humanae vitae* is one of those Church documents that is still received emotionally today. Some people praise it while others sternly criticize for being

a voice that is not tuned with today's world. Fifty years after its publication, many environments argue the issues raised by the Pope, including the contraceptives and abortifacients. Modern times, when we witness the aftermath of 1968 revolution, prove how the teachings in *Humanae vitae* Encyclical are unfadingly valid. It is therefore worth taking a fresh look at the most significant issues raised in the papal document. Before that, however, it seems plausible to fairly summarise the results of the social revolution. The fact that we are so inured to deviation, all sorts of degenerations and subversion of the young, does not mean that we should not re-discuss those issues. The fact that we have been made familiar with nudity in the public space, obscene and vulgar vocabulary does not mean we should accept that state of matters. Paul VI was not declared a saint without reason. The canonisation of that courageous and dynamic personality assuredly aimed at reminding us the sound teachings of the Church, particularly in the sphere of morality.

And what fruit do we harvest fifty years after the notorious sexual revolution? Do our times differ significantly from those that Paul VI witnessed?

1. Demoralisation of children and the youth not only through media – TV, internet, press but also at school through the so-called sexual education.

2. Destruction of authority figures who set moral values – parents, teachers, the Church.

3. Attack on family which is perceived as something unfashionable and obsolete. Replaced by promotion of individualism and partnerships.

4. Promotion of various forms of deviation – homosexual partnerships, cohabitation, gender ideology, polygamy – all presented as freedom and tolerance.

5. Relinquishment of raising the young generation in the spirit of high values – beauty, respect for the elder, honesty, manners, affection for the homeland and ancestors' traditions. Replaced by promotion of consumerism and narcissism.

6. Enslavement by idols of 21st century – internet, mobile phones, computer games<sup>11</sup> (an epidemic of young people chained to their mobile phones, taking photographs of themselves and awaiting their approval in the social media) (Fundacja Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2013).

7. Disappearance of interpersonal bonds and weakening of family relations.

8. Development of addictions such pornography, gambling, alcohol, drugs and NPS.

9. General concession to indecency, early sexual initiation among the youth, so-called “sex without commitments”.

10. Opening to marital infidelity due to general access to contraceptives.

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<sup>11</sup> According to the report, some of the questioned teenagers spend more than eight or nine hours per day on the internet. Information given in the CBOS's survey confirm the problem in numbers. An average time spent on-line among teenagers is three hours daily. “One fifth (20%) spend an hour a day on average, over one fourth (28%) – 2hrs, more than one in five (22%) – 3hrs, and a similar group (21%) – between 4 and 5 hrs” (Fundacja Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2013, 143). The above-mentioned problem of using the internet daily for longer, appears only among few. One fourteenth (7%) among surveyed teenagers use the internet between 6 and 8 hours daily, and 2% for 9 hours and above.



There are surely more similarly tragic consequences of the social changes in the 1960s, but it is impossible to mention and analyse all of them here. Nevertheless, Paul VI's teaching is adequate today in relation to men and women's intimate life. The Encyclical *Humanae vitae* should be today be re-read and its main proposals should be used to rebuild and protect the family as the elementary and saint element of human society.

Subsequent popes, including the great John Paul II, understood profoundly the significant value of a sound and morally well-formed family for the human kind.

Paul VI divided his document *Humanae vitae* into three main parts:

1. New aspects of the problem and competences of the Magisterium, paragraphs 2-6;
2. Doctrinal principles, paragraphs 7-18;
3. Pastoral directions, paragraphs 19-30.

The Pope started a debate, still ongoing today, concerning excessive human birth rate and the danger of overpopulation on our planet. He recalled families' anxiety of deterioration in their material status and job prospects linked to having many children. As it was 50 years ago, also today contraceptives and abortifacients are presented as the main remedy for those problems. This issue is difficult but the Church has always taken a firm stand. Resorting to a morally evil act in order to obtain good is incompatible with the Scripture. That has been the Church Magisterium's standing for centuries and Paul VI reminded us about it by supporting the natural law (similarly to the Holy Father John Paul II who did so many times in his teachings).

It is worth noting here that the Church has always stood for the protection of the dignity of human life from conception to natural death. The natural law laid down by God himself is fundamental to any other rights made by the man. Creation of new norms in separation or with violation of natural God's order leads to dangerous and tragic consequences. It was not without reason that since the Patriarchs' times the basic right given to the man to observe and respect was the Decalogue. Its moral code with the central commandment "thou shalt not kill" has infallibly regulated and should still today order the moral sphere of human life. The Decalogue points to the eternal Lawgiver who ordered the natural forces in such way that even today's advanced science is unable to answer all phenomena and surprising patterns ruling the nature, physics or chemistry.

Pope Paul VI witnessing the occurring social changes observed with deep regret how the norms of the Decalogue were being rejected by the generation of the sexual revolution.

Could opening to sensations stemming from drugs, alcohol, erotism be paired with the Decalogue? Was rejection of the Church moral teaching in accord with God's Law? Pope Montini knew also that the social revolution could give rise to significantly more important and inevitable changes in science and medicine, especially if voices of persons devoid of the Christian moral spine were to come to the fore. Unfortunately, it was not long before the consequences of peoples' opening

to medicinal novelties, to which many of the young yield to, became apparent. Pills, means of “protection” from an unwanted pregnancy, contraception – all that opened before the man a door to consumerism and treating their body as a tool of play and pleasure. That also led to trampling on human dignity and to general regress of the human person to primitive and basic animal instincts.

Paul VI very quickly realized that the Church cannot step aside. Indeed, the opposite. Facing destruction of authority figures, the Church has to continue its evangelical mission with a new zeal and an attempt to reach people with its evangelical message notwithstanding the unfavourable circumstances. Therefore, continuing with the Council’s adjustment of the Church’s language to the contemporary times, the Pope wrote to his fellow bishops and priests and to all the faithful of the Catholic Church a passionate apostolic exhortation on evangelisation in the contemporary world called *Evangelii nuntiandi*. In its introduction, he wrote:

“The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man. For, it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity.” (Paul VI 1973)

This document provides testimony to the great faith of Paul VI, who despite social upheaval and political unrest of his times, does not lose hope that the light of the God’s Truth will ultimately prevail. The Pope of the times of hardship uplifted the spirit of the community of the faithful truly confident that Christ is the One who has already defeated the evil:

“Let us, therefore, preserve our fervour of spirit. Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us, as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church’s history, an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives.” (Paul VI 1975a, 80)

Today Saint Paul VI’s teachings seem even more pertinent than in his pontificate times. Some even talk about the prophetic meaning of his pontificate. The natural law, so highly appreciated by him, ought to supersede human new ideas, especially those adapted to his times and fashions of a given period or those made up for convenience of certain individuals. In the above-mentioned providential document *Humanae vitae*, the Pope sternly reminds us about the role and authority of the Church in defining moral truths and rules:

“No member of the faithful could possibly deny that the Church is competent in her magisterium to interpret the natural moral law. (...) For the natural law, too, declares the will of God, and its faithful observance is necessary for people’s eternal salvation.” (Paul VI 1968, 4)

Today, we are witnessing numerous risky attempts to deny the natural law, protected by the Church, as being “imperfect” or “faulty”. Certain environments, especially medical and scientific, usurp the right to control the natural order with advanced genetic engineering. Subsidised programmes of in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) have become easily accessible to people who cannot conceive for natural causes. Psycho-manipulation of groups who take large financial advantages from the IVF programmes led to propagation of false and distorted ideas on what is artificial insemination. In the media, and even in medical journals, the IVF method is described as one of the most effective “treatments” of infertility.<sup>12</sup> However, every competent doctor knows that the IVF method does not cure infertility in any way as after a costly procedure or even a series of procedures the problem of infertility remains unsolved. The truth about psychological and biological consequences of the IVF for a woman is diligently covered up.<sup>13</sup> A different approach is taken towards the so-called Natural Procreative Technology (NaProTechnology), which is wholly supported by the Church as being morally just and fully medical way of curing infertility.

Excessive interference into nature pushed people to daring experiments on human embryos, as a result of which contemporary science entered into a field of controversy. That resulted in a wave of moral and ethical speculation and ferocious discussions of antagonizing groups. It has transpired that contemporary experimental medicine advances boldly ahead, claiming the right to take control over nature and to decide about life and death. The man of the 21<sup>st</sup> century wants to play god. This is, however, a separate serious issue that needs profound reflection by the Church and by scientists.

The moral decay and rejection of figures of authority were soon followed by the issuing consequences, namely, a sense of confusion, chaos, false freedom broiling down in fact to insecurity, the feeling of meaninglessness of life and lack of joy. Exclusion of God from peoples’ lives left a void which man started to fill with substitutes of real values. For life cannot be only an assortment of sensations, excitements and hedonic thrills. They all give only temporary satisfaction followed by existential emptiness marked with lack of purpose and meaning in life.

In Christology and Biblical Theology, the Greek word *logos* refers to Jesus Christ. Exegetes usually translate it as “word”. *Logos* however, renders a wider scope of meaning, the most relevant being “sense”. God is the sense, God gives meaning to human existence, achievements and relationships with others.

Also today, we can see around us people who are accomplished, professionally and socially successful in the eyes of the world, but who, in reality are often quite lost and, constantly searching, as if they were aimlessly moving on the life map. In some

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<sup>12</sup> On the official website of a leading IVF clinic from Poland, we can find misleading information: “We take care to assign each couple a doctor in charge especially appointed for the whole treatment period” (underlined by the Author) (InviMed n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> Hormonal imbalance and its consequences, psychical traumas – especially after unsuccessful procedures, financial abuse, emotional exhaustion, trade in embryos, etc.

cases it is the whole societies who have excluded, consciously or not, God. They have chosen senselessness. Paul VI's contemporaries succumbed to such absurdity.

The providential Pope saw how people became lost and with paternal care called the erring ones to make their lives meaningful and to reopen their door to Jesus Christ. He wanted to show the joy of Christianity and the true source of happiness to the disoriented generation:

“Yet boredom, depression and sadness unhappily remain the lot of many. These feelings sometimes go as far as anguish and despair, which apparent carefreeness, the frenzies of present good fortune and artificial paradises cannot assuage. (...) This situation nevertheless cannot hinder us from speaking about joy and hoping for joy. It is indeed in the midst of their distress that our fellow men need to know joy, to hear its song. (...) There is also needed a patient effort to teach people, or teach them once more, how to savour in a simple way the many human joys that the Creator places in our path: the elating joy of existence and of life; the joy of chaste and sanctified love; the peaceful joy of nature and silence; the sometimes austere joy of work well done; the joy and satisfaction of duty performed; the transparent joy of purity, service and sharing; the demanding joy of sacrifice. The Christian will be able to purify, complete and sublimate these joys; he will not be able to disdain them. Christian joy presupposes a person capable of natural joy. These natural joys were often used by Christ as a starting point when He proclaimed the kingdom of God.” (Paul VI 1975b, section I)

Papal words strike us with freshness and prophetic actuality. This must be an aptitude of saints to be able to listen so profoundly to the voice of the Holy Spirit in order to speak with God's voice, not their own one. The contemporary world, and even the contemporary community of the Catholic Church, needs the “re-education of mind”. We are losing sight of the aim and the sense of our journey as we are attacked and bombarded by thousands of stimuli and inundated with information on every single day. Many Christians easily succumb to the wave of the internet and media and live each day more on fresh political and sports news or yet another scandal reports rather than on the Word of God. The Good News is deafened by bad news generated by the world and people who stand far away from Christ's Gospel. Today, even more than in Paul VI's or the great John Paul II's times, people are more vulnerable to losing that difficult path and the narrow gate that Jesus told us about.

“Paul VI truly ‘rendered to God what is God's’ by devoting his whole life to the ‘sacred, solemn and grave task of continuing in history and extending on earth the mission of Christ’, loving the Church and leading her so that she might be ‘a loving mother of the whole human family and at the same time the minister of its salvation’ (...) When the secularized and hostile society was emerged, he was able to steer with farsighted wisdom and sometimes loneliness, the helm of Peter's boat, never losing joy and trust in the Lord.” (Francis 2018)

What do we learn from the Giovanni Battista Montini's, the saint Pope Paul VI, pontificate?

First: faithfulness to the Gospel and to the Catholic Church teachings of many centuries. Paul VI remained steadfast in the matter of contraception and life planning, even in the face of pressure and resentment from opponents of the traditional papal teaching. He was not looking for any recognition or acclaim. His had one goal, namely, to safeguard the deposition of the faith from temporal contamination.

Second: Paul VI stood in defence of Christian morality. He uttered a resounding “no” to secular trends and contested the contemporary popular trends of social revolution. He proved that Catholic teaching is not old-fashioned but it remains attractive and pertinent.<sup>14</sup>

Third: He did not give in to general emotions within society and within the Church as they lacked light and hope. In spite of the times he lived in, he kept good spirit and promoted the Christian joy of life. He showed the direction and the meaning of human actions by uncovering emptiness of the secular tendencies and of a life deprived of strength, moral figures, God and the Church.

Fourth: He proved to be a real and caring father of the herd he was in charge of. He fed it with the words of encouragement and consolation, provided with teaching that was demanding and incongruent with the spirit of those times and also showed a reliable path amid social and cultural unrest.

Fifth: He showed the meaning of being humble and wise in practice. He did not rely solely on his own opinions. In matters of great importance, he sought the advice of the greatest Vatican minds and experts. He was driven by prudence and a sense of responsibility, virtues intrinsic to the papal mission.<sup>15</sup>

Sixth: He taught us how to love the Church and Jesus Christ. Even when facing the post-conciliar insecurity, modernist abuses and numerous irregularities in the Western Church, he loved Peter's Boat and steered it in the best possible manner. It was not yet a stable sailing as the Church had only just started a new, not so safe yet a journey. Problems were arising everywhere, and they had to be dealt with wisely and effectively.

Paul VI's mission succeeded. He managed to prepare the Church for one of the greatest and providential pontificates which commenced on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1978.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Opposition to the trampling of the dignity of the human person, opposition to the raising of sensual experiences above the comprehensive understanding of human dignity, opposition to contraception, decline in morality and others.

<sup>15</sup> Consulting the opinions of Cardinal Wojtyła's team.

<sup>16</sup> Following John Paul II, The Pope Benedict XVI was another one who tried to revise the heritage of the Vatican II Council. Pope Ratzinger's priority was the liturgy, so much influenced after Vaticanum II by modernist and protestant abuse. Thank to Benedict XVI, the so-called old liturgy, extraordinary roman rite was back in grace pursuant to Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum* of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007. That was a sign for the Church to reflect upon and revise the 50 years of post-Council renewal. It transpired that subsequent Council Fathers were, after many years, admitting discrepancies between the Council's intentions and its reception. Recently undertaken attempts to reunite the Fraternity of Pius X prove that the Church's *aggiornamento* did not bear the expected

Giovanni Battista Montini, Pope of the times of hardship, a prophetic Father of the Church, a voice from heaven for our, possibly even harder, times.

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fruit in many areas (drop of vocations, scandals, moral decay of the clergy, relaxation of spiritual life discipline). In contrast, the traditionalist communities flourish, have increasing vocations and enjoy particular interest of the young generation. The Church is therefore challenged to find a new, wiser and profound *aggiornamento nuovo*, designed for 21<sup>st</sup> century.