

Married Sexuality within the Drama of Creation and Redemption: *Humanae Vitae* through the Lens of *Gaudium et Spes*¹

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THE CATHOLIC TEACHINGS ON human sexuality promulgated in Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* are properly understood within the interpretive context of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*.² Specifically, *Gaudium et Spes* provides the broader theological and cultural analysis that renders fully intelligible the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* on artificial contraception. Living the Church's teaching on sexual morality depends upon the joy (*gaudium*) and the hope (*spes*) offered by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This argument for interpretive context, however, is challenged by those who argue for a discontinuity between these two monumental documents.

In his 2013 *The Development of Moral Theology: Five Strands*, Charles Curran articulates the now-common revisionist narrative that presents *Humanae Vitae* as a retrogressive step away from the supposed progressive approach of *Gaudium et Spes*. He distinguishes the two documents through two supposed dichotomies: pastoral versus didactic and personalist versus natural law. Curran follows John O'Malley in describing the pastoral approach of *Gaudium et Spes* as belonging

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² English titles are respectively "On the Transmission of Human Life" and "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World."

the epideictic literary genre,³ and he contrasts this epideictic genre, which seeks to inspire appreciation for an ideal, with the dialectic genre, which seeks to “prove a point” or “win an argument.”⁴ According to this questionable view, *Gaudium et Spes* seeks to inspire in a pastoral tone whereas *Humanae Vitae* attempts simply to be right. The implication is that the Church may offer inspiration but may not prescribe norms for conduct.

Curran continues the contrast between the two documents in his treatment of natural law. He affirms that *Gaudium et Spes* “does not emphasize the use of the natural law” and uses the term only three times.⁵ In contradistinction, Curran summarizes *Humanae Vitae* as basing its teaching on the natural law:⁶ “The pope repeated the

³ Charles Curran, *The Development of Moral Theology: Five Strands* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 227, citing John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), 43–52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁵ When the term is used, however, it is used in a standard context and meaning: “Contemplating this melancholy state of humanity, the council wishes, above all things else, to recall the permanent binding force of universal natural law and its all-embracing principles [iuris naturalis Gentium eiusque principiorum universalium]” (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS] §79). In the last section of GS, on international cooperation, the Church exhorts herself to teach the natural law to the world: “Since, in virtue of her mission received from God, the Church preaches the Gospel to all men and dispenses the treasures of grace, she contributes to the ensuring of peace everywhere on earth and to the placing of the fraternal exchange between men on solid ground by imparting knowledge of the divine and natural law [cognitionem scilicet legis divinae et naturalis]” (GS §89). Moreover, the section from GS on marriage begins with a reference to the nature of marriage: “Therefore, by presenting certain key points of Church doctrine in a clearer light, this sacred synod wishes to offer guidance and support to those Christians and other men who are trying to preserve the holiness and to foster the natural dignity of the married state and its superlative value [qui nativam status matrimonialis dignitatem eiusque eximium valorem sacrum tueri et promovere conantur].” Both English and Latin versions are taken from the official Vatican website: accessed November 7, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (English); accessed November 7, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_lt.html (Latin).

⁶ Joseph A. Selling reiterates this same alleged dichotomy in the second part of the 1983 commentary on *Familiaris Consortio*, coedited with Jan Grootaers, *The 1980 Synod of Bishops “On the Role of the Family”: An Exposition of the Event and an Analysis of its Texts* (Leuven, BE: University Press, 1983). Selling contrasts “conciliar theology” as expressed in “the teaching of GS on marriage and family life” with a “pre-conciliar” view of marriage and the family

condemnation of artificial contraception based on natural law. . . . Spouses must conform their activities to the very nature of marriage and its acts.”⁷ Ironically, *Gaudium et Spes* uses almost identical language in referring to “the nature of the human person and his acts” as the basis for the exclusion of artificial contraception.⁸ The

(338–40). The latter view is characterized by “the use of biological norms” and “the marital bond as an ontological reality” and has as its foundation what “had traditionally been called ‘natural law’” (339). He asserts that the language of natural law, which had been “shunned by the Council itself,” was then reexpressed in terms of “the plan of God or God’s will, . . . [which] rests upon the (classicist) view of a world that is basically stable and predictable,” and the idea that “society, culture, history, politics and economic are appended considerations which never effectively alter the ontological scheme of things” (339). According to Selling, *Humanae Vitae* (HV) fails to grasp the innovation that allegedly was *Gaudium et Spes*: “This view of marriage and the family is pre-conciliar. However, it did not pass away after the Council. It had a real but subtle influence in HV” (340); “The encyclical [HV] itself, however, rather than begin a first step in a post-Vatican II renewal as mentioned above, is better seen as the real demise of pre-conciliar thinking” (190); “In the broad lines of historical theology, then, HV could be said to represent the end of an era” (191). Selling consistently opposes essentialist views of human nature with personalist views of human relationships: “Taking HV as a starting point, and the evident need to defend its teaching, essentialism became more and more characteristic of official pronouncements in this area. . . . [When Karol Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II in 1978,] there was an expectation that a new pope would begin a new era and the evolution in conjugal and sexual morality would move further. However, the thought of John Paul II appears to be more favorable to the essentialist interpretation of the conciliar texts and his own form of ‘personalism’ lies close to the pre-conciliar idea of human nature” (193). In contrast, Thomas Joseph White, O.P., reads *Gaudium et Spes* in continuity with *Casti Connubii* and Pope John Paul II’s later writings in “*Gaudium et Spes*,” in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 113–43. He writes: “*Gaudium et Spes*’s substantive teaching on the natural and sacramental dimensions of marriage (nos. 47–52) followed after Pius XI’s famous encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930), building upon many of the premises of that document. Both documents attempt to find a ‘middle way’ that affirms, on the one hand, the traditional teaching that the generation and education of children is the true, final end of marriage, and which, on the other hand, affirms the inherent meaningfulness and value of the friendship of the spouses and their shared conjugal life together” (129).

⁷ Curran, *The Development of Moral Theology*, 98.

⁸ GS, §51. Romanus Cessario, O.P., defends *Gaudium et Spes* as emphasizing both nature and grace, both of which have unchanging principles, in *The Virtues, or the Examined Life* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 7: “The Church [in GS] affirms ‘that underlying all changes there are many things that do not

problem, however, according to Curran is that *Humanae Vitae* bases its teaching not only on natural law but also on a false interpretation of natural law. He summarizes the revisionist approach that challenged the papal understanding of natural law in three areas: “The problem of physicalism, the lack of historical consciousness, and the emphasis on the teleology of the faculty with the failure to give primary importance to the person and the person’s relationships.”⁹ The critique of physicalism is that “such an approach seems to canonize what nature teaches human beings and all the animals and does not allow human reason to interfere in these biological and animal structures.”¹⁰ The second critique faults the document for assuming stable, consistent understanding of human nature, which instead “itself is historically developing and changing.”¹¹ Curran argues that “a more historically conscious methodology cannot claim the same certitude for its proposals that a classicist approach does.”¹² Finally, Curran juxtaposes the teleology of the sexual faculty with a personalist approach that allows one to interfere with natural processes for the good of the relationship.¹³ Thus, according

change, and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever’ [GS §10], whereas in another place the Council itself ‘seeks to recall before all else the unchanging force of the natural law of peoples and of its universal principles’ [GS §79]. *Gaudium et Spes*, then, gives us reason to suppose that the Christian believer can respect two complementary sources for moral truth, namely: (1) the explicit revelation of Christ, and (2) the created structures of human reality that the Christian tradition calls natural law.”

⁹ Curran, *The Development of Moral Theology*, 98.

¹⁰ Ibid., 99. Here Curran is objecting to this tendency supposedly present both in Aquinas and in *Humanae Vitae*.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 100. See John Finnis, “Historical Consciousness and Theological Foundations,” in *Religion and Public Reasons: Collected Essays Volume V*, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011, in which Finnis argues that Bernard Lonergan’s development of the idea of historical consciousness does not entail a fluid account of human nature or an always-revisable character of moral and anthropological judgments (abstract at, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199580095.001.0001/acprof-9780199580095>).

¹³ Curran, *The Development of Moral Theology*, 100–101: “A personalist and more relational understanding of the person would come to a different judgment [than the Magisterium] on the morality of artificial contraception. For the good of the person or of the relationship, one could interfere with the teleological ordering of the faculty. This same approach could be applied to other sexual issues, such as homosexual acts.”

to Curran, a proper understanding of natural law would eschew reference to biological realities and focus instead on autonomous, ever-developing reason.

Curran consolidates his criticism of *Humanae Vitae* by saying not simply that it is wrong, but also that *Humanae Vitae* could not be right, since human reason cannot achieve the certainty of definitive moral prohibitions. He argues that moral truth cannot be taught with the same level of certitude as speculative truth. He asserts that “moral certitude by definition is a special type of certitude that does not claim to be certain.”¹⁴ Since reason cannot reach definitive conclusions, Curran claims, it was necessary for the Church to turn to authority to come to a determination: “*Humanae Vitae* indicates that the teaching authority of the Church and not reason was the ultimate factor in Pope Paul VI’s continued condemnation of artificial contraception.”¹⁵ Curran asserts that there were no *rationes* in favor of *Humanae Vitae*’s teaching, either from the natural law or from the Gospel, when he writes, “in *Humanae Vitae* Pope Paul VI maintained that the ultimate reason why he could not change the teaching was because this would go against what the authoritative papal magiste-

¹⁴ Ibid., 209. Curran continues, “the basic problem in the area of noninfallible teaching is that the hierarchical magisterium has claimed too great a certitude for these teachings” (210). In an earlier work, Curran denies the significance of Christian revelation in moral theology and uses this as an argument for legitimate dissent in moral matters: “The Catholic tradition in moral theology has insisted that its moral teaching is based primarily on natural law and not primarily on faith or the Scripture. The natural law is understood to be human reason reflecting on human nature. Even those teachings which have some basis in Scripture (e.g., the indissolubility of marriage, homosexuality) were also said to be based on natural law. This insistence on the rational nature of Catholic moral teaching recognizes that such teaching can and should be shared by all human beings of all faith and of no faith. Such teachings are thus somewhat removed from the core of Catholic faith as such. The distance of these teachings from the core of faith and the central realities of faith grounds the possibility of legitimate dissent” (*Faithful Dissent* [Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1986], 61). John Grabowski offers a helpful rebuttal of this reductionistic review of Catholic moral theology in his *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Catholic Sexual Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003). Addressing the difficult reception of the Church’s teaching on marital sexuality, he writes, “moral theology must be reenvisioned in the light of its most basic sources: Scripture, a treatment of the human person redeemed by Christ, and an account of how the person grows in moral excellence to achieve the happiness for which he or she was created” (22).

¹⁵ Curran, *The Development of Moral Theology*, 263.

rium had taught.”¹⁶ According to Curran, “the Catholic tradition has recognized that the conclusions of natural law are not always certain and true, but the papal teaching office does not explicitly recognize this aspect of the tradition.”¹⁷ In Curran’s view, Pope Paul VI erred, first by not listening to natural law understood as reason that should have showed him contraception was permissible, and second by not recognizing that natural law conclusions are inherently revisable. In sum, Curran attempts to marginalize *Humanae Vitae* against the background of his particular reading of *Gaudium et Spes*. The Church should turn away from the prohibition of certain acts in favor of a broader approach to human freedom that allows people to decide the morality of their own actions.

Against this revisionist interpretation, the present article argues that *Humanae Vitae* is properly read within a context of continuity with *Gaudium et Spes*. In many ways, *Humanae Vitae* is helpfully viewed as an extended footnote to *Gaudium et Spes*. As the latter was addressing the “nobility of marriage and the family,” it reaffirmed the Church’s prohibition of artificial birth control and, in a footnote, established a commission to determine what exactly was involved with the recently developed hormonal treatments.¹⁸ The footnote referred to Pius XI’s *Casti Connubii* and other magisterial teachings in support of the prohibition and created a new commission that would lead in a few years to *Humanae Vitae*:

Certain questions which need further and more careful investigation have been handed over, at the command of the Supreme Pontiff, to a commission for the study of population, family, and births, in order that, after it fulfills its function, the Supreme Pontiff may pass judgment. With the doctrine of the magisterium in this state, this holy synod does not intend to propose immediately concrete solutions.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., 268. Note that Curran does not consider that authority may be a proper *ratio* for certain conclusions. In so doing, he follows the classical Kantian dichotomy between reason and authority expressed in Kant’s short work *On the Enlightenment of the Human Race*.

¹⁷ Ibid., 263–64.

¹⁸ *Gaudium et Spes* reaffirmed the traditional prohibition of contraception: “Relying on these principles, sons of the Church may not undertake methods of birth control which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of the divine law” (§51).

¹⁹ GS, pt. II, ch. 1, note 14. The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* references back to the same footnote: “The consciousness of the same responsibility induced Us to

If *Humanae Vitae* arose from this footnote, then it stands to reason that the fuller treatment of the Gospel in the modern world is presupposed in the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. Thus questions of atheism and theism and of despair and hope form the proper context for considering the nature of marriage and the marital act. *Gaudium et Spes* explicitly affirms this connection: “All should be persuaded that human life and the task of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone. Hence they cannot be measured or perceived only in terms of it, but always have a bearing on the eternal destiny of men.”²⁰ Here we have what must first appear as a paradox: the Church presents seemingly rather quotidian human realities such as sex and procreation as not fully intelligible outside of recourse to our eternal destiny.²¹

confirm and expand the commission set up by Our predecessor Pope John XXIII, of happy memory, in March, 1963” (§5). English of HV is taken from the Vatican site, accessed November 7, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html. Latin of HV is taken from the Vatican site, accessed November 7, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/la/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.

²⁰ GS §51.

²¹ Yet, this paradox appears to be vindicated in light of the experience of sexual morality and practices throughout the West over the past fifty years—and undoubtedly in the many prior decades. Although the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is presented as part of the natural moral law, its adherents typically are motivated by a fidelity to Christ and His Church. *Humanae Vitae* as an ecclesial teaching shows forth the natural law in the same way that Aquinas taught that the Decalogue shows forth the natural law. Although such teachings are in accord with the natural moral law of human beings, their full intelligibility is disclosed through the death and resurrection of Christ and the accompanying great hope of eternal life. Those without such firm beliefs typically find the teaching of the Church about contraception as at best archaic or at worst harmful to the freedom of modern men, and especially modern women. Yet, surely, questions about the morality of contraception within a fecund and faithful marriage now seem quaint in light of the increasing separation of sex from marriage, sex from children, and children from marriage. The Pew Research Center has confirmed these societal trends in numerous studies. For example, Gretchen Livingston writes, “Americans are delaying marriage, and more may be foregoing the institution altogether. At the same time, the share of children born outside of marriage now stands at 41%, up from just 5% in 1960” (“Fewer than Half of U.S. Kids Today Live in a ‘Traditional’ Family,” Pew Research Center, *FactTank: News in the Numbers*, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/22/less-than-half-of-u-s-kids-today-live-in-a-traditional-family/>). Among mothers thirty years old or younger, 50 percent of children are born out of wedlock. The entire issue of children is increasingly foreign to the contemporary view of human sexuality

What does human sexuality have to do with God or God with sex? By placing *Humanae Vitae* within the context of *Gaudium et Spes*, we see that understandings of sexuality, marriage, and procreation are necessarily related to understandings about the existence, nature, and goodness of God. *Humanae Vitae* affirms the same theme when it states that questions about procreation “concern matters intimately connected with the life and happiness of human beings.”²² *Gaudium et Spes* addressed the issue of human sexuality and marriage within the context of the broader issues of the challenge of modern atheism, the correlative loss of human purpose, and the revelation of the mystery of Christ. Including specific reference to the natural law does not exclude the promise of the Gospel, as *Humanae Vitae* clearly affirms its moral teaching on marriage as “based on the natural law as illuminated and enriched by divine Revelation.”²³ There is the need to see God—and human beings—as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In this revelation, God not only exists but also is merciful, and thus human beings may have hope in an eschatological future. *Humanae Vitae* participates in a larger message of joy (*gaudium*) and hope (*spes*).

This essay proceeds in four parts. First, we will consider carefully *Gaudium et Spes*’s dialogical encounter with atheism and the revelation of hope and mercy. Second, we will present *Gaudium et Spes*’s teaching on marriage and family within the context of the entire constitution, especially the question of atheism and the modern world. Third, we will situate *Gaudium et Spes*’s teaching on marriage and family within the background of *Lumen Gentium*’s universal call to holiness. Fourth, we will turn to an explicit consideration of the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* in light of *Gaudium et Spes*.

***Gaudium et Spes* on Atheism and Mercy**

Gaudium et Spes does not begin with the consideration simply of “the joys and the hopes . . . of the men of this age,” but also of their “the griefs and anxieties.”²⁴ The document expresses a keen awareness of

and human flourishing. People hesitate to marry and hesitate to have children. More accurately, they increasingly see marrying and procreating not merely as steps before which one should hesitate, but rather purely elective lifestyle options that may be picked up to suit particular desires.

²² HV §1.

²³ HV §4.

²⁴ GS §1: “*Gaudium et Spes, luctus et angor hominum huius temporis, pauperum praesertim et quorumvis afflictorum, gaudium sunt et Spes, luctus et angor etiam Christi discipulorum.*”

the struggles humanity faces in the modern world.²⁵ The advance of human technology “often raises anxious questions about the current trend of the world, . . . about the meaning of its individual and collective strivings.”²⁶ In response to this anxiety, the document affirms the natural inclination to self-preservation: “The human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed.”²⁷ This is already somewhat startling, since it reveals that, in the modern world, many people question the purpose of preserving the human person and renewing society. This global and diffused concern becomes concretized in the question of having and raising the next generation of persons. Ought persons to be brought into a world seemingly lacking in meaning and purpose? Ought society to be renewed through the having and educating of children?

Gaudium et Spes locates this anxiety in a loss of common values that have often served to orient people through society and tradition. It states, “many of our contemporaries are kept from accurately identifying permanent values and adjusting them properly to fresh discoveries.”²⁸ The dislocation from abiding values creates a situation in which human beings are now unknown to themselves. The document poses this question on behalf of the modern world: “But what is man? About himself he has expressed, and continues to express, many divergent and even contradictory opinions. In these he often exalts himself as the absolute measure of all things or debases himself to the point of despair. The result is doubt and anxiety.”²⁹ These contradictory extremes remain alive and well in contemporary society and higher education in the West. On the one hand, there is a kind of transhumanism in which human beings may define for themselves what it means to be human, even so far as to define their own gender and biological sex. On the other hand, there is a post-humanism that sees human beings as reduced to the ever-increasing data from empirical psychology and neuroscience, so much so that their conscious selves are merely an epiphenomenal consideration.³⁰

²⁵ See Joseph Ratzinger’s comments on the document’s use of “the world” in distinction from the Church in the epilogue of his *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987).

²⁶ GS §3.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ GS §4.

²⁹ GS §12.

³⁰ On this distinction between transhumanism and posthumanism, see Reinhard Hütter, “Polytechnic Utiliversity: Putting the Universal Back in University,”

Either way, human beings are severed from living traditions that bear abiding values.

Gaudium et Spes offers a powerful insight into this dislocation from permanent values that has become commonplace in the modern world. The document refers to “a change in attitudes and in human structures [that] frequently calls accepted values into question, especially among young people.”³¹ The language of “accepted values” translates the Latin *bona recepta*. This expression might also be translated as “received goods,” or perhaps as the “inherent goods” or “moral truths” handed down in a culture or a tradition and received by the next generation.³² Goods and truths here are not exclusively rules or customs for living well; they are also guiding principles for what makes a life worth living. How this might apply to the case of sex, marriage, and children is easily seen. The rules limiting sex to within marriage and those limiting sex to openness to children reflect the good of marriage and the good of children. Instead of a culture of *received* goods and truths, *Gaudium et Spes* diagnoses a culture of *rejected* goods and truths corresponding to the loss of purpose and meaning common in modern life.³³

Gaudium et Spes diagnoses the contradictions of contemporary understandings of the human person in light of the story of creation, sin, and redemption. The doubt, anxiety, and confusion come neither from our bodily nature in a kind of determinism nor from

First Things, November 2013, accessed November 7, 2017, <https://www.first-things.com/article/2013/11/polytechnic-utiliversity>.

³¹ GS §7: “Mutatio mentis et structurarum bona recepta frequenter in controversiam vocat, maxime apud iuvenes.” On the importance of *bona recepta*, see Brian Benestad’s “Doctrinal Perspectives on the Church in the Modern World,” in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 147–64.

³² On the need for received traditions of moral inquiry, see Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). See also Stanley Hauerwas, who writes: “America is the exemplification of what I call the project of modernity. That project is the attempt to produce a people that believes it should have no story except the story it chose when it had no story. That is what Americans mean by freedom” (“How Real Is America’s Faith,” *The Guardian*, October 16, 2010, accessed November 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/oct/16/faith-america-secular-britain>).

³³ See C. S. Lewis’s *The Abolition of Man*, in which he diagnoses modern society as having stepped outside the tradition of received moral values by rejecting the doctrine of objective moral value.

our rational nature as undirected and aimless. The human person, instead, is a complex set of contradictions due to its present nature as created in the image and likeness of God, on the one hand, and as fallen through its rejection of God via sin, on the other. *Gaudium et Spes* deploys the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, first in the ability to know and love God and exercise care for creation and second in the “interpersonal communion” between man and woman.³⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* nonetheless presents a strong sense of human sinfulness: “Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things. Therefore man is split within himself.”³⁵ The internal division and contradictions of human beings are not intrinsic to their nature but are the result of sin. This will be extremely important for the later understanding of teachings on sexuality presented by the Church as part of the natural law. Moral norms are not intended to be in accord with the present condition of human nature, but to be in accord with human nature as it reaches its perfection.³⁶ It is the very fact that sexual norms do not accord with the typical state of human beings that allows those norms to be transformative of human beings.³⁷

In addition to diagnosing these inner contradictions as the result of sin, *Gaudium et Spes* goes further and identifies a root sin as the failure to recognize God as the beginning and end of human life. This is a challenge to the modern age, since issues of atheism and theism are viewed as intellectual options without a moral import. The recognition of God forms part of the moral fabric of human persons. *Gaudium et Spes* examines the failure to recognize God, first in terms of a broad philosophical theology, and second through a narrower

³⁴ GS §12. See also GS §24: “For He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity.”

³⁵ GS §13.

³⁶ See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, ch. 5 (“Why the Enlightenment Project Had to Fail”), for the threefold division of untutored human nature, human nature having reached its *telos* and the moral laws and virtues that allow human nature to reach its *telos*.

³⁷ See Romanus Cessario’s development of the theme of transformation of the human person in his *Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 2nd ed. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009): “This transformation that takes place in the believer makes sense only if Christian conversion entails an actual movement from one point to another point” (24); “Christian life, in order to maintain a vital activity, must allow for development” (25).

Christological focus on the Incarnate Word. Having presented the human being's status as created in the image of God, it is not surprising that *Gaudium et Spes* subsequently turns its attention to the God in whose image humans are made. Not only is our dignity rooted in our "call to communion with God," but truth requires that man "freely acknowledges [the Creator's] love and devotes himself to His Creator."³⁸ Having set this stage, the document then declares that "atheism must be accounted among the most serious problems of our age."³⁹ What then is atheism?

Gaudium et Spes presents atheism as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon.⁴⁰ It especially emphasizes that what atheism means depends upon which idea of God is being rejected and upon what grounds. Thus, some of the blame for atheism rests on believers who, through erroneous doctrine or a deficient life, "conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion."⁴¹ Despite the document's sympathetic dialogical encounter, the reality remains that atheism is an objective failure in the recognition of God that creates a wound in society. A predominant form of modern atheism falsely exalts human freedom while rejecting divine creation and divine purpose in the world and in human nature.⁴² Human beings are now the creators of history, and they no longer view themselves as living in response to, and in accord with, God the Creator. The opposition in *Gaudium et Spes* between unlimited human freedom, on the one hand, and purpose within creation, on the other, will become central to the understanding of marriage and sexuality presented in *Humanae Vitae*. The Church counters that these false exaltations of unlimited freedom in fact "contradict reason and the common experience of humanity, and dethrone man from his native excellence."⁴³ Ironically,

³⁸ GS §19.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ For illuminating treatments of atheism that situate theological and anti-theological claims within a broader cultural and philosophical milieu, see: Stephen Bullivant, *Faith and Unbelief* (New York: Paulist Press, 2014); Josef Pieper, *Faith and Belief* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), and Henri de Lubac, *Drama of Atheistic Humanism*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995).

⁴¹ GS §19.

⁴² GS §20.

⁴³ GS §21. In a somewhat different tone, the Vatican I document *Dei Filius* (1870) makes a similar point about the eventual harm done to the intelligibility of human nature resulting from false exaltations of human reason and freedom: "And after forsaking and rejecting the Christian religion, and denying the true

by dethroning God, man dethrones himself: “The Church holds that the recognition of God is in no way hostile to man’s dignity, since this dignity is rooted and perfected in God.”⁴⁴ Man’s dignity is not presented as a mere static human attribute. Human dignity is something that may be perfected or, alternately, occluded or diminished. Hence, human dignity has an intrinsic link to the end of human beings in a final and higher life with God.

Once human dignity is seen as perfectible, the recognition of God as Creator foretells the virtue of hope. The promise of eternal life reveals a noble dimension of human existence that otherwise is hard for the creature to discern. This is quite controversial in the wake of Marx’s criticism of religion as “the opiate of the masses.” The document reaffirms explicitly that such an eternal hope adds “fresh incentives” to the carrying out of earthly tasks for the benefit of the human person and society. The document then specifies its analysis of the loss of hope as the true evil caused by the failure to offer due recognition of God. *Gaudium et Spes* here focuses on the loss of hope and the concomitant loss of joy: “When a divine substructure and the hope of life eternal are wanting, man’s dignity is most grievously lacerated, as current events often attest; the riddles of life and death, of guilt and of grief go unsolved, with the frequent result that men succumb to despair.”⁴⁵ Both “divine substructure” and “hope of eternal life” are highlighted. Thus, atheism is not simply contrasted to a naked theism of an impersonal God. Instead, atheism is presented as a loss of theistic hope (or hopeful theism).⁴⁶ The singularity of this theistic hope or hopeful theism may be best understood when considered through the lens of the divine mercy.

The pivotal section addressing atheism and theism deliberately closes with the revelation of God in Christ. The opposition between atheism and despair, on one hand, and theism and hope, on the other,

God and His Christ, the minds of many have sunk into the abyss of Pantheism, Materialism, and Atheism, until, denying rational nature itself, and every sound rule of right, they labor to destroy the deepest foundations of human society” (Introduction, §7, in *The Decrees of the Vatican Council*, ed. Vincent McNabb, O.P. [London: Burns and Oates, 1907]).

⁴⁴ GS §21.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Note the comparison to Aquinas on explicit faith and Heb 11:6, in which he comments that one must believe that God exists and that he will redeem or reward those who seek him. Also, see Pope Benedict’s *Spe Salvi* (2007), which addresses at length the loss of hope in the modern world.

finds a resolution in the person of Jesus Christ. In preaching the message of salvation, the Church seeks to restore “hope to those who have already despaired of anything higher than their present lot.”⁴⁷ This return to divine hope, however, requires the face of Jesus Christ. *Gaudium et Spes* §22 states, “the truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.”⁴⁸ This beautiful statement on Christ concludes the section on the dialogical encounter with atheism and, thus, is the final response to the failure to recognize God as the source and end of human life. Christ not only reveals God to man; he also reveals man to himself. Human beings remain full of contradictions that lack full intelligibility apart from the clear disclosure of the final goal of human history.⁴⁹ Yet, this return to Christ as the answer to human longings is not presented in a fideistic manner that denies the natural law or the ability of natural reason to know God as the Creator. Christ instead brings into clear vision the naturally knowable dignity of human beings as made in the image of God and then the higher reality of the perfection of that image in the Incarnation. The document thus continues, “Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”⁵⁰ Here the document situates anthropology within Christology and Christology within the Trinitarian theology.⁵¹ The Trinitar-

⁴⁷ GS §21.

⁴⁸ GS §22. It has been observed by several authors that this last section on Christ was quoted countless times by Pope St. John Paul II. See: Douglas Bushman, “Pope John Paul II and the Christ-centered Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*,” *Catholic World Report*, October 22, 2012, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/2012/10/22/pope-john-paul-ii-and-the-christ-centered-anthropology-of/>; George Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

⁴⁹ Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, ch. 5, for the necessity of the understanding of the telos of human nature to the project of moral virtues and societal life. This intelligibility has been occluded both by the rejection of divine revelation and by the reduction of human reason. See also Pope Benedict XVI’s three waves of de-Hellenization in his “Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections,” also commonly known as the “Regensburg Lecture,” given September 12, 2006.

⁵⁰ GS §22.

⁵¹ In an early commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*, Joseph Ratzinger highlights the importance of this Christological conclusion as a key to the entire document: “In accordance with the whole composition of the text, the chapter on the dignity of man culminates in Christ who is now presented as the true answer to the question of being human, and therefore to the question of true human-

ian theology is rooted in a revelation of love and divine mercy as the response to human confusion, sin, and death. The supreme calling of human beings is seen most clearly by the reception of God the Father's love in Christ.

The document summarizes this anthropological and theological truth in a memorable phrase: "Without the Creator the creature would disappear."⁵² Nonetheless, this expression is open to misunderstanding. This phrase emphasizes the interdependence between the understanding of the intelligibility of the human person and its purpose and the recognition of a God who created the universe. It is incomplete, however, as a summary of the document's teaching on God and should be understood as preparing for the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ. God's mercy and love are fully revealed in Jesus Christ, and only this revelation of love and mercy is able to respond to the "griefs and anxieties" of human beings. The Creator alone is inadequate. Human beings in their fallen and wounded state need both the Creator and the revelation and redemption of the Incarnate Word.

Gaudium et Spes's Teaching on Marriage and Family

Having addressed the grand themes of the Church and the vocation of the human person in its first part, *Gaudium et Spes* then addresses problems of "special urgency" with a chapter entitled "Fostering the Nobility of Marriage and the Family." As we saw earlier, the document highlights modern confusions and anxieties first and then presents the answer in the light of Christ.

Gaudium et Spes identifies the problems associated with marriage and sexuality in a direct and frank style. It reads: "The excellence of this institution is not everywhere reflected with equal brilliance, since polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love, and other disfigurements have an obscuring effect."⁵³ The problems of marriage

ism and of atheism. Article 22 thus returns to the starting-point, Article 12, and presents Christ as the eschatological Adam to whom the first Adam already pointed; as the true image of God which transforms man once more into likeness to God. . . . The generally theologically reserved text of the Pastoral Constitution here attains very lofty heights and points the way to theological reflection in our present situation" (*Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, vol. 5, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1969], 159).

⁵² GS §36.

⁵³ GS §47.

and family, moreover, are revealed within marriage: “Married love is too often profaned by excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human generation.”⁵⁴ Challenges from outside of marriage are identified in the form of economic and political challenges and concerns about over-population.⁵⁵ In light of these confusions from within and without, the Council seeks “to offer guidance and support to those Christians and other men who are trying to preserve the holiness and to foster the natural dignity of the married state and its superlative value.”⁵⁶ Note this dual aim of *Gaudium et Spes*’s teaching on marriage and family: the first aim defends the holiness of the marriage state; the second aim fosters its natural dignity. Marriage forms part of the natural order, and thus possesses an intelligibility in terms of its nature and its ends. Nonetheless, this natural order and resulting natural dignity receive their full intelligibility only in light of the revelation of the married state as a call to holiness.⁵⁷

Gaudium et Spes subsequently presents its teaching on marriage and family.⁵⁸ Emphasizing the perfection of human dignity and freedom

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Fifty years after *Gaudium et Spes*, some demographers worry more about underpopulation than about the overpopulation concerns of the 1960’s. See, for instance, the comments of scholars interviewed in the one-hour documentary film *The Demographic Winter: The Decline of the Human Family* by Rick Stout.

⁵⁶ GS §47.

⁵⁷ Thomas Joseph White contrasts modern views of marriage with the view from the Catholic tradition: “It is at this juncture that the tension between the natural law teaching in the Pastoral Constitution and its Christocentric doctrine of grace becomes most acutely felt and most interesting. For on the one hand, there is a clear basis in sound philosophy and in traditional Catholic theology for the affirmation that human marriage (traditionally conceived, between one man and one woman for life, open to the bearing and raising of children) is an institution of any civic polity, presupposed by the state as its genuine basis. On the other hand, in a culture in which the traditional forms of marriage are genuinely threatened and eroded existentially, can genuine human marriage be even rightly understood, let alone lived out effectively, without the revelation and grace of Jesus Christ, and the explicit knowledge of the mystery of the Church and the sacraments?” (“*Gaudium et Spes*,” in *Reception of Vatican II*, 130).

⁵⁸ Matthew Levering has carefully gone through the document’s teaching on marriage and family and shown how it is in continuity with the Church’s prior teaching. See his “Pastoral Perspectives on the Church in the Modern World,” in Lamb and Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, 165–86.

when guided by moral norms and divine laws, the teaching begins with the free gift of each person to the other: “The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent.”⁵⁹ Although it is not explicitly stated, the dignity of the human person allows human beings to consent to something irrevocable. In other words, human beings are free to bind themselves in the form of a promise or a vow. This means that the biological order is taken up into the higher order of freedom. The higher order, nonetheless, does not negate the lower order. And so, the document continues to show that the nature of the marital promise does indeed include the full psycho-somatic unity that is the human person: “By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown.”⁶⁰ The dignity of marriage thus is shown to be the consensual and irrevocable promise of conjugal love that culminates in the reception of new persons. Persons freely bind themselves to each other in a manner that fully includes their bodies so that new persons with new bodies (i.e., children) may result. In this manner, the personalist language employed by *Gaudium et Spes* does not create a body–soul dualism in which sex and marriage become voluntarist impositions separated from bodily unity.⁶¹ Persons are not extrinsic to human nature, including body and soul. In other words, two souls cannot have marital sex, nor can two bodies. Married and conjugal love requires the unique dignity of the human being as made in the image and likeness of God.

The document continues to correlate the dignity of married love and the existence of norms. “As a mutual gift of two persons, this

⁵⁹ GS §48.

⁶⁰ Ibid., citing the *Decretum pro Armenis*, St. Augustine’s *De bono coniugali*; St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* Suppl., q. 49, a. 3, ad 1; and Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*.

⁶¹ The revisionist moral interpretation exaggerates the shift in language from nature and ends to the personal gift of conjugal love. In a 1965 commentary, Bernhard Häring writes: “The personalist viewpoint provides the decisive criterion of the Council’s teaching on natural law. . . . Any false biological views which overlook or underestimate the immense difference between merely animal structure and human sexuality is most expressly excluded” (in Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 243). Häring’s reading presents a false dichotomy between natural law as biological and natural law as personalist. Natural law, instead, includes the full person, body and soul, and is open to the illumination of revealed truth.

intimate union and the good of children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them.”⁶² Here self-gift and children are presented as the basis for prescriptions against adultery and divorce. Persons beget persons within marriage. The mutual gift of husband and wife forms a unity with the gift of children. They are one and the same gift, since the expression of marital love in the marital act has as its natural consequence the procreation of children. The dignity of human persons begets moral norms; moral norms recognize persons.

The dignity of the human person finds expression in the roles that it may freely embrace. Thus, each member of the laity is called to embrace freely the role of husband or wife, with this role in turn finding its completion in the role of father or mother. *Gaudium et Spes* thus connects personalist love and biological parenthood: “Authentic married love is caught up in the divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ’s redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in the sublime office of being a mother and a father.”⁶³ Note that these roles are not created by the person, but discovered and chosen. Christ’s redeeming love is revealed as perfective of both the love between husband and wife and that love’s fruition in being a father and a mother. Again, the dignity of the human person in its body–soul unity ensures that the biological roles of begetting offspring are raised to an office of motherhood and fatherhood. As the document subsequently states, “the sexual characteristics of man and the human faculty of reproduction wonderfully exceed the dispositions of the lower forms of life.”⁶⁴ The institution of marriage is the rational ordering of the natural teleologies of the body.

Within this context, the dignity of marriage cannot be separated from its orientation to children. After highlighting the dignity of “authentic conjugal love” and affirming its high regard for “true love between husband and wife,” the document emphasizes married love’s intrinsic natality.⁶⁵ In describing such a reality, the document reads:

⁶² GS §48, citing Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*.

⁶³ GS §48, citing *Lumen Gentium* [LG]. The following sentence is “For this reason Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignities of their state” (citing Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*).

⁶⁴ GS §51.

⁶⁵ See Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) for an extended discussion of natality in a philosophical context.

“Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior, who through them will enlarge and enrich his own family day by day.”⁶⁶ Additionally, “parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted.”⁶⁷ *Gaudium et Spes* links this natality to the biblical accounts of creation by the reference to “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18) and to the command to “increase and multiply” (Gen 1:28). In this pronatal ordering, “they [husbands and wives] should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love.”⁶⁸ Once this foundation of marital natality has been established, then generosity with respect to new life becomes a reflection of God’s generosity shown not only in creation but also in redemption.⁶⁹ The document links the call to procreation to both the Creator and to Christ: “Trusting in divine Providence and refining the spirit of sacrifice, married Christians glorify the Creator and strive toward fulfillment in Christ when with a generous human and Christian sense of responsibility they acquit themselves of the duty [*munus*] to procreate.”⁷⁰ The language of “duty to procreate” is not wrong, but it

⁶⁶ GS §50.

⁶⁷ Ibid.: “Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children”; and “Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See Fr. Anthony Percy, STD, who connects sexuality and parenthood in Karol Wojtyła’s thought: “Wojtyła wrote of conscious parenthood in *Love and Responsibility* (1960). ‘Love and parenthood,’ [Wojtyła] wrote, ‘must not therefore be separated from the other. Willingness for parenthood is an indispensable condition of love’ (p. 236). This particular insight, that sexuality is intimately tied up with parenthood, has gone unnoticed by many, at least as far as I am aware,” (“Revealing the Truth of Married Love: An Introduction to a Rich, New Translation of *Humanae Vitae*,” accessed November 7, 2017, <https://marriageresourcecentre.org/a-rich-new-translation-of-humanae-vitae/>).

⁷⁰ GS §50: “They glorify the Creator and strive for perfection in Christ when they carry out the duty [or office or gift] of procreation with a magnanimous, humane, and Christian responsibility [Creatorem glorificant atque ad perfectionem in Christo contendunt, cum procreandi munere generosa, humana atque christiana responsabilitate funguntur].”

does not capture the fullness of the Latin *munus* or *munere*, which may also be translated as office or gift.⁷¹ Thus, it is through the gift/duty/office of procreation that married couples participate in the drama of creation and redemption, whether or not this dispositive self-gift results in actual procreation or is limited due to infertility.

It is in this pronatal context that *Gaudium et Spes* specifically addresses the issue of birth control. The document reaffirms the traditional prohibition of artificial birth control: “Relying on these principles, sons of the Church may not undertake methods of birth regulation which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of the divine law.”⁷² This is the aforementioned sentence that has the footnote that launched *Humanae Vitae*.⁷³ The following sentences are illuminating in light of the whole of the *Gaudium et Spes*. They read: “All should be persuaded that human life and the task [*munus*] of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone. Hence, they cannot be measured or perceived only in terms of it, but always have a bearing on the eternal destiny of men.”⁷⁴ Sexuality and natality are fully intelligible only within a transcendent horizon.

Gaudium et Spes thus places sexuality within the revelation of God’s love. Just as the mystery of human beings in general is fully disclosed only in the revelation of the Word Incarnate, so also is the

⁷¹ See Janet Smith on the various meanings of the word *munus*, here translated as “duty” but also signifying “office” and “gift” (“The *Munus* of Transmitting Human Life: A New Approach to *Humanae Vitae*,” *The Thomist* 54, no. 3 [1990]: 385–427).

⁷² GS §51.

⁷³ See Yves Congar, O.P., journal entry on 28 November 1965, in which he writes: “The *modi* about marriage in schema XIII. Their intention was not doctrinal but pastoral. The Pontifical Commission must be left with all its liberty, without being subjected to pressure. But, TO BE SILENT about methods of birth control was to allow it to be understood that the position adopted by Pius XI and Pius XII was being changed. IT MUST BE SAID THAT NOTHING IS CHANGED. (I must say that this does not please me, nor does it greatly set my mind at rest. . .)” (*My Journal of the Council*, trans. Mary John Ronayne, O.P., and Mary Cecily, O.P., [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012], 859). Congar’s reporting of his displeasure confirms that the final text of *Gaudium et Spes* §51 reaffirms the prior prohibition of artificial methods of birth control.

⁷⁴ GS §51: “Omnibus vero compertum sit vitam hominum et munus eam transmittendi non ad hoc saeculum tantum restringi neque eo tantum commensurari et intelligi posse, sed ad aeternam hominum destinationem semper respicere.”

mystery of new human beings only thus fully disclosed. The fecundity of the marital act not only expresses the love of the couple but also participates in God's fecundity in his creation and redemption. One way of viewing this reality is to say that it is wrong for a married couple to frustrate knowingly the fertility of the marital act. Another way of viewing this reality is that it is joyful and noble for a married couple to cooperate intelligently with the fertility of the marital act.

Viewing Marriage through *Lumen Gentium*'s Universal Call to Holiness⁷⁵

As *Gaudium et Spes* is the pastoral constitution of the Church in the modern world, it should be read through the lens of *Lumen Gentium* as the dogmatic constitution of the Church.⁷⁶ Thus, the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* on the lay state and the married state form the context of the particular teaching and pastoral responses as promulgated in *Gaudium et Spes*.

Lumen Gentium places the universal call to holiness at the center of its teaching about the mystery of Christ and his Church. After reaffirming that the perfection of charity is seen "in a very special way" in the practice of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, *Lumen Gentium* affirms that all of the faithful, both religious and lay, are called to perfection: "The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition."⁷⁷ The universal

⁷⁵ Consider the understanding of the beatific vision as the final common good.

⁷⁶ See Benestad's discussion in "Doctrinal Perspectives on the Church in the Modern World," in Lamb and Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, 147–64.

⁷⁷ LG §40. On the connection between holiness and charity, see Benoit-Dominique de La Soujeole, "The Universal Call to Holiness," in Lamb and Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, 37–54. He writes: "The commandment of charity is not mere *advice* suggested for some; it is, instead, the most demanding and the greatest commandment of the Christian life, and it is addressed to all without distinction" (40). He continues to show that this holiness is not a human achievement, but a divine gift, and thus necessarily connected to the sacramental life of the Church: "In remaining faithfully connected to the sources of grace—the Gospel and the authentic sacraments—holiness, as a *gift of God*, begets holiness when accepted, as the human vocation, which is progressively realized" (41). Latin of LG is taken from the Vatican site, accessed November 7, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_lt.html. English of LG is taken from the Vatican site, accessed November 7, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

call to holiness does two things: first, it opens the doors of holiness to the lay faithful alongside that of the religious; second, it also reveals that the standard for each will be the perfection of Christ.⁷⁸ The call is restated: “Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society.”⁷⁹ Holiness is here described both as coming from each rank and area of society and, yet, also as giving back to each rank and area of society. It is presented not in other-worldly terms of escaping from earthly society, but rather in terms of promoting a “more human manner of living” in this society. Marriage and family are quintessential human relationships that are called to become more human in light of their call to perfection in Christ.

Through the universal call to holiness, marriage is elevated to become simultaneously more divine and more human. *Gaudium et Spes* cites *Lumen Gentium* in the explication of this twofold dimension of marriage and family. The citation runs as follows: “Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ’s redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in the sublime office of being a father or a mother.”⁸⁰ This is a recurrent pattern: authentic human love is caught up in Christ’s divine and saving love so that the divine love may strengthen the recipients in the human realities of marriage and parenthood. The very fleshly realities such as sex and children

www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

⁷⁸ Agostino Marchetto draws out how *Lumen Gentium* grounds the vocation of the laity to holiness in their baptism in his *Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: A Counterpoint for the History of the Council*, trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 450–51. Commenting on the definition of the laity in LG §31, Marchetto writes here: “Notwithstanding this initial rather negative and exclusionary definition of the laity, the intention of the Council Fathers was eminently positive, as is seen in their general approach and in what follows this definition, namely, that every baptized Christian participates in the *munera*, or offices of Christ, and in that respect, are not differentiated from those in the hierarchy, or religious life, nor do they participate at a more limited level of Christian existence, although they are distinguished by being engaged in ‘secular activities.’”

⁷⁹ LG §40.

⁸⁰ GS §48, citing LG §41.

become part of this renewal of the married state in its Christ-like and human dimensions. The path to holiness is outlined as follows: “Furthermore, married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by faithful love. They should sustain one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives. They should imbue their offspring, lovingly welcomed as God’s gift, with Christian doctrine and the evangelical virtues.”⁸¹ Thus the call to holiness is lived by married couples by faithful love, enduring love, and fertile love, a love that is fertile both in children and in the Christian life.

It is clear that *Lumen Gentium* presents marriage and family as a means of transformation and perfection through several other passages as it presents its teaching on the Church. As *Lumen Gentium* presents the common priesthood of the faithful, it addresses specially the sacrament of matrimony as a participation in that priesthood.⁸² It states: “Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church, help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children.”⁸³ Married life, with its essential natal dimension, is a path of holiness. Immediately afterwards, the document speaks of the family as “the domestic Church.”⁸⁴ This suggests a recurrent theme: human realities become more fully human and more fully intelligible in light of their being taken up into the supernatural worship of God.

Lumen Gentium develops the theme of transformation and perfection when it considers the role of the laity within the Church. The laity are called to live in the Spirit: “For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these

⁸¹ LG §41.

⁸² LG §10–11: “But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity. It is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation.”

⁸³ LG §11, citing Eph 5:32.

⁸⁴ LG §11.

become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’”⁸⁵ Married and family life then are described as “an excellent school of the lay apostolate.”⁸⁶ Husbands and wives are called to witness to “the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children.”⁸⁷ This witness, however, is not merely internal. Instead, it aims at the world: “The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come.”⁸⁸ Thus, the Christian family has an eschatological dimension of hope that forms a whole with its foundation of love and children.⁸⁹

Gaudium et Spes emphasizes the need for purification on the path to perfection. Marriage is not a sheer affirmation of the existential situation of the human person, but rather serves as a corrective to many inclinations arising from our fallen nature. In particular, married love in both its sensual and sentimental dimensions is very much weakened by pride and lust. The attentiveness to the needs and anxieties of the modern world does not lead to a Christianization of this disordered state, but to a proclamation of mercy that the disorder may find healing: “Hence if anyone wants to know how this unhappy situation can be overcome, Christians will tell him that all human activity, constantly imperiled by man’s pride and deranged self-love, must be purified and perfected by the power of Christ’s Cross and resurrection.”⁹⁰ The very human activities of marriage and family life are called to perfection through the purification of the Cross.

Humanae Vitae* in Light of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium

Humanae Vitae places its teaching squarely within *Gaudium et Spes* and explicitly affirms its formal and material continuity with the earlier, conciliar document. *Humanae Vitae* claims this continuity

⁸⁵ LG §34, citing 1 Pet 2:5.

⁸⁶ LG §35.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid. It then follows: “Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth.”

⁸⁹ De La Soujeole draws out this eschatological dimension of *Lumen Gentium*, which has often been overlooked: “The opening paragraph [of LG §48] is of particular importance because it strongly situates the true nature of the Christian life on earth: Eternal life has *already* begun. . . . The theological virtue that enables us to live this already-begun fullness of eternal life is hope. This virtue is not well known; it risks being lived minimally or badly. Nonetheless, it enables us to live in the Kingdom while we are still on earth” (“The Universal Call to Holiness,” 44).

⁹⁰ GS §37.

when it explains that it seeks to teach “with special reference to what the Second Vatican Council taught with the highest authority in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today.”⁹¹ The continuity, however, runs deeper than explicit references, since both documents affirm the need for the twofold horizon of the natural and the supernatural in addressing human sexuality. *Humanae Vitae* situates natural law within the supernatural vocation of the human race. As the document introduces the “question of human procreation,” it refers to “the whole man and the whole mission to which he is called that must be considered: both its natural, earthly aspects and its supernatural, eternal aspects.”⁹² As such, the marital act cannot be considered solely as the action of husband and wife, but must also be considered as participating in God’s creation and redemption.

Here are excerpts from *Humanae Vitae* that present *Gaudium et Spes*’s integral view of the nobility of marriage and family:

As a consequence, husband and wife, through that mutual gift of themselves, which is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives.⁹³

Finally, this love is fecund. It is not confined wholly to the loving interchange of husband and wife; it also contrives to go beyond this to bring new life into being.⁹⁴

⁹¹ HV §7.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ HV §8. Occasionally there is the criticism that HV’s focus on natural law excludes the personalist focus of GS. In addition to being against the explicit language of HV, the distinction expresses an imposed hermeneutic of discontinuity. See Pope Benedict XVI, 2005 Christmas Address to the Curia: “The hermeneutic of discontinuity is countered by the hermeneutic of reform, as it was presented first by Pope John XXIII in his Speech inaugurating the Council on 11 October 1962 and later by Pope Paul VI in his Discourse for the Council’s conclusion on 7 December 1965. Here I shall cite only John XXIII’s well-known words, which unequivocally express this hermeneutic when he says that the Council wishes ‘to transmit the doctrine, pure and integral, without any attenuation or distortion’” (accessed November 7, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html).

⁹⁴ HV §9, which then continues with a quotation from GS §50: “Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and

Responsible parenthood, as we use the term here, has one further essential aspect of paramount importance. It concerns the objective moral order which was established by God, and of which a right conscience is the true interpreter. . . . From this it follows that they are not free to act as they choose in the service of transmitting life, as if it were wholly up to them to decide what is the right course to follow. On the contrary, they are bound to ensure that what they do corresponds to the will of God the Creator. The very nature of marriage and its use makes His will clear, while the constant teaching of the Church spells it out.⁹⁵

These quotations reiterate three central themes of *Gaudium et Spes*: (1) marriage is the mutual gift of two persons; (2) that mutual gift is inherently ordered to children; and (3) this order of man and woman first to become husband and wife and then, second, to become father and mother is fully intelligible as part of God's creative design and order.⁹⁶

After summarizing the view of marriage as outlined in *Gaudium et Spes*, *Humanae Vitae* then states the focal point of the Catholic prohibition of contraception: "The Church, nevertheless, in urging men to the observance of the precepts of the natural law, which it interprets by its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life."⁹⁷ In support of this teaching, there is first the argument from the fecundity of married love itself: "And if each of these essential qualities, the unitive and the procreative, is preserved, the use of marriage fully retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to which man is called."⁹⁸ Another argument acknowledges God's design: "But to experience the gift of married love while respecting the laws of conception is to acknowledge that one is not the master of the sources of life but rather

education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parents' welfare."

⁹⁵ HV §10, citing GS §§50–51.

⁹⁶ In its conclusion, HV addresses the other central theme of GS with respect to the revelation of mercy and the corresponding virtue of hope in midst of contemporary atheism and despair.

⁹⁷ HV §11, citing Pius XI, *Casti connubii*, and Pius XII's *Address to Midwives*.

⁹⁸ HV §12, which then continues: "We believe that our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing that this teaching is in harmony with human reason."

the minister of the design established by the Creator.”⁹⁹ The reference to the Creator’s designs recalls the entire dialogical encounter with atheism that formed a central part of the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*. Much of the modern world has in fact rejected that very Creator and the Creator’s designs, so it is hardly surprising that the prohibition of contraception has also found widespread rejection.

Humanae Vitae’s closing exhortation to Christian couples emphasizes the Christological and sacramental dimensions of married love as a perfection of their baptismal vocation. Pope Paul VI writes, “In humble obedience then to her voice, let Christian husbands and wives be mindful of their vocation to the Christian life, a vocation which, deriving from their Baptism, has been confirmed anew and made more explicit by the Sacrament of Matrimony.”¹⁰⁰ In this context, *Humanae Vitae* cites both *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* by emphasizing the missionary character of all Christian life: “Thus will they realize to the full their calling and bear witness as becomes them, to Christ before the world.”¹⁰¹ The specific missionary witness of the Christian family is to make “visible to men and women the holiness and joy of the law which united inseparably their love for one another and the cooperation they give to God’s love, God who is the Author of human life.”¹⁰² Finally, this missionary dimension is explicitly linked to the virtue of hope: “Nevertheless it is precisely the hope of that life which, like a brightly burning torch, lights up their journey, as, strong in spirit, they strive to live ‘sober, upright and godly lives in this world,’ knowing for sure that ‘the form of this world is passing away.’”¹⁰³ The problems of this world and the inner contradictions and anxieties of human beings cannot be resolved fully within this world’s horizon. That is true both for socioeconomic and political problems relating to population and poverty and for marriage and family life. There must be that “hope of that life which . . . lights up their journey.” The Church’s teachings on sexuality, marriage, and family life receive their final intelligibility in light of that hope.

⁹⁹ HV §13.

¹⁰⁰ HV §25, which continues: “For by this sacrament they are strengthened and, one might almost say, consecrated to the faithful fulfillment of their duties.”

¹⁰¹ HV §25, citing GS §48 and LG §35.

¹⁰² HV §25.

¹⁰³ HV §25, citing Tit 2:12 and 1 Cor 7:31.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that *Humanae Vitae* is properly read within the context of *Gaudium et Spes*. Such an approach places the particular prohibition of artificial methods of contraception within the broader context of atheism and Christian theism, of despair and Christian hope, and of the manner in which Christ reveals man to himself. The orders of creation and redemption unveil the ordering of marriage to generous love and natality.

Situating *Humanae Vitae* within *Gaudium et Spes* likewise reveals the inadequacies of the originally outlined approach taken by Curran that places the two magisterial documents in opposition. Against Curran's interpretation, this essay has shown that the two documents speak harmoniously of the natural law, of the mutual self-gift of persons, of the twin horizons of earthly and supernatural existence, and of the need for the acceptance of eschatological hope and divine mercy to render fully intelligible the demands of fidelity to the Church's teaching on sexual morality. Curran's revisionist approach reduces *Humanae Vitae*'s teaching to an authoritative imposition against the supposed freedom of the human person to define one's own self. There is thereby nothing in the order of the marital act essentially ordered to fecundity. In contrast, when *Humanae Vitae* is read within the proper teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*, human sexuality is elevated to form part of the evangelical call for Christian married couples to reflect the drama of creation and redemption. N·V