

8-1-1994

[Book Reviews of] *Trust the Truth: A Symposium on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, Edited by Russell E. Smith and *The Doctor and Christian Marriage*, By H.P. Dunn, M.D.

J. Daniel Mindling

Eugene F. Diamond

Follow this and additional works at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Mindling, J. Daniel and Diamond, Eugene F. (1994) "[Book Reviews of] *Trust the Truth: A Symposium on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, Edited by Russell E. Smith and *The Doctor and Christian Marriage*, By H.P. Dunn, M.D.," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 61 : No. 3 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol61/iss3/15>

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Trust the Truth: A Symposium on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae*

Edited by Russell E. Smith.

Braintree: Pope John XXIII Center, 1991. 384 pages, paperback

Here is a thorough, inter-disciplinary and enthusiastic *apologia* of the Catholic moral magisterium on questions surrounding marriage, procreation and birth "technologies." The Pope John XXIII Center, which regularly publishes the papers of its annual medical ethics workshops for Bishops, presents the proceedings of the symposium "Trust the Truth" sponsored in the summer of 1988 by the Roman Athenaeum Foundation and the Aquinas Institute at Princeton University to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. One contributor explains the title nicely, "Married couples need to hear the truth . . . and need to be called to live up to that truth" (John Hamlon, p. 302).

Fully two-thirds of the papers are published here for the first time. Their scope is comprehensive. Bernard Nathanson's keynote address starts off with a crux of the news since the 1968 encyclical and argues convincingly that *Humanae Vitae* was prophetic then and timely now. In a similar vein, Bishop Vaughn's paper is a call to arms. He presents evidence that the truth of *Humanae Vitae* was too little acclaimed in 1968 and its early rejection far too tolerated. Even today, he laments, it is "not accepted on any level in Church life" be it the classroom, the pulpit, the confessional or even our National Conference. Vaughn urges that "it is now much easier to defend the encyclical in its predictions of the consequences of contraception since we are living with the disasters that have come from desacralizing sex. This is really what this encyclical is all about" (20). Listing ten principles reaffirmed in *Humanae Vitae* that are sorely needed today, the Bishop argues strongly that these truths must be preached today if we are to be true to the faith! (22). Bishop Meyer's article advocates a similarly strong position.

Supportive philosophical analysis is the focus of several contributors. John Crosby is typical: "do not teach the norms of conjugal morality apart from the anthropological truth which grounds them" (40). This truth he finds in the rich personalism of Pope John Paul II. The Pope affirms that the human person is made for self-donation and that in performing the act of spousal self-donation each spouse affirms the truth about his/her own person and apprehends the truth about the personhood of the other (53). Contraception is a lie, no matter what the intent of the spouses, because such an act does not respect the objective laws grounded in the nuptial meaning of the body. Contraception does not and cannot respect the objective truth of that bodily intimacy.

Professional, insightful and fresh reading of *Humanae Vitae* and subsequent magisterial pronouncements is offered by philosopher Janet Smith whose discussion of *munus* leads her to lay bare the encyclical's theology of marriage as vocation as a bedrock foundation for contemporary Catholic sexual ethics. Bishop Adam Maida mines the language of "responsible parenthood" in both John Paul II and Paul VI. Bishop James McHugh conducts a tour through the magisterial statements on the population explosion.

Professor William E. May details Catholic teaching on the laboratory generation of human life. He explores the language of "inseparable connection" in *Humanae Vitae* as well as in *Donum Vitae* (the "birth technologies" document). Particularly well done is his defense of the prohibition of homologous artificial insemination by husband. His reflections focus on the distinction between genital acts and *marital* acts, between reproducing and procreating human life, between the language of the body and the language of the laboratory (206). May's presentation is well complimented by the factual study by ethicist Donald E. DeMarco on the plight of human embryos in the fertility laboratories.

The symposium was multi-disciplinary. Contributors included economist Jacqueline R. Kasun and lawyer Bruce Hafen as well as media watcher Phyllis Zagano and scientist George Gilder. Allan C. Carlson decried the fertility gap and related the whole discussion to questions of the educational system. James Kerns is on target when he views the conference "not so much as a source of ready answers but as a seedbed for future interdisciplinary thought and research" (104).

Professional educators were especially well represented. Patrick Homan examines one approach used by a "Couple to Couple League" teacher John S. Hamlon from the St. Ignatius Institute at the University of San Francisco outlines a college level course, Dr. Hanna Klaus presents Teen S.T.A.R., a program for high school students, Mercedes Arzu Wilson sketches a family-centered program of sexuality education and Kelly Mast offers her approach to junior high school and high school age children.

I especially appreciated several contributions. Dr. John Haas presents a very readable argument supportive of the encyclical. Haas is as engagingly autobiographical as he is philosophically appealing. Readers familiar with the ethical theory of Germain Grisez<sup>1</sup> or of William May<sup>2</sup> will appreciate Haas' approach. "It seems to me that what is fundamentally wrong with contraception is that it invariably treats the procreative good, the child, as though it were evil. Contraception always involves opposition to the realization of the procreative good which otherwise might arise from the marital act in which two people have freely chosen to engage. The very name of the practice makes it clear that this is what is happening: contra-ception" (349).<sup>3</sup> The rich insights of this complex natural law philosophy is amazingly accessible in Dr. Haas' article.

Roman Rota Judge Msgr. Cormac Burke is persuasive and pastoral. Reiterating the classic defense of the goodness of marriage by St. Augustine, Burke argues against the contraceptive mentality which sees privation of the good of offspring (*bonum prolis*) as though it were a good! "A series of *planned absences* is turning the married life of many couples today into a hollowed-out reality, a vacuum that eventually collapses in on itself" (362). Here is a compelling argument that contraception is not only against the procreative good, but against the unity of the spouses which has an enduring expression in the life of the offspring. Here is a convincing argument that sexuality is not essentially a sharing in *pleasure* but a sharing in *power*. This is not only a rhetorically powerful paper; it is intellectually convincing.

My overall judgment of the proceedings is positive with few criticisms. Editor Fr. Russell Smith would have served his readers better by introducing his contributors and sketching the flow of the symposium. Medical and legal material quickly go out of date, and the contributions which discuss "birth technologies" may be showing their age, the symposium was, after all, in 1988. Even though we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* last year, the volume remains timely. Familiarity with the contents of this fine text will breed trust for the truth of our Catholic moral heritage.

— The Reverend  
J. Daniel Mindling, O.F.M., Cap, S.T.D.

## REFERENCES

1. *The Way of the Lord Jesus* Volume 2 *Living a Christian Life* published Spring 1993 by Franciscan Press (217)-228-5760.
2. *An Introduction to Moral Theology* Huntington, Indiana: OVS Press, 1991.
3. Smith sees the malice of contraception in the choice of anti-procreative acts rather than in the anti-life willing. "My argument will take the lines of demonstrating that they are engaging in acts that violate nature (whereas NFP does not); that they are thwarting acts from achieving their natural telos (whereas NFP does not); and that they are not fully giving of themselves (whereas those who use NFP are). Janet Smith, "Appendix Four: A Critique of the Work of Germain Grisez, Joseph Boyle, John Finnis, and William May," in *Humanae Vitae A Generation Later*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University America Press, 1991.

## *The Doctor and Christian Marriage*

By H.P. Dunn, M.D.

New York, Alba House 1992. 157 pages

There has been a precipitous deterioration in societal values in the United State, as evidenced by the Heritage Foundation's Index of Leading Cultural Indicators which reveal alarming statistics of decline. Strikingly, the institution of marriage has undergone a devaluation to the point where out-of-wedlock births have reached crisis figures. Two-thirds of births to black women are out of wedlock and the percentage of out-of-wedlock births to white women has doubled in the short ten year period between 1982 and 1992. The position of the Catholic Church on marriage and sexual morality has been thoroughly vindicated by these consequences of the trivalization of marriage and the tolerance of sexual license.

Dr. Dunn has been a stalwart and uncompromising advocate of the values of Catholic marriage throughout his career as an obstetrician in Auckland, New Zealand. This book is the distillation of a lifetime of professional experience as an unyielding practitioner of Magisterial bioethical teachings. He has reached a level of esteem among his professional colleagues which attests to the fact that one need not compromise Catholic principles in order to practice according to highest standards of modern medicine.

There was a time when a book like *The Doctor and Christian Marriage* might have been part of a genre available at any Christian book store. In an era when many Catholic physicians have yielded to the siren call of the "pill", this book is like a beacon in the twilight. All of the important issues are addresses in Pat Dunn's cogent and comprehensive style. There is a section devoted to courtship, marriage and marital problems which makes the book particularly useful for engaged couples. The treatment of sexuality and childbearing is explicit and instructional and appropriate for the couple experiencing a first pregnancy or a stressful early marital adjustment.

There is an in-depth exploration of various reproductive technologies associated with artificial contraception, sterilization, abortion and artificial insemination. These sections would be useful for clergymen and other counselors who might need an authoritative exposition of the Catholic position on newer methodologies.

The overriding spirituality and wisdom of the author conveys a tone and an impact to the book which would be lacking in a lesser work. *The Doctor and Christian Marriage* is a gem which deserves the widest readership possible in a society badly in need of its values.

— Eugene F. Diamond, M.D.

---