

Introduction: Sexual Ethics Forty Years after *Humanae Vitae*

Readers will notice in this issue of the *Josephinum Journal of Theology* a new cover design, the inclusion of short abstracts, this opening editorial, and a collection of thematically organized essays. These features reflect our efforts to build upon those of the previous editor, Dr. James Keating, who brought the journal back into circulation in 1994, guiding it into 2006. As we move forward, the journal seeks to continue its mission of contributing to the intellectual, apostolic and pastoral life of the Church by providing a forum for the exploration of important and timely themes.

To initiate this new phase in the life of the journal, we have chosen to address the status of sexual ethics forty years after Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae vitae*. As readers are well aware, this encyclical was arguably the most contested in the history of the Church, and it is integrally related to the subsequent developments in sexual ethics, to broader questions of theology and philosophy, to various levels of Catholic education, to pastoral ministry, and to the behavioral practices of millions of Catholics. Some have gone so far as to write of a "moral schism" centered on the question of contraception and including, especially, various aspects of the ethics of procreation. Others have written of a generation during which matters of sexual ethics were largely avoided in pastoral ministry. The post conciliar tendency of pastors to avoid matters of sexual ethics is not surprising given the widespread theological debate, which undermined confidence in particular teachings, and given that many parishioners in modern societies were not looking for instruction regarding their sexual behavior.

Over roughly the last two decades, as the unpleasant consequences of the sexual revolution have become clear, the wisdom of the Catholic tradition has become more widely appreciated. New signs of confidence are especially apparent in seminarians and priests of "the John Paul II generation," and in popular catechesis, most notably that employing the late Pope's writings such as his *Theology of the Body*. However, because positions became hardened in the quarter century or so following *Humanae vitae*, there has been relatively little attention paid to argumentation regarding contraception since the 1993 publication of *Veritatis splendor* in 1993. Moreover, the renewed confidence in traditional sexual ethics needs the support of careful theological and philosophical analysis if it is to persist and deepen. The fortieth anniversary of *Humanae vitae* therefore provides an opportunity to revisit the state of the question, regarding not only contraception, but a wide range of questions pertaining to marriage and sexual ethics.

The contributions to this issue are ordered from those most closely treating the question of contraception and leading up to a concluding essay that treats some related aspects of contemporary pastoral ministry. In our first essay, **William Murphy** reviews the state of arguments in support of *Humanae vitae*, doing so in light of the approaches to natural law and moral action encouraged by *Veritatis splendor*. He argues that the best arguments in support of the former encyclical will avoid "traditionally naturalistic" approaches and instead draw on the approaches encouraged by the latter encyclical, especially in light of the contemporary recovery of Thomistic virtue ethics. The second essay by **Fr. Martin Rhonheimer** takes a similar theoretical approach to the case of using contraceptives under the threat of rape, showing why such behavior is fully in accord with the teachings of these two encyclicals. In so doing, he reaches the same conclusion regarding this case as trusted moralists both before and after *Humanae vitae*, but he does so in a way that avoids problematic aspects of the earlier analyses. Next, **Donald P. Asci** offers a reading of John Paul II's teaching on conjugal chastity in light of what he calls the Pope's "procreative personalism,"

characterized by an appreciation for the inseparably procreative character of conjugal acts. In our fourth essay, **William E. May** offers an analysis of the theological significance of consummation, applying his analysis to some contemporary questions including the consummation of marriage through contracepted acts, the use of condoms to prevent the transmission of HIV, and same-sex marriage. Next, **E. Christian Brugger** offers a powerful critique of a recent argument to justify same-sex behavior, showing that it is based on a dualistic separation between the “biological” and the “personal.” In the sixth contribution, **David Cloutier** argues, in light of the contemporary recovery of the importance of love or charity in sexual ethics, for a reading of Aquinas that emphasizes the centrality of charity and Aquinas’s distinctively theological ethic, without sacrificing the strengths of Thomas’s treatment of sexual ethics in light of chastity. Next, as an illustration of an important aspect of the contemporary recovery of virtue theory, **Julie Hanlon Rubio** employs Alasdair MacIntyre’s notion of “practice” to give a positive account of those practices that couples can employ to strengthen their marital fidelity. Finally, **Monsignor Stewart Swetland** offers insights based upon his experience in the pastoral preparation of men and women for the vocation of marriage.

It is our hope that this issue of the *Josephinum Journal of Theology* will contribute not only to a greater understanding of these important and challenging questions, but also to a more faithful living of the truth about human love and the transmission of life.

William F. (Bill) Murphy, Jr.
Editor, Josephinum Journal of Theology
Associate Professor of Moral Theology, Pontifical College Josephinum