



MARRIAGE IS A HOLY SACRAMENT

by

Blessed John Paul 11

In a marriage, a man and a woman pledge themselves to one another in an unbreakable alliance of total mutual self-giving – a total union of love! This Love is not a passing emotion or temporary infatuation but a responsible and free decision to bind oneself completely ‘in good times and in bad’ to one’s married partner. It is the gift of oneself to the other. It is a love proclaimed before the eyes of the whole world. It is unconditional. To be capable of such love calls for careful preparation from early childhood. The love of husband and wife in God’s plan leads beyond itself and new life is generated, a family is born. Marriage is a holy

sacrament. Those baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus are married in his name also. Their love is a sharing in the love of God. He is the source. The marriage of Christian couples are images on earth of the wonder of God, the loving, life-giving communion of three persons in God, and of God’s covenant in Christ with the Church. Christian marriage is a sacrament of salvation. It is the pathway to holiness for all members of the family.



MARRIAGE PREPARATION TALKS

PAPER 1

Marriage in God's plan

Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman made in the image and likeness of God. God Himself is the author of marriage. The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman.

Marriage is not a purely human institution. It is common to all cultures. The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.

God is love and he created man and woman so that their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves mankind. According to Scripture this love of man and woman is intended to be fruitful and to be realised in the common work of watching over creation. God said to Adam and Eve: 'be fruitful, multiply fill the earth and subdue it'

Scripture affirms that man and woman were created

for one another - 'a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh'. The book of Genesis also says: 'it is not good for man to be alone', let us make him a helpmate which is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh'

Marriage under the regime of sin

Since there is sin in us and in the world around us, it finds its way also into the relationship of man and woman. The union can be threatened by discord, infidelity, jealousy and domination. The battle of the sexes stems from man's sinful nature. When Adam and Eve sinned they first ruptured their relationship with God and then their relationship with each other. Their mutual attraction of man and woman - God's gift, can so easily be degraded by domination and lust. (Perhaps the government would do well to remember this when they think that education is the magic bullet which will bring down the teenage pregnancy rate. Man tainted by sin has unruly passions which only the grace of God and the virtue of chastity will overcome. In fact sexual education devoid of this religious content is liable to have the opposite effect of fuelling these unruly passions and making the situation worse.) That is precisely what's happened.

In order to restore order back into their relationship, man and woman need the help of the grace that God which in his infinite mercy He never refuses them. The disorder set in motion by the first Adam can only be reversed by the second Adam – Christ. Marriage helps us to overcome self-absorption, egotism, the pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other in mutual self-giving.

Marriage in the Lord

Jesus performs his first miracle at Cana in Galilee. The Church sees this event as confirmation of the goodness of marriage and a sign of Christ's presence in their relationship. God has determined that the matrimonial union of man and woman is indissoluble: "what therefore God has joined together let no one put asunder." Even though this seems a very heavy burden to carry, God Himself will give couples the strength to carry it out. If they take on board Christ's command to renounce themselves and take up their cross, the spouses will have a happy and fulfilled married life.

Christ lays down his life for us – the church, so, couples who get married in the Lord mirror this same love in their conjugal life. Marriage between baptised

persons is a true sacrament of the New Testament.

The Sixth Commandment

'Male and female he created them...' A husband and wife who live in loving communion with each other mirror God who is love in its totality. Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of body and soul. It primarily concerns our capacity to love and procreate but also leads us into deeper bonds of communion with each other and the wider human family.

Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept their sexual identity. The present Holy Father, when he was cardinal, bemoans certain modern trends which tend to undermine "sexual specificity that makes every role interchangeable between man and woman". Some say: 'whether one is male or female is not important - we are all simply humans'. According to the Pope this attitude has grave consequences even if at first it appears very beautiful and generous. It signifies, in fact, that sexuality is no longer rooted in anthropology; it means that sex is viewed as a simple role, interchangeable at one's pleasure.

Man and woman are made for each other and the

living out of their complementary nature will be conducive towards their fulfilment and the good of society at large. Among certain quarters today there is a tendency to introduce disharmony into the relationship between the sexes and disrupt the complementary nature of male and female intended by the Creator. Of course, in this context, the Church sees 'gay marriage' as a non-starter and completely at variance with the teaching of Christ and his Church. It can never be approved.

The vocation to chastity

Sexuality is in accord with the designs of the Creator when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another in the complete and lifelong union of marriage.

Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy. In order to resist temptations against chastity we must know our innate weaknesses, avoid the occasions of sin and be faithful to the commandments of God and to prayer. Self-mastery is a long and exacting work. When relationships are not dominated by lust they lead to a deeper spiritual communion. Those who are engaged

to marry are called to live chastely. It leads to mutual respect. They should reserve for marriage expressions of affection that belong to married love. Couples help each other to grow in chastity.

Offences against chastity

Lust

Sexual pleasure is disordered when sought for itself, and isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.

In this context masturbation is condemned. The Magisterium of the Church, in the course of its constant tradition has maintained that self-abuse (masturbation) is a gravely disordered action. However, as far as a person's culpability is concerned, psychological or social factors and a person's overall maturity should not be overlooked.

Fornication is a carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. Couples who 'live together' before marriage are not permitted to receive Holy Communion until they get married in the Catholic Church. If they have lived together they should 'go to confession' before they get married in Church. Fornication is contrary to the dignity of

persons because human sexuality is ordered towards the good of married spouses and the generation and education of children. Parents who live together and are not married are the source of scandal to their offspring.

Pornography offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act - the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It is a grave sin. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world and thereby distorts their view of reality.

Prostitution is a social scourge. While it is always gravely sinful, the imputability of the offense can be attenuated by destitution, blackmail or social pressure. It is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy and integrity of another person. It causes grave damage and can mark a victim for life.

Chastity and Homosexuality

Sacred Scripture and the Church's constant tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered' and do harm to the persons involved. They are contrary to the natural law. These acts do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. They can never be approved

and are grave sins. Unless confessed and repented of in the Sacrament of Penance they hinder those involved from receiving Holy Communion at Mass.

For most people however, being homosexual is a trial. They do not choose their condition. They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity and never be discriminated against. Like every other Christian they become holy by carrying their cross in union with Jesus and living according to his commandments. Like everyone else homosexual persons are called to chastity.

PAPER 2

The Love of husband and wife

In marriage the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. Sexuality in marriage is not something simply biological. It is meant to be an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.

The Creator has designed that the acts of marriage be a source of joy and pleasure for the couple. This

union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These two ends of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple's spiritual life.

Conjugal fidelity

The union which a couple freely enter into in marriage imposes on them the obligation to preserve it as unique and indissoluble. What God has joined together let nobody put asunder. Fidelity involves keeping one's given word. St John Chrysostom suggests that young husbands should say to their wives:

'I have taken you in my arms, and I love you, and prefer you to my life itself. For the present life is nothing, and my most ardent dream is to spend it with you in such a way that we may be assured of not being separated in the life reserved for us. I place your love above all things, and nothing would be more bitter or painful to me than to be of a different mind than you'

The fecundity of marriage

Fecundity is an end of marriage. Conjugal love naturally tends to be fruitful. A child does not come

from outside as something added-on to the love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfilment.

The Church teaches that "each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life". The teaching of the Magisterium says that the unitive and procreative significance of the marriage must not be separated.

Couples share in the creative power of God when they bring children into the world. Having brought children into the world they have the responsibility to raise and educate them in the light of the gospel.

However for a just reason, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood. In deciding about the number and spacing of their children the morality of the decision must be based on objective criteria and not merely on the mutual intentions of the couple alone.

Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods is in conformity with objective criteria

of morality. To render procreation impossible by artificial means is intrinsically sinful and against the Will of the Creator. Artificial contraception goes against the inner truth of conjugal love which calls on the spouses to love each other unconditionally which they promised to do on their wedding day.

As is happening in China at present the State may not legitimately usurp the initiative of the spouses because they, and not the State, have the primary responsibility for the procreation and education of their children. Anything other than this, like their one child policies is contrary to the moral law established by God and gravely immoral.

The gift of a child

Sacred Scripture and the Church's traditional practice see large families as a sign of God's blessing and the parents' generosity. Couples who discover that they are sterile suffer quite a bit. Research aimed at reducing human sterility is to be encouraged provided that it is based on the design and will of the Creator.

Techniques that entail the dissociation of husband and wife, by the intrusion of a person other than the couple (donation of sperm and ovum, surrogate

womb etc) are gravely immoral. These techniques infringe the child's right to be born of a father and mother known to him and bound to each other by marriage. A child may not be considered a piece of property. A child has the right to be the fruit of the specific act of conjugal love of his parents, and the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception. Techniques involving artificial insemination and fertilization dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act. The act which brings the child into existence is no longer an act by which two persons give themselves to one another in love, but one that entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists. Being conceived in such a way is contrary to the dignity of the person – a dignity to which we all have a right.

Couples who find they can't have children should unite themselves to the Lord's Cross, the source of all spiritual fecundity. They can give expression to their longing for a child by adopting children or an ardent service of others.

Offences against the dignity of marriage

Adultery

When two partners, of whom at least one is married

to another party, have sexual relations, they commit adultery. The sixth commandment and the New Testament forbid adultery absolutely. Christ condemns adultery even of desire.

Adultery is an injustice. The person who commits it transgresses the rights of the other spouse and undermines the institution of marriage. He compromises the welfare of children who need their parents' stable union.

Divorce

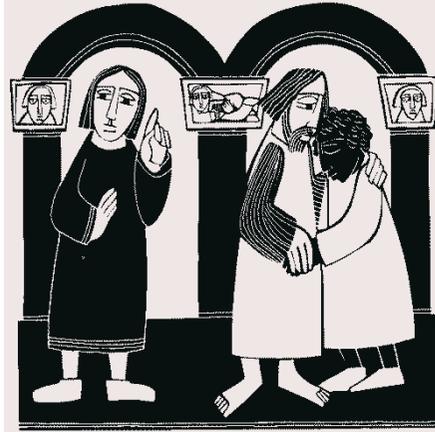
The intention of the Creator, according to Scripture is that marriage be indissoluble. The separation of the spouses while maintaining the marriage bond can be legitimate in certain cases provided for by Canon Law.

It can happen that one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law: this spouse therefore has not contravened the moral law. There is a considerable difference between a spouse who has sincerely tried to be faithful to the sacrament of marriage and is unjustly abandoned, and one who through his own grave fault destroys a canonically valid marriage. However, a divorced partner may not contemplate a new union unless the Church has officially granted them an annulment. If a divorced

person attempts a second marriage without an annulment, the marriage is invalid. Persons living thus may not receive Holy Communion at Mass until the situation is resolved. The Church, like a mother is there to help couples in situations like this.

Divorce is immoral because it introduces disorder into the family and into society. The disorder brings harm to the deserted spouse, to the children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them and because of its contagious effect which makes it truly a plague on society.

Other offences against the dignity of marriage are polygamy, incest, common law marriage, i.e. where a couple live together and refuse to give juridical and public form to a liaison involving sexual intimacy. Impediments to marriage



LIST OF DIRIMENT IMPEDIMENTS TO MARRIAGE

Age.

In England and Wales, this minimum age has been set to be in accordance with civil law (i.e., 16 years old for both parties).

Physical capacity for consummation lacking.

"Without prejudice to the provisions of Canon 1098, sterility neither forbids nor invalidates a marriage."
Both parties, however, must be physically capable of

completed vaginal intercourse, wherein the man ejaculates "true semen" into the woman's vagina. (See [1] for details.) To invalidate a marriage, the impotence must be perpetual (i.e., incurable) and antecedent to the marriage. The impotence can either be absolute or relative. This impediment is generally considered to derive from divine natural law, and so cannot be dispensed.[16] The reason behind this impediment is explained in the Summa Theologica:[17] "In marriage there is a contract whereby one is bound to pay the other the marital debt: wherefore just as in other contracts, the bond is unfitting if a person bind himself to what he cannot give or do, so the marriage contract is unfitting, if it be made by one who cannot pay the marital debt."

Previous marriage

Previous marriages, whether conducted in the Catholic Church, in another church, or by the State. All previous attempts at marriage by both parties wishing to marry must be declared null prior to a wedding in the Catholic Church, without regard to the religion of the party previously married.

Disparity of Cult.

A marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person is invalid, unless this impediment is dispensed by the Local Ordinary i.e. the Bishop.

Sacred orders

One of the parties has received sacred orders. It is permanent (unless dispensed by the Apostolic See).

Perpetual Vow of Chastity.

One of the parties has made a public perpetual vow of chastity.

Abduction,

One of the parties, usually the woman, has been abducted with the view of contracting marriage.

Crime

One or both of the parties has brought about the death of a spouse with the view of entering marriage with each other.

Consanguinity.

The parties are closely related by blood. Ecclesiastical or divine, depending on the degree of relationship.

Affinity.

The parties are related by marriage in a prohibited degree.

Public propriety.

The parties are "related" by notorious concubinage.

Adoption.

The parties are related by adoption.

Spiritual relationship.

One of the parties is the godparent of the other. This no longer applies in the Latin Rite, but still applies in the Eastern Catholic Churches.

OTHER FACTORS WHICH INVALIDATE MARRIAGE**Lack of Form.**

When a marriage of a Catholic takes place without following the laws and rites of the Catholic Church.

Coercion.

This impediment exists if one of the parties is pressured by any circumstances to enter into marriage. (In order for the impediment to cease, the situation must change so that the party can marry freely of his or her own will.)

Psychological immaturity or mental incapacity.

To enter into sacramental marriage, both parties

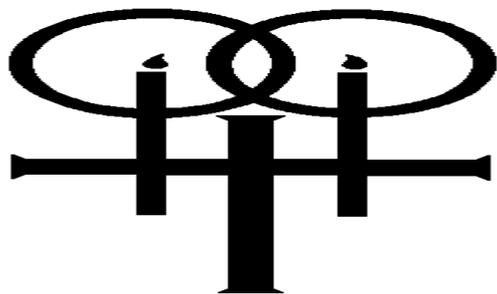
must understand and have the capacity to accept the minimum of what it entails.

Refusal to have children.

One of the goods of marriage is children. A man or woman physically capable of fathering or, respectively, conceiving a child but who intends never to have children may not marry in the Catholic Church.

Exclusion of fidelity or permanence.

Fidelity of each party to the other is a good of marriage. If this is specifically excluded in the mind of either party or if the marriage is not seen as permanent, the couple may not marry in the Catholic Church.



DR JANET SMITH ON CONTRACEPTION

It was not until 1930 that the Anglican Church went on record as saying that contraception was permissible, for grave reasons, within marriage. Catholic Church has been "clear and constant" in its position on contraception, throughout its whole history.

In the early sixties there were perceptions of a population problem and growing sentiments that it would be inhumane for the Church to continue with a "policy" that promoted large families.

Feminists argued that not having children — would enhance access to careers.

When *Humanae Vitae* was released in July, 1968, it went off like a bomb.

Soon theologians and eventually lay people were dissenting not only about contraception but also about homosexuality, masturbation, adultery, divorce and many other issues.

The Church continually reiterates its opposition to contraception as a great moral wrong.

I think the experience of the last many decades has revealed that the Church has been very wise on

opposing contraception.

Contraception facilitates the sexual revolution which leads to much unwanted pregnancy and abortion. It has made women much more open to sexual exploitation by men.

The millions of abortions over the last decade and the phenomenal spread of AIDS alone indicate that we have serious problems with sexuality.

In the 1930's Pope Pius XI stated in *Casti Connubii*:

No reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose, sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.

There is an unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the conjugal act, and both are inherent in the conjugal act.

Sex is for babies and for bonding; if people are not ready for babies or bonding they ought not to be engaging in acts of sexual intercourse.

The modern age tends to treat babies as burdens and not as gifts.

We speak about "accidental pregnancies" as if getting pregnant were like getting hit by a car — some terrible accident has happened to us. But the truth is that if a pregnancy results from an act of sexual intercourse, this means that something has gone right, not that something has gone wrong.

Babies are treated as an unwelcome intrusion on the sexual act.

Women now take a "pill" to thwart their fertility, as if fertility were a disease against which we need a cure. Contraception treats the woman's body as if there were something wrong with it.

The use of contraception suggests that God made a mistake in the way that He designed the body and that we must correct His error

Let us not fail to mention that many forms of contraception are abortifacients; Contraception, then, enters a note of tremendous negation into the act of sexual intercourse.

But lovemaking should be a most wonderful act of

affirmation,

This is conveyed by making a total gift of one's self to another.

But we forget what a marvellous thing it is to be able to bring forth a new human being.

God wishes to share His creation with new human souls, and brings new souls into the world through the love of men and women for each other.

When a man and women have a child together, it's an act that changes the cosmos: something has come into existence that will never pass out of existence; each soul is immortal and is destined for immortal life.

In sexual intercourse, spouses provide God with an opportunity to perform His creative act.

Contraception says no to God; it says those using it want to have the wonderful physical pleasure of sex but do not want to allow God to perform His creative act. Contraception also means that the 'I do' the couple say to each other on their wedding day becomes a very emphatic 'I don't'.

But contraception is wrong not only because it violates the procreative meaning but also because it

violates the unitive meaning of the sexual act.

The sexual act is meant to be an act of total self-giving and that in withholding their fertility from one another spouses are not giving totally of themselves. They have lied with their bodies.

One of the most certain ways to distinguish simple sexual attraction from love is to think about whether all you want from another person is sexual pleasure, or whether you would like to have a baby with him or her.

Contraception, then, is an offense against one's body, against one's God, and against one's relationship with one's spouse.



'FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO'

Apostolic exhortation
of
Saint John Paul II
1981

God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation to love and be in communion. "It is not good for man to be alone".

Sexuality is by no means something purely biological but concerns the innermost being of the human person.

It is realised in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman

commit themselves totally to one another until death.

If a person were to deliberately withhold their fertility from their spouse he or she would not be giving totally of themselves which is part of the inner nature of conjugal love. When a couple make use of the safe period they are not withholding their fertility because the woman is temporarily infertile.

Since fertility is directed to the generation of a new human being, so by its nature it surpasses the purely biological order.

The only place in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage.

The marriage of baptised persons thus becomes a real symbol of the new and eternal covenant endorsed in the blood of Christ. Marriage 'in the Lord' is based on the Paschal mystery of Christ. Christ laid down His life for his Bride, the Church. In marriage the lives of the couple are entwined permanently.

Marriage of the baptised is one of the seven sacraments of the new covenant.

Conjugal love aims at a deeply personal unity -

beyond union in the flesh. It leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definite mutual giving and is open to fertility.

The Transmission of life

God calls married couples to a special sharing in his love and his power as Creator when they co-operate with him in the transmission and gift of human life.

The fundamental task of the family is to serve life, transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person.

Conjugal love is not restricted solely to the procreation of children. It also encompasses all those fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life which the father and mother are called to hand on to their children and through their children to the Church and the world.

Precisely because the love of husband and wife is a unique participation in the mystery of life and of the love of God Himself, the Church knows that she has received the special mission of guarding and protecting the lofty dignity of marriage and upholding

the most serious responsibility of the couple in the transmission of human life. When people say that 'the church should keep out of the bedroom', they don't appreciate or understand the Church's mission in guarding and protecting the lofty dignity of marriage. It's like saying 'the church should keep out of the classroom'.

The love between husband and wife must be fully human, exclusive and open to new life (*Humanae Vitae*).

People give all sorts of reasons why families should be limited through contraception. Some are guided by purely materialistic considerations, others believe that the world is overcrowded which is not true. The ultimate reason for these mentalities is the absence of God in people's hearts. An anti-life mentality is born. The Church firmly believes that human life, even if weak and suffering is always a splendid gift of God's goodness. The Church stands for life.

She sees it as a grave offence against human dignity and justice when governments or other public authorities attempt to limit in any way the freedom of couples in deciding about children.

Likewise to be denounced is where economic

assistance is conditional on particular countries adopting anti-life policies such as contraception, sterilization and procured abortion.

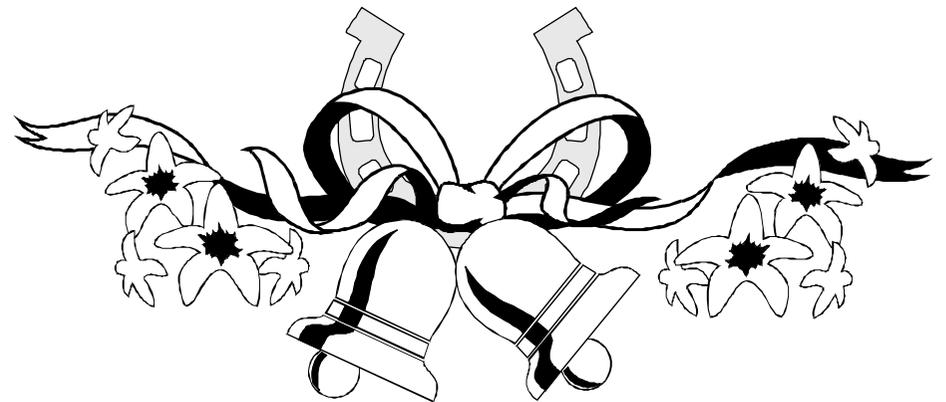
Pope Paul VI affirmed that the teaching of the Church "is founded upon the inseparable connection willed by God, and not allowed to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act, the unitive and procreative meaning.

When these two meanings are separated man and woman act in a purely subjective way, and without reference to the Divine plan, manipulate and degrade human sexuality and with it they and their married partner by altering its value of "total" self-giving. It is a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love.

The choice of the natural rhythms when controlling a family involves accepting the cycle of the person, that is, the woman and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control.

Knowledge of NFP must be made accessible to all married people and also to young adults before marriage through clear, instruction and education given by married couples, doctors and experts.

In the Christian view, chastity by no means signifies rejection of human sexuality or the lack of esteem for it; rather it signifies spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness, and able to advance it toward its full realization.



A SUMMARY OF THE ENCYCLICAL EVANGELIUM

VITAE

by

Saint John Paul II

Introduction

The Gospel of Life is at the heart of Jesus' message. It is good news to the people of every age and culture. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (Jn. 10:10)

The recent encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, The Gospel of Life, is a vigorous reaffirmation of the value of human life. It is an appeal to work together for justice and solidarity so that a new culture of human life will be affirmed for the building of an authentic civilization of truth and love.

In his encyclical, the Pope challenges us with the awesome question: do our daily choices contribute to the building of a culture of life or a culture of death?

In each area of society: the family, medicine, law, education, commerce, politics, the media, individuals daily make important choices which form our culture. Today, choices once unanimously considered criminal and rejected by the common moral sense

are becoming socially acceptable.

What follows is a summary of the encyclical. It is offered in the hope that you will be moved to study the full text and make its message and recommendations part of your lives. All passages in italics are quotations from the encyclical.

A culture of death

Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the dignity of the human person such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them ... poison human society.

We face the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity ... [and] takes the form of a veritable "culture of death". This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents

which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. It is, in a certain sense, a war of the powerful against the weak.

Are we each other's keepers?

In humanity's earliest days, Cain asked the question we still face. Yes, we are each other's keepers, because God entrusts us to one another ... [and] gives everyone freedom, a freedom which possesses an inherently relational dimension. Freedom is at the service of the person and his or her fulfilment through the gift of self and openness to the other.

Around the globe various human rights declarations acknowledge the value and dignity of every individual as a human being. How do we reconcile these noble declarations with the refusal to accept those who are weak and needy or elderly or those who have just been conceived?

This remarkable contradiction is rooted in a mentality which really only recognizes rights for the person who enjoys full or at least developing autonomy and who emerges from a state of dependence on others. Such a mentality also tends to equate personal dignity with the capacity for verbal and explicit, or at least perceptible, communication.

This leaves no room in the world for anyone who, like the unborn or the dying, is a weak element in the social structure or anyone who appears completely at the mercy of others and radically dependant on them and can only communicate through the silent language of a profound sharing of affection.

Freedom of choice for whom?

When the sense of God is lost there is also a tendency to lose the sense of the value of human dignity and life. Freedom negates and destroys itself and becomes a factor leading to the destruction of others when it no longer recognizes and respects its essential link with the truth. People end up making choices based only on subjective and changeable opinions or selfish interests and whims instead of choices based on the truth about good and evil.

Society becomes a mass of individuals placed side by side but without any mutual bonds. Reference to common values and to a truth binding on everyone is lost and relativism takes over. Everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargain, even the first of the fundamental rights, the right to life itself. Life is no longer considered a splendid gift of God entrusted to our loving care.

Practical Materialism

The eclipse of a sense of God and of the value of the human person fosters individualism, utilitarianism and permissiveness. The values of being are replaced by the values of having. The quality of life is interpreted primarily or exclusively as economic efficiency, inordinate consumerism, physical beauty and pleasure.

Interpersonal relationships are seriously impoverished in this materialistic perspective. The first to be harmed are women, children, the sick and the suffering, and the elderly. Personal dignity is replaced by the criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness. Sexuality is depersonalized and exploited. People are considered, not for what they are, but for what they have, do, and produce.

In such a context suffering is not seen as an occasion for possible human growth, but is rejected as useless and opposed as an evil, always and every way to be avoided. When it cannot be avoided then the temptation grows to claim the right to suppress it, to eliminate it at the root, even by hastening death.

Lights and Shadows

There are also positive signs at work in our world today. Many couples generously accept children as the supreme gift of marriage. Centres give practical support to mothers and families in difficulty and movements in defence of life have sprung up all over the world. Developments in medical science offer much promise for the unborn, the suffering and those who are dying.

Physicians from around the world who aid people affected by war or disasters are a sign of a growing solidarity among peoples, a praiseworthy human and moral sensitivity and a greater respect for life. There are also countless daily acts of unselfishness by caregivers of the sick, the elderly, and the disabled. Increasing attention is being given to quality of life, ecology and the ethical implications of life issues, especially in the area of bioethics.

Our current situation with its lights and shadows ought to make us all fully aware that we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the “culture of death” and the “culture of life”. We are in the midst of this conflict and have the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life.

You shall not kill

To defend and promote all of human life, to show reverence and love for it, is a task which God entrusts to each of us.

Life is always a good

Human life is always a good because it comes from God, sharing in his very breath of life. We are God's gift, image and imprint.

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the "creative action of God" and it remains forever in special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end.

Human life is inviolable; no one can claim the right to destroy directly an innocent human being.

Abortion

The decision to have an abortion can be tragic and painful for the mother, when she believes she is trying to protect her own health, or a decent standard

of living for her family, or fears the terrible living conditions that the child could face. But these reasons, however serious, can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being.

Other people also participate in the responsibility for the terrible decision to end a life. The father may pressure the mother directly to abort the child, or indirectly by leaving her alone to face the responsibility and the problems. Sometimes pressure comes from parents or other members of the family or from friends.

Doctors and nurses are also responsible when they place at the service of death the skills acquired for promoting life: as are legislators who promote and approve abortion laws; those who operate centres where abortions are performed; those who encourage sexual permissiveness and denigrate motherhood. One cannot overlook the international institutions, foundations and associations which campaign for the legalization and spread of abortion.

Abortion thus becomes a most serious wound inflicted not only on individuals and their families who should provide the sanctuary for life, but inflicted as well on society and its culture, by the very people who ought to be society's promoters and defenders.

Euthanasia

At the other end of life's spectrum, we face the mystery of death. Science and medicine are now able to treat cases formerly considered untreatable, to reduce or eliminate pain, to sustain and prolong life even in situations of extreme frailty and to resuscitate artificially patients whose basic biological functions have collapsed.

The question arises of controlling death. Euthanasia is understood to be an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death with the purpose of eliminating all suffering. Even when not motivated by the refusal to be burdened with the life of someone who is suffering, euthanasia must be called a false mercy. True compassion leads to sharing another's pain, not killing the person whose suffering we cannot bear.

The choice of euthanasia becomes even more serious when it takes the form of a murder committed by others on a person who has in no way requested it and who has never consented to it.

Disproportionate means

However, euthanasia must be distinguished from the

decisions to forego aggressive medical treatment disproportionate to any expected results. It needs to be determined whether the means of treatment available are objectively proportional to the prospects for improvement. To forego extraordinary or disproportionate means is not the equivalent of suicide or euthanasia; it rather expresses acceptance of the human condition in the face of death.

Pope Pius XII affirmed that it is licit to relieve pain by narcotics even when the result is decreased consciousness and a shortening of life, "if no other means exists and if in given circumstances this does not prevent the carrying out of other religious and moral duties."

Suicide

Suicide is always morally objectionable. While certain psychological, cultural and social conditions may induce a person to such an action and thus lessen subjective responsibility, objectively suicide is a gravely immoral act.

To concur with the intention of another person to commit suicide and to help in carrying it out is to cooperate in and at times to be the actual perpetrator of an injustice which can never be excused even if it is

requested.

A culture of life

One characteristic of present day attacks on life is the demand for legal justification of them as if they were rights and the claim that it should be possible to exercise these so called rights with the safe and free assistance of doctors and medical personnel.

Democracy stands or falls with the values it embodies and promotes. These values cannot be based on provisional and changeable “majority opinions”. Consequently, there is a need to recover the basic vision of the relationship between civil and moral law. The real purpose of civil law is to guarantee an ordered social existence in true justice. Civil law must ensure that all members of society enjoy certain fundamental rights which innately belong to the person.

The issue of life, its defence and promotion is not a concern for Christians alone. This question arises in every human conscience which seeks truth and which cares about the future of humanity. The value at stake is one which every human being can grasp by light of reason: thus it necessarily concerns everyone.

The cultural change needed demands from everyone the courage to adopt a new life-style consisting in making practical choices — at the personal, family, social and international level — on the basis of the primacy of being over having, of persons over things. This renewed life-style involves passing from indifference to concern for others, from rejection to acceptance of them.

Renewing our culture

We need to begin with the renewal of a culture of life within Christian communities themselves. Believers can find themselves basing decisions on emotional and personal subjective criteria separated from the ethical requirements of their Christian faith. We must recognize this and identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth.

The first step is forming consciences with regard to the incomparable and inviolable values of every human life and to re-establish the essential connection between life and freedom and recover the necessary link between freedom and truth.

Closely connected to forming consciences is: the work of educators who teach the value of human life

from its very origin; authentic education in sexuality and love; training for married couples in responsible parenthood; and an understanding of suffering and death with their profound mystery in all its harsh reality.

A unique responsibility belongs to health care personnel. Their profession calls for them to be guardians and servants of human life, affirmers not manipulators of life. Biomedical research which promises great benefits for humanity must always reject experiments, research or applications which disregard the inviolable dignity of the human being.

Civil leaders, called to serve people and the common good, have a duty to make courageous choices in support of life, especially through legislative measures. We must encourage politicians to make those choices which, taking into account what is realistically attainable, will lead to the reestablishment of a just order in the defence and promotion of life.

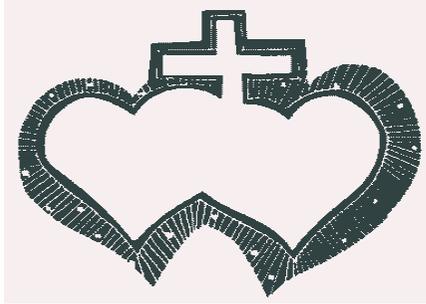
The role of the family in building a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable. Parents must lead their children to an authentic freedom and cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, generous service, solidarity and other values which help people

live the gift of life, as well as teaching them the true meaning of suffering.

The welcomed presence of the elderly in the family is of fundamental importance in creating a climate of mutual interaction and communication between the different age groups.

It is therefore a service of love to which we are all committed to ensure our neighbour that his or her life may be always defended and promoted, especially when it is weak or threatened. It is not only a personal but a social concern which we must all foster: a concern to make unconditional respect for human life the foundation of a renewed society.

For us too, Moses' invitation to the Israelites rings out loud and clear: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, therefore choose life that you and your descendants might live." (Dt. 30: 19)



LOVE LETTER TO MY CHILDREN

by
Frances Neville
(Mother of four)

My dear children, your school is about to give you its secular explanation of sex. This means you will be offered "knowledge of sexual issues, firmly embedded, we are told, within the understanding of relationship". The "comprehensive programmes" includes contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. But because the society in which we live no longer wishes or is able to talk about God, your sex education class is bound to be flawed and superficial. How can an account of the most powerful and mysterious aspect of human life be anything but flawed if the origin and destiny of human beings is ignored? If human relationships are not understood as being formed in the image of God, the

giver of all life, who calls us to love each other and Him above all things, then they will be formed in the image of man. Without the imperative to put God at the centre of his life, man inevitably puts Himself there.

Sex is not just another optional, recreational activity, which, if you don't take care, harms your health and freedom. If it is treated trivially, sex will reduce, rather than enhance, your humanity. Sex is part of the powerful and dynamic energy of love that created the world. Not surprisingly, it is also the means for the creation of new human life which is a miracle in itself.

In a permanent, loving relationship, sex is a powerful engine to keep a couple together and a family happy. As an experience, divorced from marriage, it can be a pleasurable roller coaster, full of excitement and fun. But if sex is treated like a fairground ride, where the main point is how I feel, the experience becomes recreation, not deep bonding and growing awareness of the loved one. The other person involved becomes an object to give me excitement. Moreover, if sex is just a recreational excitement for me, then there is no reason why it should not be engaged in as often as possible with any available body.

Of course the high divorce rate in the UK is a clear indication that something is clearly amiss in the realm of love relationships and marriage. Sex is no longer special, the cement for marriages, but can be had easily with the help of a few condoms. Contraception has had a lot to do with compromising how people understand sexual relationships. It purports to make them easy and unproblematic. Sex becomes the defining badge of those who think they have grown up. Of course the truth is that there is a lot more to growing up than sex and sex is no way to learn about growing up.

The Government and education authorities have become neurotic about providing sexual and contraceptive information to everyone who knows the mechanics of sex on the grounds that this supposedly deters teenage pregnancy. But it's been known from ancient times that sexual information is strongly erotic. It stimulates a strong urge for sexual experience. If you combine that message with the stream of advertising aimed at removing all inhibitions to satisfying one's whims as quickly as possible, it's not rocket science to deduce why teenage pregnancy is on the increase.

Artificial contraception, typically, focuses on

controlling female fertility. The Pill blocks it out. Rarely is there any distinction drawn between contraception designed to prevent fertilisation and those which are intended to act as abortifacients, causing early abortions of fertilised eggs.

The Pill was promoted as setting women free. But did it? Does it? Women generally are more concerned about ongoing affection and having children than men, whose role in the reproduction of the species is geared typically to engaging in numerous sexual acts. Contraception creates choice. One choice is to exclude children. Children become an optional extra to a relationship. Isn't it strange that people often talk these days about unwanted children but you never hear them mention unwanted sex? Of course, children come with obvious disadvantages compared to the 'freedom' of the single state.

Sexual attraction is the design of the Creator to bring men and women together as procreators. Sexual intercourse, by contrast, is properly understood as being embedded in marriage, not just in any relationship (e.g. partners). It is part of the relationship of married people, because one of the main reasons for marriage is the creation of new life, a life which will grow and thrive against the backdrop

of the mutual and on-going love of husband and wife. There is a huge difference between being a spouse and being a partner. Living as partners is very far removed from marriage in the Lord.

Not every marriage act ends in the creation of new life even if marriage itself is directed to this end. Marriage concerns itself with more than regeneration of the species. Christian marriage is understood as the principal means by which married people grow from self-absorption to the fullest love of someone else of which they are capable. In this sense it is modelled on God's love for us. But this special nature of marriage is no longer clear and understood because the complete availability of contraception to people who are not married means that sex has simply become an aspect of consumer choice.

This perhaps explains why the Church has been so hostile to contraceptives, unwilling to accept in its official teaching that artificial contraception has any place within a permanent vowed loving relationship. The church rightly insists that marriage and the procreation of children are inextricably linked. Pope Paul VI took a strict position on this in 1968 to the dismay of many committed Catholics at the time and since. Many felt this was not attuned to the realities of marriage in the modern world. More recently Pope

John Paul II insisted that the ban on contraceptives was absolute and not susceptible to a different conscientious decision. Is this an ideal towards which we should aim or is it a sin against the nature of married love which we need to repent of? Over the past 25 years Catholic family sizes have not been very different from those in other parts of society. Does this mean that the church's positive message about sexuality has not been heard? The Pope, the Successor of St Peter, teaches absolute truth in the realm of faith and morals. Today, alas, it seems that everyone is infallible except Him. Where do we stand as a couple?

The notion that sexual attraction must lead to sexual intercourse is wrong. Let me give you a practical example: sexual attraction does not end when you marry. A married person may notice someone else to whom they are physically drawn. The vows to remain faithful to their spouse mean, though, that married people promise to place their joint long-term good and goodness, and that of their children, above the pleasure of engaging intimately with someone else. Meanwhile secular society is hostile, for a number of reasons, to vowed marriage and vocation of any kind. So it isolates sex and depersonalises it, by regarding it as a means to individual fulfilment – a fulfilment made to look respectable under the banner

of the word "relationship". People are reduced from being images of God and become consumers of things and each other.

For the greatest value in the modern world is "me". I must do what makes me feel good. I must be "honest" and pursue my own desires rather than be a hypocrite and pretend to suppress them in favour of someone else. I must create my own philosophy of life, which makes sense to me. If God is dethroned man enthrones Himself and all sense of shame is abandoned. Everybody absolves themselves, while being quick to condemn others.

Sex is an issue, perhaps more than any other, which distinguishes the believer from the non-believer. By understanding it in God's way and living accordingly it will lead to fulfilment in marriage and indeed to the wellbeing of the whole human family.



THEOLOGY OF THE BODY – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

by
Dominic Baster
St Vincent's Parish
Sheffield

On 25th July 1968, Pope Paul VI released his long awaited and much-hyped encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, surprising the world by saying no to contraception. It is well known that this was not the end of the matter, however. Within a few days the Catholic Herald ran

with the headline “Birth Control Debate Grows” and the encyclical continues to be controversial and widely rejected. The question is, why?

The so-called Sexual Revolution, which was well underway by the 1960s, has changed people’s attitude towards the purpose of their bodies. Margaret Sanger, one of its pioneers, said that “no woman is free who does not own and control her own body” and the thinking behind this statement has influenced even those within the Church. The ‘Majority Report’ of the Pontifical Commission on Birth Control, set up to advise the Pope on this matter, based much of its pro-contraception argument on the notion that it is “natural to man to use his skill in order to put under human control what is given by physical nature”.

In reality, the idea that the goal of human knowledge is to gain mastery over nature is centuries old. The French philosopher Descartes believed in a radical distinction between the human person and the body. This ‘Cartesian’ vision of the human person reduces the body to ‘mere matter’ which can then be regarded simply as a mechanism and an object for manipulation and exploitation.

Professor Michael Waldstein has suggested that the

main reason why so many people reject Catholic teaching in the area of sexual morality today is that “the nature of sex has become invisible through our Cartesian glasses”. Many Catholics continue to reject *Humanae Vitae* on the basis that our bodies are private things we ‘possess’ and can use as we see fit, leading to the common refrain that “the Church should stay out of the bedroom”.

And yet it is clear to anyone with eyes to see that the promise of the Sexual Revolution has not been fulfilled. Women are now objectified as sex objects as never before, there is a crisis of family breakdown, the abortion rate has rocketed and sex has been cheapened almost beyond recognition.

Against this backdrop, a growing number of Catholics are coming to realise that Blessed John Paul II’s Theology of the Body presents a moving, surprising, profound and intensely practical counterpoint because it affirms an integrated vision of the human person – body and soul together. Accordingly, the fact that human beings are made in the image of God must apply to our bodies just as much as to our souls. Our bodies are not just biological but also theological because they can tell us about God in whose image they are made.

The Theology of the Body was expounded in 129 general audience addresses delivered by John Paul II between 1979 and 1984 and throws modern secular ideas of love, sex and even the meaning of life on their heads. It was envisaged as a comprehensive and definitive defence of Paul VI's teaching in *Humanae Vitae* but went far beyond this in its scope and ambition. John Paul II's biographer, George Weigel, has described it as "a kind of theological time bomb set to go off with dramatic consequences" and "one of the boldest reconfigurations of Catholic theology in centuries".

John Paul II affirmed that our bodies are created in such a way that they carry within them a message calling us to live our lives as a gift. This he called the 'spousal meaning of the body'. Crucially, all people are called to live 'spousally' in this sense – including married people, those committed to celibacy and all those in other circumstances. Each of us is called to give of ourselves completely, as Christ did, and this is what it means to be truly human.

The spousal meaning of the body can be discerned in the 'language' our bodies 'speak'. Furthermore, the fact that our bodies call us to live spousally gives us a glimpse of the nature of God. We are created as spousal beings because God loves us spousally.

Throughout the Old Testament we see references to God wanting to 'marry' his people, and finally he becomes completely one with them at the incarnation. Christ's death on the cross is the supreme spousal act of history through which Christ also fully reveals man to himself.

The teaching in *Humanae Vitae* that the sexual act has two intrinsic meanings – procreative and unitive – continues to be hard for people to grasp because the simple question arises: why is this so? The Theology of the Body answers this question by affirming that the sexual act is not a mere function outside of the person without meaning. Understanding the unitive and procreative meanings of sex is to 'read the language of the body in the truth' – and this truth is the spousal meaning of the body. Sex, therefore, has a profound meaning as an expression of the whole human person.

The Theology of the Body affirms a truly Christian, coherent and God-centred understanding of the human body and reveals a refreshingly positive way of understanding the Church's teaching in the area of sexual morality. It contains many aspects that cannot be mentioned here but, nearly eight years after the death of its author, it is surely the case that its message is more poignant and more necessary than

ever.



**HOMILY FOR UPHOLDING THE SANCTITY OF
LIFE
BY
Father Paddy
ST Vincent's Parish, Sheffield**

I think the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is a most appropriate day for offering Mass for those who work to promote the culture of life. If Mary was preserved from Original sin from the first moment of her conception then her life must have begun at conception. Elizabeth, the kinswoman of Mary referred to Jesus as her Lord even while still in the womb of Mary. John the Baptist 'leapt for joy' in the womb of Elizabeth when Mary visited her. "Blobs of tissue" as the Dean of St Paul's regrettably called

preborn human life in 1967, don't weep for joy. The Church has always taught and insisted upon the sanctity of Life from conception to natural death. The first teaching given by the Church, (the 'Didache' 47AD?), on the subject states "you shall not murder a child by abortion." It was a serious sin then and it is a serious sin now.

The Holy Father tells us that 'everyone has an obligation to be at the service of life. I don't know if you can remember the band aid concert for the helpless people of Sudan some years ago. It was a great success in terms of raising money for those starving people. It shouldn't, however, be an excuse for diverting our gaze away from the bigger evil of abortion in our midst. When some of the young pop stars saw the emaciated bodies of starving Sudanese children on Telly they had to divert their gaze and many broke down. How much more will they shield their faces when they see what happens to an aborted baby. But this is what the proponents of abortion don't want us to see. They (the unborn) are indeed the new holy innocents sacrificed on the altar of our own convenience. It is an affront to the dignity of the human person and an offence to God who is the source of all life. It is unnatural to kill one's offspring.

Because the issue doesn't concern us directly, doesn't mean we can walk away from it. St Paul says we are ambassadors for Christ and if he showed pity and compassion for the vulnerable and defenceless people of his day, so must we. Who is more defenceless than the baby in the womb? In the Holy Father's recent letter he says: 'our support and promotion of human life must be seen as a great work of charity which finds expression in personal witness, various forms of volunteer work, social activity and political commitment.' And again he says: among the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable'. He goes on 'a great prayer for life is urgently needed - a prayer which will rise up throughout the world'. If Christians and people from other religions don't uphold the value of life in our world then who will.

May God bless you all

Fr Paddy



'VERITATIS SPLENDOR'
BY
SAINT JOHN PAUL II

(some reflections by Dominic Baster)

The next instalment in our series of Church documents that either laid a basis for Blessed John Paul II's Theology of the Body or developed it further is Veritatis Splendor. This encyclical, the title of which means 'The Splendour of Truth', was issued by Pope John Paul on 6th August 1993.

The encyclical deals with the Church's role in moral teaching and has been described as one of the most comprehensive and authoritative set of teachings on the basic principles of ethics in the history of the Magisterium. There is no Conciliar document or any other papal document which contains a more in-

depth discussion, analysis and exposition of Catholic teaching on the principles of morality.

While I was researching this short talk, I was also struck by the magnitude of the encyclical – not just by its sheer length, although it runs to 179 pages in the CTS edition! – but by its scope, its clarity, its profound spirituality and, at times, the beauty of its text even in the English translation. Blessed John Paul II clearly was a colossus of a pope, and this encyclical should form a central part of any Catholic education at all levels. Many might not like its clarity and firm defence of Church authority and tradition, but no one can deny that this magnum opus is right up there with the greatest papal documents.

Anyway, I'll attempt now to go through the text of *Veritatis Splendor*, albeit in a very summary fashion given its length and breadth. Pope John Paul begins by explaining why he believed it was necessary to write it. He writes: "Today it seems necessary to reflect on the whole of the Church's moral teaching, with the precise goal of recalling certain fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine which, in the present circumstances, risk being distorted or denied."

"In fact," he continues, "a new situation has come about within the Christian community itself, which

has experienced the spread of numerous doubts and objections of a human and psychological, social and cultural, religious and even properly theological nature, with regard to the Church's moral teachings. It is no longer a matter of limited and occasional dissent, but of an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine, on the basis of certain anthropological and ethical presuppositions.

"At the root of these presuppositions is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth. Thus the traditional doctrine regarding the natural law, and the universality and the permanent validity of its precepts, is rejected; certain of the Church's moral teachings are found simply unacceptable; and the Magisterium itself is considered capable of intervening in matters of morality only in order to 'exhort consciences' and to 'propose values', in the light of which each individual will independently make his or her decisions and life choices." Now I'm sure we can all recognise this trend!

The Pope continues, "Given these circumstances, which still exist, I came to the decision...to write an Encyclical with the aim of treating 'more fully and more deeply the issues regarding the very

foundations of moral theology', foundations which are being undermined by certain present day tendencies."

The encyclical then moves on to an extended reflection on the story of the Rich Young Man in the Gospel of Matthew.

"In the young man," John Paul writes, "we can recognise every person who, consciously or not, approaches Christ the Redeemer of man and questions him about morality. For the young man, the question is not so much about rules to be followed, but about the full meaning of life. This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion. This question is ultimately an appeal to the absolute Good which attracts us and beckons us; it is the echo of a call from God who is the origin and goal of man's life."

John Paul then adds, "In order to make this 'encounter' with God possible, God willed his Church." The central role of the Church's Magisterium in allowing all people to find the fullness of Truth is a key theme in the encyclical, as is the associated assertion that there are absolute truths accessible to all people across all cultures.

Furthermore, as the encyclical affirms, in the depths of every person's heart "there always remains a yearning for absolute truth and a thirst to attain full knowledge of it".

The search for absolute truth is ultimately a question about God, who is the fullness of goodness, and so the role of the Church's Magisterium is to provide definitive answers to these questions about what is truly right and wrong. This crucial role is for everyone, in every culture, whether they know it and accept it or not.

The encyclical deals next with human freedom and the divine law. It stresses that there is no conflict between the two because being truly free means maturing into the person God has created us to be. So, true freedom is only to be found in following God's law, which actually does not inhibit freedom but rather "protects and promotes that freedom".

Although human freedom is in itself a good thing, the encyclical cautions that it is not an absolute value in its own right. We can decide to do things in apparent freedom, but those things might be good or bad. We cannot be sure which they are ourselves without referring to the authoritative Magisterium of the Church to help us determine what the divine law on a particular subject is. Otherwise, we can very easily

make ourselves the final arbiter of what is right and wrong, and this in fact was the original sin of Adam and Eve which is the foundation of every sin – wanting to be like gods.

Next the encyclical looks at the thorny subjects of natural law, human reason and the role of conscience. Human reason has a role in discerning and applying the natural law, but it cannot supersede or trump the natural law because God remains its author. John Paul states that this would be “the death of true freedom” and cites as an example those ideas of morality that treat the human body as a “raw datum”, separating man and how he uses his body from his greater meaning derived from the entirety of his person. This is, as I’m sure we all recognise here this evening, classic Theology of the Body!

John Paul reaffirms the traditional belief that people are obliged to follow their conscience, but presents conscience as an inner dialogue between man and God. He likens it to a herald from God who proclaims the divine law, and explains that following our conscience is the process by which a person may apply the divinely revealed law to a particular practical situation. Conscience is never a replacement for the divine law, and Blessed John Henry Newman is one theologian who has made this

very point. He described conscience as the “aboriginal vicar of Christ” which could not be at odds with the Church’s Magisterium because the messenger is the same.

This is why we are obliged to inform our conscience, because on our own our judgement may be flawed and erroneous. Even if our conscience allows us to do a morally wrong act, it is still wrong and damaging.

The last main section in the encyclical deals with the intrinsic connection between freedom and truth. Here John Paul responds to the idea of what is called the ‘fundamental option’. This particular view is that it is not a person’s actions and deeds that have a bearing on whether he will go to heaven, but rather his fundamental orientation towards or against God. John Paul firmly opposes this view as contrary to both Scripture and Catholic tradition because it undermines the distinction between venial and mortal sin. He also opposes it on philosophical grounds, writing, “To separate the fundamental option from concrete kinds of behaviour means to contradict the substantial integrity or personal unity of the moral agent in his body and in his soul.”

The ‘fundamental option’ is also contrary to true

freedom. The encyclical explains: “According to Christian faith and the Church’s teaching, ‘only the freedom which submits to the Truth leads the human person to his true good. The good of the person is to be in the Truth and to do the Truth.’”

It strikes me that this heresy called the ‘fundamental option’ has become incredibly widespread in the Church today, and probably affects us all to an extent. Allied to a false understanding of the role of conscience and a failure to understand that conscience must be informed by the teaching of the Church, I think this goes a long way to explain why so many Catholics have lost a sense of their own sinfulness and why so few Catholics regularly go to Confession. It also helps to explain why belief in purgatory and prayers for the dead are not as popular as they once were, and why people seem to think that everyone goes straight to heaven when they die – maybe apart from the most notorious sinners. The heresy leads people to become complacent, thinking that as long as their intentions are broadly right, if they mean to be good people and haven’t completely rejected God, they’ll be all right and need not worry. Well, John Paul is saying that this simply isn’t Catholic. Our actions do matter because they spring from our inner being.

I remember that Blessed John Henry Newman once preached a sermon explaining how good, practising Catholics could nevertheless end up in hell. This sort of thing seems very out of place these days, like a throw-back to medieval times when we were all terrified by dreadful depictions of hell-fire and eternal torment, but the idea that our actions are not in fact all that relevant because it’s our overall disposition that counts is clearly a smoke-screen.

Moving on, the next section in the encyclical is perhaps the best known part of *Veritatis Splendor* – at least this is what I remember being reported at the time it came out – that is its insistence that certain acts are intrinsically evil. This is to say that there are never circumstances in which some acts can be permitted, and it is really just a restatement of the Catholic belief that the ends do not justify the means. John Paul specifically refers to Pope Paul VI’s teaching against the use of artificial contraception in *Humanae Vitae* as an example.

One of the problems John Paul was dealing with here was the spread of proportionalism, an approach to moral theology which states that ‘nothing is always immoral’. This approach became popular because it allowed people to justify acts which the Church teaches are intrinsically evil, but which modern culture teaches are good – such as abortion and

contraception. I suppose proportionalism was what lay behind various statements after *Humanae Vitae*, from the Canadian Catholic bishops for example, that undermined the message of the encyclical by saying that there were times artificial contraception could be used with a clear conscience.

Perhaps with this in mind, John Paul goes on to insist in the encyclical that bishops, in particular, have a duty “to be vigilant that the Word of God is faithfully taught” so that the Church’s moral teaching “is faithfully handed down” and that the faithful “are guarded from every doctrine and theory contrary to it”.

John Paul continues, “When people ask the Church the questions raised by their consciences, when the faithful in the Church turn to their bishops and pastors, the Church’s reply contains the voice of Jesus Christ, the voice of the truth about good and evil. In the words spoken by the Church there resounds, in people’s inmost being, the voice of God who ‘alone is good’, who alone ‘is love’.”

Finally, the last section of *Veritatis Splendor* concludes all that has gone before with a moving reflection on God’s mercy and Mary as the Mother of Mercy. “No human sin,” John Paul writes, “can erase

the mercy of God, or prevent him from unleashing all his triumphant power, if only we call upon him. Indeed, sin itself makes even more radiant the love of the Father who, in order to ransom a slave, sacrificed his Son.”

And he makes it clear that his message is for everyone – “By the light of the Holy Spirit, the living essence of Christian morality can be understood by everyone, even the least learned,” he writes.

Now that I have gone through the encyclical itself, I thought I’d draw this presentation to a conclusion by saying a little about why I think understanding *Veritatis Splendor* is important to understanding fully the Theology of the Body. Actually, we don’t have to go further than the encyclical’s first two sentences to see that John Paul saw the Theology of the Body as bound up with his reflections on truth. He writes: “The splendour of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God. Truth enlightens man’s intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord.”

Much of the Theology of the Body touches upon sexual ethics, and so it is important also to understand the basis of ethics. As Professor Mark

Latkovic has written, “In many ways, John Paul II’s theology of the body was given its theoretical foundation in fundamental moral theology in... *Veritatis Splendor*... one way that the pope grounds sexual ethics in fundamental moral theology is by showing how the language of the body ‘is subject to the demands of moral truth, that is, to objective moral norms’.”

Another important aspect of 'Veritatis Splendor' that ties in with the Theology of the Body is its anthropology, or John Paul’s vision of the human person. He writes that “it is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts”. This is why the so-called ‘fundamental option’ I spoke about earlier is so wrong because, as the encyclical states, “Human acts are moral acts because they express and determine the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them. They do not produce a change merely in the state of affairs outside of man but, to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his profound spiritual traits.” Here we see, I think, the Personalism that also formed a philosophical basis for the Theology of the Body.

Theologian Mark Lowery explains: “Catholic

anthropology and moral theology posit a close interrelationship between man’s spiritual/rational nature and his physical dimension. It resists a dualism that separates our personhood from our bodies. We are not souls imprisoned in a body; we are embodied spirits.... Given this unity, part of God’s will for us is revealed in and through the dynamism of the body, or what John Paul II and others mean when they speak of the body as the ‘expression of the person’.” This is quite a key point, I think.

Finally on this subject, John Paul II’s biographer George Weigel explains the fundamental connection between the arguments in *Veritatis Splendor* and the Theology of the Body more accessibly when he writes, “In his great encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II takes the story of Christ’s dialogue with the rich young man as the paradigm of the Christian moral life. What good must I do, the young man asks, in order to have eternal life? For that is the purpose of the moral life: to fit us for beatitude, to make us the kind of people who can live with God for ever. It takes a special kind of people to do that – in a word, it takes saints. And saints are what we all must become, if we are to realise our baptismal destiny.”

“The Theology of the Body,” Weigel continues, “shows us how sexual love within the bonds of

faithful and fruitful marriage is a path to sanctity – and thus a path to God and to eternal life.”

So finally, I said at the beginning that I was struck at times by the beauty and profound spirituality of Veritatis Splendor. Allow me to end, therefore, by quoting from the penultimate section of the encyclical where John Paul the pastor comes to the fore. This is what he writes:

“Such is the consoling certainty of Christian faith, the source of its profound humanity and extraordinary simplicity. At times, in the discussions about new and complex moral problems, it can seem that Christian morality is in itself too demanding, difficult to understand and almost impossible to practise. This is untrue, since Christian morality consists in the simplicity of the Gospel, in following Jesus Christ, in abandoning oneself to him, in letting oneself be transformed by his grace and renewed by his mercy, gifts which come to us in the living communion of his Church.”



IVF AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

What is IVF? It is a laboratory procedure which involves collecting sperm from the man and harvesting usually 12 or more ova from the woman and mixing them in a Petri dish to achieve fertilisation and produce many embryos in the laboratory. The human embryos are screened and subjected to ‘quality control’ to select the best two for transfer to the woman’s womb in the hope that one or other will successfully implant and actually come to term.

IVF is the product of extensive, destructive experimentation on human embryos. The main reason why the British Government passed a law to allow destructive experimentation on human embryos is the need to perfect what is still a very imperfect procedure, namely IVF. But even if destructive experimentation is excluded, the process is still

morally dubious.

Every step of this procedure – which has all the characteristics of making things – has moral implications. Sperm, though it can be got by morally licit means, is usually got by masturbation, which is immoral. Because of the low success rate, the medical technicians seek to harvest a large number of ova or eggs through the dangerous procedure of super ovulation, a hormonal treatment to make the woman produce more than one ovum in a cycle. Placing a woman in such a dangerous situation (some have died) is itself morally questionable and can only be justified by a proportionate reason.

More serious is the fact that the tiny human embryos usually undergo a kind of quality control to select the best two for transfer to the womb. The others are either used in embryonic experimentation (in the UK), or frozen for possible later use, or are allowed to perish if deemed of poor quality.

Even if only one ovum were fertilized, it only has, at best, a 20 percent chance of coming to term. But in practice, with super ovulation and the production of multiple embryos, less than 5 percent of IVF embryos come to full term. In round figures, available from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

(HFEA) in the UK, only 35,000 children have been born despite producing 750,000 embryos.

There is no moral justification for exposing a human being to such a risk. By implanting two or more embryos, the technicians are in fact saying: the cost of the survival of one child is the probable death of another.

Apart from these moral difficulties, the main moral objection (which also applies to artificial insemination) is summed up in the title of a book by an Anglican theologian, Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* Are children to be begotten by a married couple as the result of their mutual self-giving or are they to be made by technicians in a laboratory? If you examine the way God the Creator has designed our humanity, it becomes obvious that the only way a child should be conceived that is in keeping with its dignity is through the conjugal act of love.

The child is the gift of life that supervenes on the spouses' mutual gift of self. It is not the direct product of their wills. What we intentionally make are things, property at our disposal. What we beget, are persons equal in dignity to us. The term procreation is used only of the way human beings come into existence. It draws attention to God the Creator who is active in

the coming into being of each child, who directly creates each soul. It is His design that each child should be conceived within the conjugal act that expresses the love of the spouses. Couples may desire a baby. They should not make them or cause them to be made by others.

Is there no hope for infertile couples? There is indeed. Medical experts in fertility, adhering to Church teaching, have devised a method of assisting couples to have a child within the natural process designed by God and which, it is claimed, is even more successful than IVF. This is NaPro Technology, developed by Dr Thomas Hilgers, a professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Omaha, Nebraska, USA. A full list of European doctors who are NaPro practitioners is available from (www.fertilitycare.net). If you do not have internet access there are three doctors providing NaProTechnology treatment from Suite 11, The Galway Clinic, Doughiska, Co Galway.

Although it is impossible to help every couple to conceive, their fruitfulness can be expressed in other ways, in an increased love for each other, adoption, in hospitality, and in caring for nieces, nephews and godchildren, and in drawing closer to God who is love. The bottom line is that children should be begotten not made.



Reverend. Philip Egan, Bishop of Portsmouth
on 'gay marriage'

(Letter to the Prime Minister)

Dear Mr Cameron

I am writing to you to send you best wishes from the priests and people of the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth, and the promise of our prayers for you, as you carry the heavy responsibility of leading our

great nation. However, I am also writing to ask you, indeed to urge you, to change course on your intention to introduce same-sex marriage.

You have said you are an enthusiastic supporter of marriage and that you do not want "gay people to be excluded from a great institution." Yet I wish respectfully to point out that behind what you say lurks a basic philosophical misconception about the nature of 'equality.' Equality can never be an absolute value, only a derivative and relative value. After all, a man cannot be a mother nor a woman a father, and so men and women can never be absolutely equal, only relatively equal, since they are biologically different. So too with marriage. Marriage, ever since the dawn of human history, is a union for life and love between a man and a woman. It is a complementary relationship between two people of the opposite sex, the man and the woman not being the same, but different. They are not, in other words, absolutely equal but relatively equal. This is why gay couples, two men or two women, are not being 'excluded' from marriage; they simply cannot enter marriage.

By enabling gays to 'marry' and by equating the union of gay people with marriage, however well-intentioned, you are not only redefining what we

mean by marriage but actually undermining the very nature, meaning and purpose of marriage. Marriage, and the home, children and family life it generates, is the foundation and basic building block of our society. If you proceed with your plans, you will gravely damage the value of the family, with catastrophic consequences for the well-being and behaviour of future generations. The 2011 Census shows the perilous state of the institution of marriage which you claim to believe in so strongly, and of family life in general, with one in two teenagers no longer living with their birth parents and over 50% of adults living outside of marriage.

Can you imagine the confusion and the challenge for teenagers as they grow up and seek to reach a fully mature and integrated sexuality? This is why I fail to see how your intentions can possibly strengthen the institution of marriage and family life. Rather they will dilute it.

More, you are ignoring the huge opposition of Christians, Jews and Muslims alike, as well as that of a huge number of ordinary people. You are imposing the aspirations of a tiny minority on the vast majority. Make no mistake, the change you are proposing is of immense significance. By it, you will be luring the people of England away from their common Christian

values and Christian patrimony, and forcing upon us all a brave new world, artificially engineered. What you are proposing will smother the traditional Christian ethos of our society and in time strangle the religious freedom of the Catholic Church in Britain to conduct its mission. There is no sanction whatsoever in the Bible and the Judaeo-Christian tradition for gay marriage. I cannot see how anyone who claims to be a Christian can possibly justify what you are intending to do.

I know you have spoken of the 'quadruple lock' and other legal safeguards. Yet for me many grave concerns remain about the brave new world you are fashioning in the name of the false gods of equality and diversity. For example, will I as a Christian have to support your ideology when preaching? Will you exempt the Church, its resources and premises, from charges of discrimination if it declines to host same-sex social activities? Will Catholic schools, Catholic societies, Catholic charities and Catholic institutions be free (and legally protected) to teach the full truth of Christ and the real meaning of life and love?

I appreciate how politically difficult it can be to undertake a U-turn and to sustain the attendant criticism such would bring. But when it is a matter of the truth, and the reasons are cast-iron clear, a U-

turn would be hailed by history only as brave and courageous. This is why, like a Thomas a Becket appealing to Henry II, I do not hesitate to ask you to consider doing what is the right and just thing to do. Otherwise, will we ever be able to forget that it was the leader of the Conservative Party (sic) who finally destroyed marriage as a lasting, loving and life-giving union between a man and a woman?

I assure you of my respect, best wishes and prayers.

Philip A. Egan
Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth