

*Humanae Vitae:*  
Explained and Defended

Christopher Kaczor, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Philosophy  
Loyola Marymount University  
<http://myweb.lmu.edu/ckaczor/>

# Humanae Vitae's Teaching on Contraception

- “[Ethically] excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means.” *Humanae Vitae* 14

# Importance of Presuppositions

- How could you understand why stealing is wrong, if you did not understand the value of money?
- How could you understand that lying is wrong if you didn't understand the good of truth?
- So too, you cannot understand why contraception is wrong, without understanding the good of procreation.

# The Presupposition of HV: Procreation as a Good

- "Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parents' welfare." *Humanae Vitae* 9

# What Parents Give to Children

- Life itself
- Support in the womb for 9 months
- Needs of the body (food, drink, clothing, shelter)
- Needs of the spirit (teaching, correcting, guiding, comforting)
- Accepting Love and Transforming Love “Parents find it difficult to maintain an equilibrium between the two sides of love. ... Accepting love, without transforming love, slides into indulgence and finally neglect. Transforming love, without accepting love, badgers and finally rejects.” William F. May

# Children Strengthen Marital Love

- What is “love”? Plato's *Symposium*, the Speech of Aristophanes
- Some previous speakers elevate *eros* that it becomes divine (Phaedrus)
- Others make *eros* something less than human, like a force of nature (Eryximachus)
- Eros is not really about some “higher power” nor is it merely an animal or physical impulse—it is distinctly human (Story of Aristophanes)

# The Story of Aristophanes

- Original human beings like conjoined twins
- Rebellion against the gods
- Punishment by the gods by splitting human beings into their current condition
- Erotic love arises as an attempt to reunite

# Eros as Yearning for Unity

- Unity, including, but not limited to sexual acts
- Realizing the dream of Hephaestus, being “rolled into one,” “fused together,” and “never to be parted.” by Hephaestus the god of blacksmiths (*Symposium* 192 d-e)
- Love—as opposed to lust—involves ‘you alone’ (exclusivity) and ‘forever’ (permanence)

# Eros as Tragedy

- We cannot in fact be fused into one with our beloved
- Even if we could, this would be self-extinction
- Is erotic love really a death wish? Do we really want to be united if it means we cease to exist as individuals?

# Physical Union Through Procreation

- In their offspring, a couple realizes the dream offered by Hepheastus to be “rolled into one,” “fused together,” and “never to be parted.”
- Parenthood of this child unifies the couple exclusively to each other, ‘you alone’
- Parenthood of this child unifies the couple “forever” (permanence) as long as the child lives

# Spiritual Union Through Procreation

- Unity of affection for the child typically arises
- Unity of will to work for the child's good
- Unity of shared activity in running a household, raising the child

## Children Make Divorce (gigantic lack of unity) much less likely

- “According to a United Nations study of millions of people in forty-five societies, 39 percent of divorces occur when there are no children, 26 percent when there is only a single child, 19 percent where there are two, and less than 3 percent when there are four or more.” (Bess, *The Evolution of Desire*, pg.175).

# Children Strengthen Marital Friendship and Happiness

- Who is Friend? Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Mutual good will (since you love your kids, you have an extra reason to love their mother/father)
- makes the same choices (shared activity of raising children)
- shares the friend's distress and enjoyment (you rejoice and are saddened by the children)
- Friendship is based on what is loveable about the friend

# Friends of Pleasure

- Based on bodily pleasure “party people”
- Pleasure loved, not the person
- Relatively unstable because pleasures unstable

# Friends of Utility

- Based on what is useful about the friend
- Unstable because what is useful changes
- Utility, not person, loved (1164a10)
- Accusations and reproaches arise only or for the most part in friendships of utility

# Friends of Virtue

- Based on what is excellent in person
- Virtues=good habits
- Virtue tends to last, more stable
- Includes the good aspects of friends of utility and pleasure

# What Virtues Especially Relevant for Parents?

- Patience
- Play
- Responsibility
- Self-Sacrifice

# Children Help Parents Get to Heaven

- “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

# Children help us to obey the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment

- Honor your Father and Mother
- In becoming parents ourselves, we begin to realize all that our own parents have done for us
- Making it easier to honor them

# Children help us to obey the 1st commandment

- As children, we know we are not God
- As childless adults, it can be easy to forget that we are not God
- Sartre's "Desire to Be God" thwarted by children, we did not choose their looks, their native intelligence, their athletic ability, their temperament as introverted or extraverted, slow to react or quick (Michael Sandel, *Against Perfectionism*)
- We are vulnerable in our children
- We cannot make our children always behave as we'd like

# Children help us obey the greatest commandment

- “Love one another even as I have loved you” (Matthew 5:28).
- In having children, parents imitate God who loves each of us with *accepting love* and *transforming love*
- “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me” (Matthew 25:35-36)

# Conclusion

- Children strengthen marital love
- Children strengthen marital friendship
- Children help us get to heaven
- Therefore, "Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parents' welfare." *Humanae Vitae* 9

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