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BOOK REVIEW

Why Humanae Vitae Was Right: A Reader

Edited by

Janet E. Smith

Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1993, 591pp. Softcover

This book brings together some of the best writing in recent years which supports the anthropological vision and specific conclusions, including those regarding contraception and natural family planning, of Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (On the Transmission of Human Life). It contains twenty-two articles by a number of different authors, including five articles by the editor. The articles contain a rich variety of ethical methodologies and arguments. The approaches range from profoundly theological and philosophical to treatments of the lived experience of couples and specific problems (e.g. population problems and conscience formation). The book contains helpful introductions to the articles, which situate them and their authors, lists of further reading by the authors, and a comprehensive index. This work complements well the earlier contribution of Janet Smith in this area, including her book, *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later* (1991).

Most of the articles were published before, although a few appear here in print for the first time. For the most part, the authors live and teach in the United States, although a few hail from other places. For example, Carlo Caffara directs the Pontifical Institute for Marriage and the Family in Rome. John Finnis teaches at Oxford in England, Joseph Boyle is Principal of St. Michael's College in Toronto, and Elizabeth Wójcik is a Polish physician. And worthy of note, five of the authors are women.

Humanae Vitae speaks of the unitive and procreative meanings of human sexual relations, their interrelationship, and spouses collaborating with God the Creator in transmitting human life. Concerning the objective disorder of contraception, some of the articles in this book focus on contraception violating the procreative meaning or good of sexual intercourse (e.g. Joseph Boyle's). Other articles focus on contraception violating the unitive (or convenantal/self-giving/symbolic/marital) meaning (e.g. Paul Quay, Cormac Burke, and John Kippley's) or failing to properly respect God's role in procreation (Carlo Caffara's). Some articles combine more than one of these approaches (e.g. Dietrich Von Hildebrand and Elizabeth Wojcik's). In one article, Janet Smith develops well the concept of *munus*, a term used in *Humanae Vitae*. She explains well the God-given "mission" of spouses to contribute to the building of God's Kingdom, and how this relates to parenthood, contraception and natural family planning. A number of the articles also address various negative consequences of contraception (e.g. health risks, a barrier to the bonding of spouses and one's union with God, and contributing to sexual immorality) and various positive benefits of natural family planning (e.g. it tends to promote better communication and bonding between spouses, it has no health risks, it can be very effective, and it can help people grow in self-mastery and true love). It seems to me that these various approaches are all valid and

complementary. In other words, contraception is wrong for several reasons.

The book includes an article by Janet Smith on the moral use of natural family planning. This focuses on what constitutes good reasons or motives for limiting family size. The book's appendix is a translation by Janet Smith of *Humanae Vitae* which include explanation of many of the nuances of the Latin text.

This book will be of great interest to anyone interested in ethical methodology, especially with respect to human sexuality and marriage. This is clearly an interest of the editor in her selection of the articles. What is interesting is that different authors here use somewhat different methods but arrive at basically the same conclusions. One finds here a legitimate Catholic pluralism. The originality, depth and rich diversity of the arguments and analogies that one finds in this book clearly show that a theology or philosophy that agrees with the conclusions of official Catholic teaching is not necessarily "rigged". One finds here intellectual honesty, and highly rigorous and critical scholarship.

A few of the articles provide insights into the writing and talks of Pope John Paul II in this area. These explain his phenomenological method, anthropology, personalism and theology of the body. Themes here include his awareness of the great dignity of each person, never to be used as a mere means, and that sincere self-donation to another and receiving another in love reflects the inner-trinitarian life of God.

Concerning the scope of this book, I think Janet Smith has made a good selection of authors, articles and topics. It can be noted though that there are other authors who have written well in this area who are not included. See, for example, Benedict Ashley and Kevin O'Rourke, internationally respected theologians; Hanna Klaus, M.D., who has addressed well problems teenagers face with respect to sexuality and contraception, and who with the help of others has developed the holistic Teen STAR sex education program; and Larry and Nordia Christenson, a Lutheran couple, who after years of experience with both contraception and natural family planning have come to the same conclusion as *Humanae Vitae* (see Ch. 8 of their book, *The Christian Couple*).

In conclusion, I highly recommend the reading of this book. It is a valuable resource for both Catholic and non-Catholic pastors, theologians, philosophers, counsellors, teachers, and health care professionals. It provides many profound and persuasive reasons, rooted in God's revelation and human experience, that support Catholic teaching on marriage, procreation and family planning. The variety of approaches used by different authors, I expect, will contribute to providing for the intellectual and practical needs and concerns of many people regarding these important areas of human life.

— Paul Flaman, S.T.D.
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