

Self-Gift: The Heart of Humanae vitae

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Abstract. It is possible to defend the Church's teaching that contraception is incompatible with God's plan for sexuality in many different ways. This essay sketches the fundamental views of reality common to all the defenses and the main lines of the most prominent defenses, some based on natural law (of which there are several versions), on the theology of the body, and on the physical, psychological, and social consequences of the use of contraception. While all the defenses have merit, the argument based on the recognition that sexual intercourse is meant to be a complete self-gift has a special power of its own. *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 16.3 (Autumn 2016): 449–474.

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The Catholic Church's teaching on sexuality is based on the dignity of the human person as being made in the image and likeness of a loving God. The gift of life is a great gift, not only because it enables us to enjoy the marvelous goods of this world

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but, even more importantly, because it enables us to anticipate and strive for eternal life, where there will be an everlasting enjoyment of all goods, made possible by union with our loving Father.

Humanae vitae begins by referencing the “extremely important mission of transmitting human life” that God has entrusted to spouses.¹ It speaks of parents as those who render God a great service. After all, God wants to share his limitless goodness with souls; that is why He created the universe. Having and raising children is an act of immense generosity and dignity, and it enables human persons to participate in an act of inestimable value: the act of assisting God in bringing a new immortal soul into existence.

In August 2016, the Wijngaards Institute in the United Kingdom released a statement challenging Church teaching on contraception.² Among many erroneous claims, is the assertion that *Humanae vitae* is based primarily on biological laws. As the opening sentences of *Humanae vitae* indicate, that is very far from the truth. The biological reality that sexual intercourse can lead to the conception of new life is undeniably relevant to any consideration of contraception, but biology in no sense provides the primary basis for the Church’s teaching. To start there is to start in the wrong place.

1.1 God Is Love and the Source of New Life

The Church’s teaching on sexuality begins with an understanding of God as love and an understanding of love as a power that overflows into new love and new life. The human persons He creates have an immortal destiny. He has bestowed on spouses the tremendous gift of being participators with Him in the creation of new persons, a gift that requires complete self-giving. The statement below makes this clear and shows that many compelling reasons have been put forth to justify the claims of *Humanae vitae*. These reasons are based on Scripture, Catholic Tradition, several theories of natural law, and the real-life consequences of contraception on women’s bodies, on nonmarital and marital sexual relationships, and on society. None of these reasons have been addressed by the Wijngaards statement. Our intent here is not to provide a full-scale defense of *Humanae vitae*. It is, rather, to give a sketch of some powerful defenses of the doctrine found in the encyclical and to show that love, rather than biology, animates all of them. The footnotes and an online list of resources offer additional in-depth support for these defenses.³

1. Paul VI, *Humanae vitae* (July 25, 1968), in *Humanae Vitae: A Challenge to Love*, trans. Janet E. Smith (New Hope, KY: New Hope Publications, n.d.); available online at <https://marriageresourcecentre.org/2012/10/31/a-rich-new-translation-of-humanae-vitae/>. Subsequent references to *Humanae vitae* are given in the text.

2. Wijngaards Institute, “Catholic Scholars’ Statement on the Ethics of Using Contraceptives,” August 2016, <http://www.wijngaardsinstitute.com/statement-on-contraceptives/>.

3. A comprehensive bibliography and list of resources are available on the website of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America, at <http://trs.cua.edu/res/docs/HV-Bibliography-Resources.pdf>.

1.2 Multiple Defenses

It is possible to explain the wrongness of many moral issues by a variety of defenses. Adultery, for instance, can be argued to be wrong because (1) it is against God's will, (2) it violates the sixth commandment, (3) it contravenes the nature of marriage, (4) it is incompatible with the virtues of fidelity and self-mastery, (5) it violates a valid promise, (6) it violates the rights of a spouse, (7) it has been considered by virtually all civilizations at all times and all places to be wrong and has been prohibited by law, and (8) it can be harmful to one's self, spouse, children, other relationships, financial status, and society. Some of these arguments lead to the conclusion that adultery is always wrong, and some to the conclusion that is almost always wrong. Thus, they do not all have the same strength, but all weigh heavily against adultery.

It must be noted that there are also weak arguments against adultery (for example, that it is unpleasant to be known as an adulterer), but just because an argument is weak does not mean that the claim it is meant to support is false. Nor is it true that an argument (for example, that it is unpleasant to be known as an adulterer) is necessarily philosophically valid or strong simply because it leads to a true conclusion.

1.3 Fundamental Truths

Not everyone who collaborated on this document accepts all its arguments or sees them as equally valid, but each author and contributor does accept the Church's teaching that contraception is never in accord with God's plan for sexuality, and each holds that one or more of the arguments presented, rightly understood, establishes that contraceptive intercourse is an action that is always incompatible with the goods of marriage. Our statement provides the big picture of the Church's teaching rather than a point-by-point rebuttal of the Wijngaards statement, although responses to the Wijngaards claims are included here.

Our affirmation of Church teaching, which has been published online, lists the fundamental truths accepted by all signatories.⁴ They provide the foundation for this document. We restate them here.

1.3.1 GOD IS LOVE. The God who made our beautiful and ordered world is loving and good. All of his creation is a loving gift to humankind. Even after the Fall, God continued to reach out to his people, gradually revealing himself and the depths of his love and mercy. God the Father's gift of his Son, Jesus, whose life was poured out on the cross, was the ultimate and complete self-gift. This great and radical love is borne out in Scripture, where the authors of the Old Testament often speak of God as husband and his people as his wife, and the authors of the New Testament describe Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as his bride. Throughout the history of the Church, many have seen this spousal imagery as a key to understanding God's relationship to every human soul.

4. "Affirmation of the Church's Teaching on the Gift of Sexuality," common statement with multiple signatories, September 20, 2016, <http://trs.cua.edu/humanae-vitae/>.

1.3.2 **MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE.** Because God is love, a communion of the divine persons, He made men and women in his image: able to reason and to choose freely, with the capacity to love and to be in loving relationships.

1.3.3 **COMPLETE GIFT OF SELF.** God invites all people to share in his love. Every person, therefore, is beloved by God and made to be in loving relationships; every person is created to make a gift of self to God and to others. This gift need not include any sexual dimension; it means living in a way that promotes the good of everyone, especially those with whom one is in a close relationship.

1.3.4 **MARRIAGE: A UNIQUE COMMUNION OF PERSONS.** Marriage was designed by God to enable a man and a woman to live out humanity’s core identity as lovers and givers of life—to enable the two to become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) and that one flesh to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Human sexual relations fulfill God’s intent only when they respect the procreative meaning of the sexual act and involve a complete gift of self between married partners.

1.3.5 **GOD’S LAW, NOT MAN’S.** In the words of *Humanae vitae*, “The doctrine that the Magisterium of the Church has often explained is this: there is an unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning [of the marital act], and both are inherent in the marital act. This connection was established by God and human beings are not permitted to break it through their own volition” (*HV* n. 12). The teaching that contraception is always against God’s plan for sexuality, marriage, and happiness is not based on human law: “The teaching of the Church about the proper spacing of children is a promulgation of the divine law itself” (*HV* n. 20).

1.3.6 **FAITH AND REASON.** God has revealed the truths about sexuality to human beings through the biblical vision of the human person and has also made them accessible to our reason. Several well-argued versions of natural law defenses support the Church’s teaching that contraception is not in accord with God’s plan for sexuality and marriage. Each begins with different basic truths, and thus each constructs its arguments differently.

1.3.7 **THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY: POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II’S CONTRIBUTION.** John Paul II’s *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (virtually ignored by the Wijngaards statement) provides a powerful defense of the view that contraception is not in accord with the understanding of the human person as conveyed by Scripture and Sacred Tradition. He speaks of the “language of the body” and shows that to violate the procreative meaning of the marital act is also to violate its unitive (commitment-expressing) meaning. He demonstrates that our very bodies have a language and a “spousal meaning”—that they express the truth that we are to be in loving and fruitful relationships with others.

1.3.8 **HUMANAЕ VITAE AS PROPHETIC.** *Humanae vitae* speaks against the distorted view of human sexuality and intimate relationships that many in the modern world promote. The encyclical was prophetic when it listed some of the harms that would result from the widespread use of contraception. Many studies show that contraception, such as hormonal contraceptives and intrauterine devices, can cause serious health problems for women. The widespread use of contraception appears to have contributed greatly to the increase of sex outside of marriage, nonmarital pregnancies, abortion, single parenthood, cohabitation, divorce, poverty, and the exploitation

of women. It has also contributed to declining marriage rates as well as declining population growth in many parts of the world. There is also growing evidence that chemical contraceptives harm the environment.

1.3.9 A PRACTICAL HELP TO HUSBANDS AND WIVES: FERTILITY AWARENESS–BASED METHODS. In order to live God’s design for married love, husbands and wives need moral family planning methods. Fertility awareness–based methods of family planning (FABMs)—that is, the many forms of natural family planning (NFP)—respect the God-given spousal union and the potential to procreate. FABMs are fully consistent with the Church’s teaching on marital chastity, and couples using these methods do not thwart the power of acts that could result in the creation of new human persons. They respect God’s design for sexuality, help individuals grow in self-mastery, have the potential to strengthen marriages, and respect the physical and psychological health of women. Moreover, scientific studies show that FABMs are highly effective in helping couples both limit their family size when necessary and conceive when appropriate.

1.3.10 RESPECT FOR CULTURAL VALUES AND FREEDOM. International organizations and governments should respect the values and beliefs of families and cultures that see children as a gift and therefore should not impose practices that are antithetical to those values and beliefs about children and family planning. Governments and international organizations should make instruction in FABMs a priority, because these methods are based on a solid scientific understanding of a woman’s fertility cycle, are easily learned by women in developing countries, are virtually without cost, are effective, and promote respect for women.

1.3.11 CHRIST PROVIDES GRACE. Because of original sin, men and women are subject to temptations that sometimes seem insuperable. Christ came not just to restore our original goodness but to enable us to achieve holiness. The Catholic Church invites married couples to participate in the life of Christ and in the sacraments, especially Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist. The Church asks the faithful to deepen their relationship with God the Father, to be open to receiving the direction of the Holy Spirit, and to ask Christ to provide the graces needed to live in accord with God’s will for their married lives, even when doing so requires living difficult moral truths.

1.4 *Theology of the Body*

The big picture conveyed by these fundamental truths greatly surpasses the horizon of the Wijngaards statement. It includes the view that the teaching on love and marriage in Holy Scripture shows that contraception is incompatible with God’s plan for sexuality and the dignity of the human person. The Wijngaards statement never mentions John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* (presented in his magisterial *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*); indeed, the statement shows no awareness of it or of the fact that conferences have been held and institutes have sprung up all over the world (largely founded by married laity) to instruct people about John Paul II’s profound meditations on Scripture and his exposition of the spousal meaning of the body.⁵ Nor does the Wijngaards statement acknowledge that

5. Consider, for instance, the facts that John Paul II Institutes for Marriage and the Family exist on six continents, there are many lay-run apostolates promoting chastity that

John Paul II's insights have led countless couples away from the use of contraception to an appreciation of the great joy found in embracing God's plan for sexuality. Never claiming that Scripture explicitly condemns contraception, but claiming that Church teaching arises from the logic of the text, John Paul II shows the ways in which contraception is incompatible with Scripture's clear teaching about love and marriage. Focused as the Wijngaards statement is on promoting sterile sex, it is perhaps unsurprising that it barely mentions love or marriage.

1.5 Natural Moral Law

The Church has long referenced natural moral law arguments in its teaching on contraception. Let the clarification be made from the outset that natural law does not refer primarily to the laws of nature; rather, it refers to the essence or nature of the human person, of sexuality, and of all other goods. The laws of nature are not in themselves sacrosanct: only those that are part of the goods basic to human beings have this status. Although the person is primary, the biological laws that govern the human body must be taken into account, since the body is an integral part of the human person. The human person's biology is thoroughly human; it is oriented toward human goods, not purely animal goods.

In *Love and Responsibility*, written before his *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II (writing as Karl Wojtyla before he became Pope)—basing his thinking on both Thomism, especially St. Thomas Aquinas's teleology and view of the human person, and personalism—holds that contraception does not cohere with a proper understanding of sexuality. His is the philosophical defense that we expound here, but we also sketch the main lines of other understandings of natural law arguments.

1.6 Fertility Awareness–Based Methods: Natural Family Planning

We also briefly present some explanations for why the use of FABMs fosters virtue, strengthens marriages, does not violate God's plan for sexuality, and thus differs radically from the use of contraception.

1.7 Medical, Relational, and Environmental Dangers

We draw attention to the growing evidence of health risks associated with the use of chemical contraceptives, such as cancer and strokes. We briefly note the damage they do to a woman's physical health, the damage that contraception does to relationships between men and women both outside and within marriage, the dire consequences to children because of that damage, and the legal consequences of a widespread acceptance of contraception, among them, the multiplication of fierce threats to religious liberty. We draw attention to the growing evidence suggesting that the hormones in chemical contraceptives are damaging the environment. We also comment on the cross of infertility and what light it sheds on contraception.

are based on the *Theology of the Body*, and most seminaries and many universities now use this text as the preferred explanation of the Church's teaching on sexuality.

*1.8 Authority of *Humanae vitae**

All Christian churches up until 1930 taught that contraception is immoral, but they eventually abandoned that teaching (though increasingly individuals of various faiths are rediscovering this truth). One of the welcome features of the Catholic Church is its sure guidance on moral matters, which protects Catholics from the immoral currents of the secular world and gives them confidence that they are following God's will. There is no doubt that the teachings in *Humanae vitae* are to be accepted as authoritative teachings of the Catholic Church, binding on all believers. We provide a sketch of the claim made by some scholars that the Church's teaching on contraception is more than authoritative, that, indeed, it has been proclaimed infallibly and that the Church has no more authority to alter her teaching on contraception than it has authority to change its teachings on such acts as adultery, murder, and theft.

1.9 Condoms and HIV

We briefly examine the morality of using condoms to reduce the transmission of HIV. In this section we address the very important reality of the cross in every Christian's life. The moral law itself is demanding and can be a cross, though a redeeming and healing one. Spouses often find it difficult to respect the goods that God has embedded in sexuality, but those who turn to Jesus and ask for the graces He so freely gives generally discover the profound joy and satisfaction that comes when the human goods God has provided are honored and embraced.

1.10 Recommendations for Promoting the Truth about Human Sexuality

Finally, this document makes a few recommendations about how the Church and society can help advance happy marriages and strong societies by promoting the truth about sexuality. Prosperous nations should not feel threatened by the love that parents in many developing countries so evidently have for children, but should use their resources to help those children live and prosper, as Popes Benedict XVI and Francis have emphasized in their teaching.

2

John Paul II's Philosophical Defense of the Church's Teaching on Sexuality

The Theology of the Body (laid out in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*) is a defense of the Church's teaching on marriage based on Scripture, particularly a scriptural view of the human person. The Church has, however, used not only scriptural defenses of Church teaching but also natural law defenses. As mentioned in the introduction, there are several varieties of natural law theory, all based on the understanding that the human person, by virtue of the ability to reason, has access to important fundamental moral truths without the aid of revelation. For instance, some natural law theories are based on Thomistic teleological metaphysics and the understanding that human dignity requires persons to live in accord with the truth about sexuality; others are based on the understanding that for persons to act morally they must have right intentions in accord with basic goods. Here, space and time constraints permit us to provide only brief descriptions of some of the better-known understandings of natural law.

This section briefly lays out a philosophical defense of the Church's teaching on contraception developed by Wojtyla and presented primarily in *Love and Responsibility*. The purpose of that book is to explain how to transform the self-seeking sexual urge into an impetus for self-giving love in marriage.

2.1 *The Personalistic Norm*

The first principle Wojtyla establishes is that human persons are never to be used, because they are free and thus have an innate dignity that must be respected. Indeed, he enunciates what he calls the "personalistic norm," which states that the only just response to a person is love; by love he means "seeking what is good for another." In spousal love, each spouse seeks the good of the other in a context of total mutual self-giving.

2.2 *Mutual Affirmation and "Conscious Parenthood"*

Wojtyla speaks of two goods embedded in the marital act: a deep union through a total mutual self-giving and the common good of conceiving and raising a child. Indeed, he speaks of an end of the sexual act as parenthood, in which the parents bring forth and educate not just a new member of the human species but a new human person: two people committed to each other take part in co-creating a new person who needs nearly a lifetime of care. Central to Wojtyla's sexual ethics is the claim that the dignity of human persons resides in the ability to know the truth and to choose freely to live in accord with it.

Wojtyla holds that in the order of nature, the sexual act can lead to the coming-to-be of a new member of the human species, whereas in the order of the person, the sexual act leads to two persons becoming parents of a new human person. The good of fertility belongs to both orders. Thus, to reject one's own or another's fertility is to reject the person and to allow one's self to use or be used by another. That is, to have sexual intercourse with another and not be willing to be a parent with the other or accept a child as a great gift is to use another person and to allow one's self to be used.

Wojtyla maintains that being aware these truths and making decisions in accord with them is the foundation of moral choices about sexual matters. Wojtyla refers to this as "conscious parenthood." Moreover, since love by its inner logic is life-giving, blocking the creative dimension of the act of love between the spouses poses a threat to the love itself. Those who, when they engage in sexual intercourse, intend to express a lifetime union with each other, believe they will be good parents with each other, and would welcome a child as a gift engage in an action which by its very nature expresses profound and committed love for each other.

2.3 *Justice to the Creator*

Love and Responsibility has a chapter titled "Justice to the Creator" in which Wojtyla speaks of each person as God's own and explains that using another person is an offense against God. Wojtyla shows how in conjugal relations the body serves as a means, not otherwise open to spouses, for a new and deeper union between them. That is, for human beings, God has made the order of nature not to be separate from but to participate in the order of persons, which explains why the bodily act of union—no

longer a merely biological reality—can be incorporated into the act of love. Wojtyla shows that by a divinely established order, the body also serves the fruitfulness integral to spousal love by giving it a new, awe-inspiring scope: the possibility of the creation of new human life. On the basis of this integration of the bodily act into the order of the person and love, Wojtyla makes it clear that by rejecting the possibility of parenthood in any individual act, the spouses reject the authority of the Creator, act against the inner logic of love, and take up an attitude of use.

Elsewhere, John Paul II speaks of sexuality and the ability to participate in the act of creating a new human person as a great gift from God: human persons engage in the physical act that provides God with the opportunity to create a new immortal soul. The male provides the sperm, the female provides the ovum, and God provides the soul. God acts out of love; so, too, should the spouses. Justice to the Creator requires that we do nothing to thwart the possibility of the creation of a new human soul. Wojtyla explains that confining one's sexual acts to the infertile period for the purposes of responsible parenthood does not thwart the possible creation of a new human soul and permits the spouses to affirm each other as integral wholes through the marital act.

2.4 Thomism and Personalism

The above sketch, which provides the main lines of John Paul II's philosophical defense of the position that contraception conflicts with the dignity of the human person, is based on both Thomistic principles and personalist principles. From Thomism he takes the objective truth that what God creates is good, and that it is good to live in accord with the natures and essences of what God has created. From personalism he takes the view that the ability of each person to choose in accord with the truth and thereby to shape his character is the source of human dignity: such creatures deserve to be loved. These principles, along with the principles of the Theology of the Body, are being utilized more and more in both magisterial documents and statements produced by episcopal conferences and dioceses throughout the world. The Wijngaards statement evinces no knowledge of them.

3

Several Approaches to Natural Moral Law

3.1 Natural Moral Law

3.1.1 THE ROLE OF NATURAL MORAL LAW IN THE CHURCH'S TEACHING ON CONTRACEPTION. Since the close of the Second Vatican Council and its call to renew moral theology, the Church has witnessed several approaches to natural moral law over the past five decades. Those scholars and schools of thought that have worked broadly in the Thomistic tradition, for example, and who maintain fidelity to the magisterium have developed various theories to understand the law that St. Paul taught is "written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:15). The proponents of these theories do not all see eye-to-eye on how to properly understand natural moral law. But all agree that the natural moral law is rooted in the created order, that there is an objective moral order, and that certain acts, such as contraception freely engaged in, are not compatible with God's plan for his created order and for sexuality in particular. Thus, although these

theories of moral law are not in every respect harmonious, all schools of thought are united in affirming absolute moral norms, including that contraception is contrary to the natural moral law.

3.1.2 BIOLOGICAL LAWS. It is essential to note that none of the theories of natural moral law hold that biological laws are sufficient to ground a condemnation of contraception. The Church does not object to violating biological laws in respect to sex among animals: animals neither achieve personal union nor procreate. Animals achieve bodily union; humans seek intimate personal union. Animals reproduce; persons procreate. Human biology is not directed merely to the continuation of the species but to the creation of new human persons who have an eternal destiny with God. Interfering with a process that simply blocks another member of a species from coming into being is very different from preventing the coming-to-be of a new immortal soul and refusing to respect God's plan for human marriage and sexuality.

This teaching of natural moral law, which *Humanae vitae* says is also "illuminated and made richer by divine revelation" (n. 4), is grounded in both the nature of the human person as a body-soul unity and Church teaching about the nature of marriage as a one-flesh reality, which is open to both union and procreation.⁶ This openness is not only a moral truth to guide conscience, but a truth about the human person and the meaning of human sexuality as well.⁷ Therefore, the view that we find in the Wijngaards statement, which caricatures the Church's teaching against contraception as being based on a physicalist or biologicistic understanding of natural law, is greatly mistaken.

3.2 *Thomistic Theory of Natural Moral Law*

Thomistic metaphysics, which entails a teleological understanding of nature, has for centuries provided the foundation for the Church's moral teachings. It holds that natural things have purposes; that those purposes are good; and that for things to flourish, their natures must be respected. Mainstream Thomistic natural moral law is not based on biological laws but on the fact that things have essences or natures. The natures of many things are instrumental. Indeed, all of creation, except for human persons, was created for the good of human persons. Thus, we can use those things for our purposes. Wood, for instance, can be used for many human goods. Human persons, however, are a good in themselves and should never be used as things for the advantage of others.

What is good for all other things may not be good for human persons. Marriage, for instance, is not an institution needed by animals, since animals do not need intimate relationships, have immortal souls, or require the wise guidance of parents to help them develop virtue and holiness. Animal and human sexuality have radically different purposes. Animal sexuality has as its purpose the reproduction of a species whose destiny is only temporal. Human sexuality has the purpose of providing a way for a man and a woman to join in a special kind of love and friendship that enables

6. See also Gen. 2:24 and Matt. 19:5.

7. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (November 22, 1981), n. 32.

them to bring forth new human beings who have an eternal destiny. Since human beings have intrinsic value, the very processes that bring about a new human being share in that intrinsic value. To violate the purposes of the sexual act is to violate the purposes that God has embedded in it. Therefore, contraception is always wrong.

Although traditional Thomistic natural law theory does not speak of contraception being a violation of the personal meaning of sexual intercourse, implicitly it holds that contraception is always wrong for persons because they are persons. This is the view of Wojtyla. Thus, as we shall see, the personalism of John Paul II draws out of Thomism something that is already there but that needed to be expanded and expressed in more modern terms.

3.3 *Contraception Is Contra Life*

Humanae vitae defines and excludes as morally wrong “all acts that attempt to impede procreation, both those chosen as means to an end and those chosen as ends” (n. 14). The encyclical’s definition of contraception thus makes it clear that what is relevant is not the behavior involved but the intention to impede procreation, no matter how that intention is carried out.

Although contraception presupposes an act of intercourse, it is not itself a sexual act, for it involves a distinct choice. A couple chooses contraception when they have already decided to have intercourse and fear it will result in the conception of a child. Their decision to use contraception is aimed precisely at preventing the child they fear will come into existence from actually doing so. Contraception, then, is a contra-life act.

By rejecting contraception as contra-life, the Church makes it clear that, like other choices, the choice to contracept has an intrinsic meaning. A couple cannot reasonably define the act purely in terms of the end they have in mind and discount the significance of their chosen means. A married couple may well intend the good end of enjoying intercourse without risking conception when their other responsibilities would make it irresponsible for them to conceive. If, however, contraception is their chosen means, then one of the reasons for its wrongness is that it is a contra-life choice.⁸

This problem becomes especially clear when one considers the relation of the couple to the child when contraception fails: since they tried to prevent that child from existing, they almost invariably to some extent regret the fact that the child has come to exist. Given that conception is seen as a failure, it is not difficult to see how it can lead to abortion, for it is all too easy for the couple to follow the fatal logic of taking the life of the child they failed to prevent. While they will likely come to accept and love their child, the fact is that their choices have caused them to some extent to have a contra-life will.

It is worth noting that couples who practice NFP never make such a choice. Since they make the sacrifice of abstaining whenever they think conception is pos-

8. For a detailed treatment, see Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 2, *Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 506–519.

sible, they never make the distinct contra-life choice of trying to prevent a child from coming into existence. Nevertheless, if a child is conceived, they may initially be emotionally distraught, but they are morally secure. No change of heart is necessary.

In short, *Humanae vitae*'s definition of contraception perfectly captures the idea that contraception is contra-life—wrong precisely *because* it is intended to prevent a new person from coming to be.

4

The Differences between Natural Family Planning and Contraception

4.1 Different Methods

FABMs, or NFP methods, are the scientific, natural, and moral methods of family planning that can help married couples either achieve or postpone pregnancy. Most women and too many physicians have little knowledge of a woman's patterns of fertility and the various signs that indicate when she is fertile and when she is not.

The majority of these methods provide a thorough education in the combined fertility of a man and a woman. Most NFP methods are based on the daily observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle, such as a variation in the mucus she secretes, a rise in temperature after she ovulates, and a change in her cervix. These methods treat each woman and cycle as unique; therefore, all women, despite varying lengths of menstrual cycles, can use most NFP methods. In addition, because of the variety of NFP methods, women from different cultures and educational backgrounds can find a method of NFP that is effective for them.⁹ Finally, women who learn to chart their own patterns of fertility can often discover various hormonal imbalances that may be causing infertility or other health issues.¹⁰

4.1.1 EFFECTIVENESS. Research demonstrates that NFP methods can be up to 99 percent successful in postponing or avoiding pregnancy when couples understand the methods, are motivated to use them according to their family planning intentions (spacing or limiting births), and follow the guidelines consistently.

4.1.2 NFP AND THE COUPLE RELATIONSHIP. Research also shows that couples who switch from a contraceptive to an NFP method improve their relationships, feel more respected by their partners, and are more in control of their fertility.¹¹ In fact, some evidence suggests a positive correlation between NFP and lower divorce rates. Anecdotal studies and non-population comparison studies, for example, consistently show very low levels of divorce among couples who use NFP.

9. Leona VandeVusse et al., "Couples' Views of the Effects of Natural Family Planning on Marital Dynamics," *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 35.2 (April 2003): 171–176.

10. "What Is NFP? Frequently Asked Questions," US Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://www.usccb.org/>.

11. VandeVusse et al., "Couples' Views," 171–176.

4.2 *Moral Differences*

The Church teaches that couples are to discern prayerfully when it is right to limit their family size, and praises couples who generously and prudently decide to have large families as well as those who responsibly limit their family size when biological, financial, psychological, or sociological reasons indicate that they should do so. These families are protecting the good of fertility rather than violating it.

Many people fail to see any moral difference between contraception and NFP. They think that since both a contracepting couple and one using NFP do not want to have a child and intend to have sexual intercourse that does not issue in a child, their actions amount to the same thing.

A succinct justification for the use of NFP can be made this way: There is nothing wrong with deciding, for good reasons, that it is not a good time to have another child. There is nothing wrong with abstaining from sex at any time, including during the period of fertility. There is nothing wrong with having marital intercourse during the infertile time. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with using NFP, which simply involves not having marital intercourse during the fertile time and having it during the infertile time when the spouses, for good reasons, have made the decision not to have another child.

Still, there is more that can be said. The distinction between means and end is certainly operative here. Although both couples may have equally good reasons for wanting to limit their family size, one couple chooses the means of thwarting their fertility, engaging in potentially fertile acts while simultaneously working to destroy that fertility. They engage in an act that gives only partially of themselves; they give and refuse to give at the same time. The other couple respects their fertility and when not prepared to accept a child, they refrain from fertile acts. They do not diminish the gift of self; rather, they give all they have at that moment. A standard example demonstrating the difference between contraception and NFP is the rough analogy with bulimia. Some individuals who wish to avoid gaining weight eat and then force themselves to vomit. They want the pleasure of eating but not the consequences. Others who wish to avoid gaining weight do not eat fattening foods. They abstain from rich foods and only eat them when prepared for the consequences. The parallels with contraceptive sex and NFP are clear.

The differences between the two means of birth control are much greater than this brief argument conveys. Contraception treats fertility as though it were a defect to be corrected rather than a gift to be cherished. Moreover, there is something radically anti-female about contraceptives—their use suggests that it is better to have a male body that can engage in sexual intercourse and not become pregnant. Many women resent contraceptives for their unpleasant side effects and also resent the men who want them to use contraceptives. Women who use NFP, on the other hand, are generally very positive about it, because it does not in any way threaten their health. NFP respects their fertility, whereas contraception, as noted above, treats it as a liability. They have confidence in the love of their husbands, who revere their fertility to the extent that they do not wish to interfere with it. They understand abstaining to be another form of love and a form of self-giving. After all, many save the gift of sex until marriage, precisely out of love for their beloved.

There is no denying that the abstinence required for NFP can be difficult, more for some than for others; those who have abstained before marriage usually bring self-mastery into the marriage, whereas those who indulge in sex before marriage (which is nearly everyone in the current culture) have to learn new habits to use NFP. Nonetheless, spouses who use NFP nearly always find that, in spite of the difficulties (which, like those of dieting, can be considerable), there are great benefits realized over time both for their relationship with each other and for their relationship with God. NFP enables a couple to understand and cooperate with the plan of God their Creator, while contraceptives tempt them into thinking that they can control their destinies without any reference to the order of creation. Finally, NFP invites a married couple to build a greater intimacy, grounded in communication and mutual self-mastery, while contraceptives lull them into thinking that technology can replace patience and virtue.

5

Authority, Infallibility, and the *Sensus fidelium*

5.1 Criteria for Infallible Teachings

While an encyclical is a particularly solemn expression of papal authority, the significance of *Humanae vitae* is to be found primarily not in the status of the document but in the teaching it contains. The core of that teaching—contraception is always wrong—“is rooted in natural law, illuminated and made richer by divine revelation” (*HV* n. 4). Indeed, as John Paul II showed at length in his *Theology of the Body*, when this teaching is set against the fuller context of biblical anthropology, one sees that it “belongs not only to the natural moral law, but also to the *moral order revealed by God*.”¹²

It is clear that Catholics are bound to follow the teaching of the Church on contraception because of the Church’s teaching authority. Some argue that the Church’s teaching on contraception is infallible by virtue of her universal ordinary magisterium.¹³ Vatican II clearly sets out the conditions that must be met for bishops dispersed throughout the world to proclaim Christ’s teaching infallibly. They must “maintain communion with one another and with Peter’s successor, authoritatively teach on a matter of faith and morals, and agree in one judgment as something to be held definitively.”¹⁴ The required universality cannot be undone even by a later lack

12. John Paul II, General audience (July 18, 1984), n. 4, original emphasis. The English translation of these addresses is found in John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006).

13. For a defense of this claim, see John C. Ford and Germain Grisez, “Contraception and the Infallibility of the Ordinary Magisterium,” *Theological Studies* 39.2 (May 1978): 258–312.

14. Peter Ryan and Germain Grisez, “Indissoluble Marriage: A Reply to Kenneth Himes and James Coriden,” *Theological Studies* 72.2 (June 2011): 410. For a consideration of the meaning of these conditions, see pp. 410–411.

of consensus.¹⁵ The historical evidence makes it abundantly clear that all of these conditions have been met.¹⁶ A list of highlights must suffice here:

- Certain Fathers of the Church condemned contraception, and none ever approved it.
- Throughout the ages, many bishops have taught that acts intended to prevent conception are always wrong, as have non-bishops who are canonized saints and some who are also Doctors of the Church. No saint or Doctor of the Church ever approved contraception. And there is no evidence of a Catholic bishop teaching otherwise until at least 1962.
- From the thirteenth century until 1917, the Church's canon law included a canon severely condemning contraception. Needless to say, canon law has never suggested that contraception is licit.
- Until 1962, there was a constant consensus among modern theologians in support of the received teaching on contraception, and bishops authorized the use of these theologians' works in seminaries.
- When Pope Pius XI reaffirmed the teaching in his 1930 encyclical *Casti connubii*, bishops did not object but readily accepted it, and many supported it with their own statements and programs.
- No evidence has shown that bishops handed on this teaching as a private opinion, a probable judgment, or an ideal that need not be realized. It was always authoritatively proposed as a grave moral obligation.
- The teaching was often proposed as a divinely revealed moral norm, which by definition must be held definitively.

The teaching that contraception is always wrong has not been formally defined by the Church. Nevertheless, theologians have never refuted—indeed, they have largely ignored—the claim that the teaching is infallible because Catholic bishops in communion with each other and the Pope have authoritatively proposed it to be held definitively.

5.2 *Sensus fidelium*

Some, of course, claim that widespread dissent from the Church's teaching on contraception manifests a *sensus fidelium*, or sense of the faithful. But this raises the question of what counts as being faithful. That sense is not authentic if it contradicts revelation, tradition, and the magisterium. Moreover, to affirm the claim, one must deny that those who accept the teaching on contraception, including almost all Catholics before the 1960s and the great majority of other Christians until several decades earlier, had a sense of the faithful. Reasonable people will reject such culturally myopic chauvinism.

15. Ibid., 411–412.

16. See Ford and Grisez, "Contraception and the Infallibility of the Ordinary Magisterium," 277–286.

6

**The Use of Condoms to Prevent
Transmission of HIV**

There has been a debate in the Catholic Church on the morality of using condoms to prevent the transmission of HIV. Some theologians maintain that the use of a condom is intrinsically contraceptive and that even if one's primary intention is to avoid the transmission of HIV, the use of a condom is morally wrong, since it is never morally permissible to do a moral wrong to achieve a good. The argument is also made that the use of a condom is immoral because it is immoral to engage in incomplete sexual acts, and having sex with a condom makes the sexual act incomplete: although penetration occurs, the union of bodies does not truly take place, because the man deposits his semen not in a woman's vagina but in a condom.

Those who argue that one may use a condom to prevent the transmission of HIV without violating the Church's teaching maintain that the moral evaluation of the act must be determined by the intentionality of the agent. Since the intention is to avoid transmission of HIV and the structure of the act is not violated, the use of a condom is good because the fact that conception cannot take place is not the defining feature. The magisterium has not made a determination on this matter. It is very important to keep in mind that the distribution and use of condoms in developing countries has proved to be very ineffective in reducing the rate of transmission of HIV; abstinence-based programs are the only ones that have succeeded.¹⁷

7

**Medical, Social, Legal, and
Environmental Consequences of Contraception***7.1 Medical Consequences*

Although much of the public believes that contraceptives provide substantial health benefits, it has long been established in professional medical and scientific literature that contraceptives carry substantial risks to life and health, as well as being relatively ineffective in preventing disease transmission. At the outset of its fact sheet on condom effectiveness, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states, "The most reliable ways to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), are to abstain from sexual activity or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner."¹⁸

In other words, the CDC has recapitulated traditional Christian moral teaching: abstinence (virginity) followed by fidelity. This core component of God's design for human sexuality carries the very health benefits the CDC and medical establishment

17. Matthew Hanley and Jokin de Irala, *Affirming Love, Avoiding AIDS: What Africa Can Teach the West* (Philadelphia: National Catholic Bioethics Center, 2010).

18. "Condoms and STDs: Fact Sheet for Public Health Personnel," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last updated March 25, 2013, <https://www.cdc.gov/>.

have failed to secure with condoms. Notice, too, that the CDC does not include the condom among the most reliable ways to avoid disease transmission. In fact, they go on in the document to say, “Genital ulcer diseases and HPV infections can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered or protected by a latex condom, as well as in areas that are not covered. . . . Condom use may reduce the risk for HPV infection and HPV-associated diseases (e.g., genital warts and cervical cancer).”¹⁹

Beyond the threats to life and health from their failure, condoms have not lived up to their promise in preventing unintended pregnancies. According to *Contraceptive Technology*, a widely respected textbook in the field, the male latex condom is only slightly more effective than the withdrawal method, 18 and 22 percent, respectively.²⁰ Considering the narrow window of fertility in the monthly cycle and the fact that *Contraceptive Technology* defines a failure as resultant pregnancy, it must be deduced that the absolute mechanical failure rate of condoms is much higher than the 18 percent of the time their use results in pregnancy.

If the disease prevention and pregnancy data on condoms are less than reassuring, the inherent risks of hormonal contraceptive use are even more alarming. In addition to the well-known role of oral contraceptives in causing the most common forms of breast cancer, their use raises the risk of the deadliest and most difficult to treat form of cancer, premenopausal triple-negative breast cancer. According to a 2009 study, the elevated risk ranges from 250 percent for women who start oral contraceptives at age twenty-two or older, to 540 percent for women who start using them before age eighteen.²¹ This should not come as a surprise. The International Agency for Research on Cancer, a part of the World Health Organization, has classified estrogen-progestogen (progestin) oral contraceptives as group 1 carcinogens for breast, cervical, and liver cancers.²² Oral contraceptives also increase a woman’s risk of possibly lethal and always disabling pulmonary embolism, myocardial infarction, and cerebral vascular accidents as well as her susceptibility to the HIV and HPV viruses with their attendant morbidity. Both the estrogen-progestin combined pill and the progestin-only pill have also contributed greatly to the incidence of ectopic

19. Ibid.

20. James Trussell, “Percentage of Women Experiencing an Unintended Pregnancy during the First Year of Typical Use and the First Year of Perfect Use of Contraception,” table 3-2, in *Contraceptive Technology*, 20th rev. ed., ed. Robert A. Hatcher et al. (New York: Ardent Media, 2011). Trussell’s table is also available at <http://www.contraceptivetechnology.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CTFailureTable.pdf>.

21. Jessica M. Dolle et al., “Risk Factors for Triple-Negative Breast Cancer in Women under the Age of 45 Years,” *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention* 18.4 (April 2009): 1159.

22. Group 1 agents are those that have been shown to be carcinogenic to humans; they include known carcinogens such as tobacco, radium, plutonium, and all types of ionizing radiation. The classification of carcinogenic agents is published in the *IARC Monographs*. See the IARC tables “Agents Classified by the *IARC Monographs*, Volumes 1–117,” and “List of Classifications by Cancer Sites with Sufficient or Limited Evidence in Humans, Volumes 1 to 117,” last updated October 24, 2016, <http://monographs.iarc.fr/>.

pregnancies, which are fatal for the baby and life-threatening for the mother.²³ Oral contraceptives have failure rates of close to 10 percent with typical use.²⁴

These data show that the more people use these contraceptive technologies, the higher the incidence of unintended pregnancy and disease. None of these data existed fifty years ago in the run-up to *Humanae vitae*, and many people who were not aware of the rationale behind the Church's clear and consistent teaching believed in good faith that contraceptives might be a modern and humane way of addressing all manner of social ills. That was then. In the ensuing half-century, the clear teaching that the Church explicated in clear language has been tragically underscored by the failures inherent in the contraceptive culture and the overwhelming number of its victims. God's wise design is not a "no" to happiness, but a protection of life and health. The numbers tell the story.

7.2 *Hormones and Relationships*

Although research into the psychological and behavioral effects of hormonal contraceptives has been insufficient until recently, a review of scholarly research to date finds significant cause for concern. The author states, "Women who use HCs report higher rates of depression, reduced sexual functioning, and higher interest in short-term sexual relationships compared to their naturally cycling counterparts. Also, hormonal contraceptives use may alter women's ability to attract a mate, as well as the mate retention behavior in both users and their romantic partners. Some evidence even suggests that hormonal contraceptive use alters mate choice and may negatively affect sexual satisfaction in parous women, with potential effects on future offspring."²⁵ Regarding mate attraction and retention, a subsequent study supported those findings. It found that women are attracted to different types of men depending on whether or not they are taking hormonal contraceptives, and that marital stability can be negatively affected when a woman who was on hormonal contraceptives at the beginning of her relationship subsequently discontinues their use.²⁶

7.3 *Chemical Contraception and the Environment*

It is an inconvenient truth that chemical contraceptive use is wreaking havoc on the environment. The chemical ethinyl estradiol (EE2) in hormonal contraceptives is transferred directly to the water supply through urination. There is no practical or economic way to remove these toxins from the water supply using standard treatment

23. Walter L. Larrimore and Joseph B. Stanford, "Ectopic Pregnancy with Oral Contraceptive Use Has Been Overlooked," letter, *BMJ* 321.7258 (August 12, 2000): 450.

24. Trussell, "Women Experiencing Unintended Pregnancy."

25. Lisa L. M. Welling, "Psychobehavioral Effects of Hormonal Contraceptive Use," *Evolutionary Psychology* 11.3 (July 2013): 718, doi: 10.1177/147470491301100315.

26. V. Marie Russel et al. "The Association between Discontinuing Hormonal Contraceptives and Wives' Marital Satisfaction Depends on Husbands' Facial Attractiveness," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111.48 (December 2, 2014): 17081–17086, doi: 10.1073/pnas.1414784111.

methods.²⁷ Because of this, artificial reproductive hormones are accumulating in both natural and drinking water supplies and are having significant negative environmental effects, especially on fish populations living in inland estuaries and, in particular, near water treatment plants.²⁸ Male fish are feminized and have less reproductive success, to the point where population collapse has occurred among some species in certain locations.²⁹ Vertebrates, including male amphibians and rats, appear to be similarly affected.³⁰

The evidence of intersex and other fertility-related disorders in higher-order male vertebrates contributes to the growing concerns that environmental EE2 toxicity may be a significant contributor to the decades-long global increase in the rates of poor reproductive health among men, including increased rates of hypospadias, undescended testicles, testicular cancer, and low sperm count.³¹

7.4 Social and Personal Consequences

For decades, scholars have documented the harmful social effects of contraception.³² One of the most harmful effects is the astronomical increase in sex outside of marriage and, when contraception fails, in single parenthood. This has led to the sadness of countless children being raised in fatherless households. Social science findings have repeatedly demonstrated that growing up in an intact home benefits children and, conversely, that growing up in a single-parent home increases the risks

27. Wynne Parry, "Water Pollution Caused by Birth Control Poses Dilemma," *LiveScience*, May 23, 2012, <http://www.livescience.com/>.

28. Lund University, "Estrogen in Birth Control Pills Has a Negative Impact on Fish," *ScienceDaily*, March 4, 2016, www.sciencedaily.com/. See also Adam R. Schwindt et al., "An Environmental Oestrogen Disrupts Fish Population Dynamics through Direct and Transgenerational Effects on Survival and Fecundity," *Journal of Applied Ecology* 51.3 (June 2014): 582–591, doi: 10.1111/1365-2664.12237.

29. Matthew R. Mills et al., "Removal of Ecotoxicity of 17 α -Ethinylestradiol Using TAML/Peroxide Water Treatment," *Scientific Reports* 5, e-pub June 12, 2015, 10511: 1–10, doi: 10.1038/srep10511.

30. Stephanie Tamschick et al., "Sex Reversal Assessments Reveal Different Vulnerability to Endocrine Disruption between Deeply Diverged Anuran Lineages," *Scientific Reports* 6, e-pub March 31, 2016, 23825: 1–8, doi: 10.1038/srep23825. See also Lisa A. Vrooman et al., "Estrogenic Exposure Alters the Spermatogonial Stem Cells in the Developing Testis, Permanently Reducing Crossover Levels in the Adult," *PLOS Genetics* 11.1, e-pub January 23, 2015, 1004949: 1–20, doi: 10.1371/journal.pgen.1004949.

31. L.M. Zorrilla et al., "The Effects of Ethinyl Estradiol on Spermatogenesis in the Adult Male Rat," presented at Triangle Consortium of Reproductive Biology, Research Triangle Park, NC, February 6, 2010, available at <http://cfpub.epa.gov/>. See also Vrooman et al., "Estrogenic Exposure."

32. Lionel Tiger, *The Decline of Males: The First Look at an Unexpected New World for Men and Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). See also Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (New York: Free Press, 2006); and Mary Eberstadt, *Adam and Eve after the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013).

of sexual abuse, criminality, truancy, emotional disorders, and other childhood and adolescent harm.

Moreover, the widespread use of contraception has led to a rise in both illegitimacy and abortion. In *Evangelium vitae* n. 13, John Paul II speaks of contraception and abortion as fruits of the same tree. It is an easily observable fact that trend lines for both contraception and abortion rise in parallel. To say that the relation is only a correlation and not a sign of causation is to refuse to see what is obvious. It is hard to deny that contraceptive use leads to abortion, in part because it contributes to the perception that pregnancy is a failure or an accident that can be remedied by killing the unborn child.

Those who advocate for increased use of contraception should realize that it not only increases the number of abortions but also leads to gendercide, the form of abortion that targets unborn children of a specific sex. Across the planet, millions more unborn girls are killed by abortion than boys. In some cultures, this happens because parents want boys to carry on the family legacy; in others, it is a result of the consumer mentality reinforced by widespread contraception—we want what we want when we want it—which extends to killing children whose sex does not match our preferences.

In many ways, the harmful effects of contraception are closely connected to a consumer mentality. Men can come to treat women as an interchangeable partners for recreational sex, rather than as potential partners in a lifelong relationship that involves commitment to each other and the shared task of child-rearing. *Humanae vitae* n. 17 predicted that the sexual revolution would lessen respect for women among men. The accumulated data from studies of happiness suggest that female unhappiness has increased since the sexual revolution took hold. One study found that during the past thirty-five years, women's self-reported feelings of well-being have declined both absolutely and relatively compared to men's.³³

The enthusiasm for contraception arose when people thought the world would soon be overpopulated to the point of annihilation. Today, in contrast, more and more scholars and leaders are realizing the damage done to economies and cultures when birth rates fall below replacement levels. Indeed, some countries fear that the wealthier nations try to impose their contraceptive lifestyles on developing nations because they fear competition.³⁴

The erroneous view that contraception is necessary to happiness has led to attempts to pressure societies to provide contraception for free, which leads in turn to violations of religious liberty. The multiple ways that contraception contributes to social decay have been catalogued elsewhere; suffice it to say here that the writers of the Wijngaards statement are naïve to speak of proven benefits without acknowledging the harms. Certainly there are great benefits to spouses in being able to control

33. Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, "The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 1.2 (August 2009): 190–225, doi: 10.1257/pol.1.2.190.

34. Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

the size of their family, but that can be done using NFP methods, which are very effective, lack bad health consequences, are virtually free, and contribute to marital stability and happiness.

7.5 *Legal Consequences*

Pope Paul VI spoke prophetically in *Humanae vitae* when he warned that with widespread contraception, governments would begin violating human rights:

Let [reasonable individuals] also carefully consider that a dangerous power will be put into the hands of rulers who care little about the moral law. . . . Who will prevent public authorities from favoring what they believe to be the most effective contraceptive methods and from mandating that everyone must use them, whenever they consider it necessary? And clearly it will come about that people who desire to avoid the difficulties that are part of the divine law, difficulties that individuals, families, or society may experience, will hand over to the will of the public authorities the power of interfering in the most exclusive and intimate mission [*munus*] of spouses. (*HV* n. 17)

Once a large segment of society accepts contraception as a social good, it takes but a few short steps for governments to begin to force this “good” on others. This process begins with the elimination or reduction of legal impediments to contraceptive access, followed by heavy state subsidization of contraceptive drugs and devices and active suppression of religious, familial, and cultural opposition to contraception. It takes the form of mandatory sexual education in public schools (which may also be extended to private and religious schools) that indoctrinates children and erodes parental authority. School administrators, counselors, and teachers thus assume the role of primary educators in sexual matters. In some schools, children receive condoms and instructions on their use, with no possibility of opting out, while school officials disingenuously claim that they are leaving the moral question of contraceptive use to families. But once the state decides to promote contraceptives, its position on the moral question is clear: having accepted contraception as a societal good, the state will treat it as such.

When concentrated government power supports an ideology of radical sexual autonomy, the religious freedom of all also comes under assault. In the United States, the government actualized this threat by mandating near-universal coverage of contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs and devices by employers and insurance companies. Private business owners and religious nonprofits who objected, including a religious order that serves the poor, were threatened with millions of dollars in fines if they followed their faith and refused to collaborate in the provision of contraceptives. Although narrowly decided court decisions have so far protected such groups from government coercion, the durability of those rulings remains to be seen.

In any event, it is clear that government has come to see religious authority as an obstacle to government-endorsed goals for contraceptive use and thus an obstacle to progress. Religious institutions may thus be targeted by the state for exclusion from the public square and public programs if they do not adopt or endorse the government’s views on human sexuality.

It is the vulnerable populations served by religious institutions—be they women, racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, or the undereducated—that will be induced

and ultimately coerced by governments into accepting contraceptive practices. One need only look at forced sterilization programs in India, Africa, and South America or forced abortions in China to see this dynamic in practice. As Paul VI states in *Humanae vitae*, people under individual or societal pressure “will hand over to the will of the public authorities the power of interfering in the most exclusive and intimate mission [*munus*] of spouses” (*HV* n. 17). Once this authority is ceded, it will not easily be restored.

7.6 Cultural Consequences

Many African nations have been under enormous pressure for decades to distribute contraceptives. Since the Catholic Church provides nearly 50 percent of the health care in most African nations, there have also been attempts to coerce Catholic institutions to distribute contraceptives. This is a serious violation of religious liberty. *Humanae vitae* provides a solid line of defense for bishops, religious, and laity who are committed to both following the Church’s teaching and refusing to be used by governments and international agencies for their agendas. Ecclesial and lay Catholic leaders have seen the harms, if not devastation, to which the widespread use of contraceptives has contributed in developed countries. They are convinced that the values honored by FABMs are more compatible with the family values of their cultures. It is scandalous that international agencies in some cases refuse to provide food and health care unless a government institutes population control measures based on widespread distribution of contraceptives and access to abortion. Africans love their children: they do not so much want fewer of them as want food and health care for them. The money spent providing contraception and promoting abortion could easily fund universal instruction on FABMs, with large amounts remaining for food, clean water, and health care.

8

The Cost of Discipleship

8.1 The Reality of Grace

Living by the Church’s teaching that it is good for each and every act of marital sexual intercourse to retain its openness to life can present many challenges that seem insuperable. But the Gospel, or Good News, *is* good news. We are not on our own. Our savior, Jesus Christ, came to make available to us the graces that enable us to live up to the demands and greatness of our nature. He is eager to take our burdens onto himself and has provided many sources of grace, such as prayer, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Reconciliation. At times, we must all practice what can seem a frightening, radical reliance on the Lord, but we must have confidence that He is there to help us: “Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you” (Peter 5:7). The time we spend worrying would be better spent in prayer, for there we can hear the voice of the Lord and learn his plan for us, a plan He will help us achieve.

8.2 The Challenge of Infertility and Contraception

Just as the language of marital love requires spouses to accept each other in all of their dimensions, richness, and wholeness (here, fertility), so spouses must welcome each other in their weaknesses, limitations, and lack of wholeness (here,

infertility). In the case of spouses suffering from infertility, the temptation can be strong to seek another partner to fulfill the natural (but sometimes obsessive) desire for children. The absence of children, much like the failure to find a good spouse, can be experienced as an insuperable barrier to happiness, a void that cannot be filled, leading sometimes to permanent heartbreak. Yet abandoning one's spouse for this reason is a grave breach of love, a betrayal, and amounts to using the new partner with whom one seeks to have children.

The struggles with infertility yield an important perspective on the question of contraception, since those who are infertile can come to reject their spouses, a rejection that is implicit in the use of contraception, as well. For spouses to love the fertility they offer to and receive from each other is just as necessary as loving each other when infertility is a part of the relationship. Rejecting the gift of fertility by the use of contraception amounts to telling one's spouse that he or she is not loved in all respects. Spouses who use contraception reject a key element of their marital pledge and thereby wound their love at its very core.

9

Recommendations

9.1 *To Catholics, Especially Husbands and Wives*

We urge Catholics, especially husbands and wives, to consider God's original intention for men and women. The gifts of sexuality, fertility, and the one-flesh union of marriage are an invitation to share in his life. We urge you to consider that Catholic teachings on human sexuality, marriage, and procreation come from the Lord God of all creation as revealed to the Church—they are not invented by academic theologians or the clergy. These teachings express God's truth and love for us.

We recommend that all Catholics prayerfully read *Humanae vitae* and become familiar with the many benefits of NFP. If questions arise, it may be helpful to contact a Catholic priest or an NFP teacher for counsel, visit the websites, and read the books and articles on the list of resources mentioned earlier.³⁵

9.2 *To Health Care Professionals*

We ask health care professionals to consider how knowledge of the methods of NFP and NaProTECHNOLOGY could contribute to your service to your patients. We urge you to familiarize yourself with the various methods and the science behind them so that you may help your colleagues and patients appreciate the beauty of God's gift of fertility.³⁶

35. See the bibliography and resources at <http://trs.cua.edu/>.

36. For a list of NFP providers that offer online and on-site education, see "NFP Education for Healthcare Professionals," US Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://www.usccb.org/>.

9.3 *To Institutions of Higher Learning*

We ask leaders in Catholic colleges and universities to hire faculty who support Church teaching on Catholic morality. We ask them to provide programs that will educate young people on how to remain chaste in their college years and beyond and how best to find a suitable spouse and build a relationship based on the love of Jesus and respect for his Church.

9.4 *To Catholic Lay Ecclesial Leaders, Consecrated Religious, and Ordained Clergy, Especially Bishops*

Those who are leaders in the Catholic Church have a special responsibility to authentically represent Church teaching to the faithful. Therefore, we make these recommendations:

9.4.1 UNDERTAKE TO STRENGTHEN AND EVEN REFORM ALL CATECHETICAL PROGRAMS UNDER YOUR SUPERVISION. Ensure that catechetical programs and curricula provide substantive education on Church teachings that treat Christian anthropology (how God made men and women in his image); the nature of human sexuality, including evidence dispelling the myths of gender ideology; the nature of marriage (natural and sacramental); the virtue of chastity; the incompatibility of contraception with the goods of marriage; the morality of natural methods of family planning, including their basic science and methodology; the value of waiting until marriage to have sex and of marrying in the Church; and the value of having children in marriage and providing them with a strong and loving family life. NB: A review of catechetical programs ought to be undertaken with the goal of uncovering weakness, correcting problems, and strengthening content. Today, there are many resources that can facilitate this process.³⁷

9.4.2 PROVIDE CATECHETICAL EDUCATION TO ALL THE FAITHFUL. Since love and sexuality affect all people, pastoral education ought to be provided for parishioners of all ages, with age-appropriate curricula for children and adolescents. From an early age, young people should prepare for marriage, practice the virtues needed to be good spouses, and know how to seek a good spouse. Parents and educators should be intentional in helping young people be conscious of how best to prepare for married life and parenthood. NB: Special mention should be made of young adults, who often fall away from the Church. As mentioned, education in the Catholic faith should be offered in university settings. Since some 70 percent of young adults do not attend college, it is also critical to reach out to young adults through creative venues, such as Theology on Tap, and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

9.4.3 ENSURE THAT CHURCH TEACHING IS PROVIDED BY WELL-FORMED AND BELIEVING CLERGY, RELIGIOUS, AND LAITY. No one who does not believe and strive to live Catholic teaching in their lives should teach the faithful. Every effort ought to be made to ensure that Church leaders who teach—from the parish religious education volunteer to the faculty in a Catholic university's department of theology—should have the mind of the Church. We especially recommend that continuing education

37. See the bibliography and resources at <http://trs.cua.edu/>.

and formation programs be required of all Church leaders on the subjects of Christian anthropology, human sexuality, chastity, marriage, and the planning of family size.

9.5 A Special Word to Diocesan Bishops

We make these recommendations to bishops because of their sacred teaching authority.

9.5.1 CREATE OR STRENGTHEN DIOCESAN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE MINISTRY. Diocesan marriage ministry is concerned with all aspects of the pastoral preparation of couples for marriage as well as pastoral support for married couples and their families. Central to this activity should be catechetical education and formation in God's design for married love, which should include

- Substantive content and personal witness to the Church's teachings on conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the immorality of contraception, and the morality of NFP.
- Education for youth and young adults not yet contemplating marriage, with a special focus on the virtue of chastity and an introduction to the science and methods of NFP.
- Continuing education offered to diocesan clergy, religious, and lay ecclesial leaders.

9.5.2 CREATE OR STRENGTHEN DIOCESAN NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING MINISTRY. Part of diocesan NFP education should include creating or strengthening its NFP ministry, since this apostolate is complex and involves education in human fertility in addition to Church moral teachings.³⁸ When developing diocesan NFP ministry, it is important to include

- Programming for the pastoral support of NFP users, especially those struggling with the methods.
- Programming for clergy education in the science and methods of NFP, including where to find reputable resources. NB: It is especially important to encourage clergy to give Sunday homilies on Church teaching regarding chastity, conjugal love, responsible parenthood, and the moral methods of NFP.
- A variety of educational and witness formats, such the diocesan website, online courses, and social media.
- Local NFP-only health care professionals, including Catholic marriage counselors (or those who support Catholic teaching).

9.5.3 PROVIDE PASTORAL SUPPORT TO THE NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY. Since the secular scientific community does not commonly support NFP research, Church leaders ought to step in to help. Among the activities we recommend are

38. A useful instrument for accomplishing this can be found in "Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry," US Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://www.usccb.org/>.

- Identifying benefactors for the funding of NFP research.
- Funding the participation of diocesan representatives, such as teachers and physicians, in NFP educational conferences.
- Promoting the medical practices of NFP-only doctors in the diocese.

9.6 *To All People of Good Will*

The evidence from both sociological research and common sense seems to challenge the popular belief that access to contraception is necessary to individual freedom and will help people attain, if not long-lasting love, at least some degree of happiness. People should ask whether they are healthier or happier from contraceptive use and the sexual behavior which accompanies it.

We do not presume to tell people what to believe, but we do urge all people of good will to question the status quo—especially the healthiness of contraceptive use with regard to both their personal lives and society in general.

We also invite all people to read *Humanae vitae*, test the claims made against it, and appreciate its wisdom. Finally, we invite you to discover the methods of NFP.³⁹

9.7 *To International Agencies*

We urge international agencies to listen to the voices of women and men who share the understanding that contraception is harmful for women, relationships, children, and society and who would benefit from knowledge of NFP. We ask agencies to respect the religious liberty of organizations and individuals. Indeed, we ask them to become fully familiar with the science behind NFP and to take an honest look at the damage contraceptive use has done in many cultures. We ask them to promote natural methods of family planning, since these methods are moral, ecologically sound, effective, inexpensive, and conducive to strong marriages. The Catholic Church and those who see the harms that contraception has done deserve a hearing. Individuals, marriages, and societies will benefit greatly if the truth is recognized and followed.

39. For more information, visit <http://www.factsaboutfertility.org/>.