

## Response to Michael Waldstein's Address

This past September (2004) Professor Michael Waldstein came to Christendom to deliver a guest lecture. He began by quoting from an article I had published in *The Latin Mass* magazine, and then he stated, "The main thesis of my talk, put negatively, is that Galvin [and another author] are wrong." In order for Christendom students to be able to hear both sides of the argument, the editors of *The Romanist* have offered me this opportunity to respond to Waldstein's presentation.

The thesis of the article to which Michael Waldstein took exception was that Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* abandoned traditional Catholic teaching on marriage and that is why it has so monumentally failed at its task of convincing Catholics of the truth of the Church's position on birth control. The article described 9 different ways in which *Humanae Vitae* abandoned Catholic tradition. Of these, Waldstein has written to me, "I find myself agreeing wholeheartedly with your own theological and philosophical points," but he takes exception to the final two points which deal with personalism versus Thomistic teleology. Before we examine the philosophical questions, let's take a look at the first 7 points on which we appear to find agreement:

1. The establishment of the Papal Commission to investigate the birth control issue was a disastrously imprudent decision which sabotaged any chance for success of the encyclical by: a) handing over a question of faith and morals to a bureaucratic committee with no defined purpose; b) delaying the decision for several years so that the Catholic forces did not even appear on the field until the opposition had already won the war; and, c) creating division within the teaching authority of the Church, a division which is reflected even in the encyclical itself.
2. *Humanae Vitae* failed to situate the argument within the context of Catholic marriage, giving only a single paragraph to the 3 traditional foundations of marriage, while deliberately excising the teaching of obedience within marriage, thus igniting a crisis of obedience not just in Catholic marriages but within the wider Church.
3. *Humanae Vitae* demonstrated a very gloomy attitude towards children and increased populations, adopting the mentality of the "population explosion" (now thoroughly debunked), while encouraging family size limitation, as long as it was done by natural means. Thus the encyclical recognized a conflict only between *natural* versus *artificial means*, while abandoning the traditional Catholic *end* which is generous fruitfulness.
4. *Humanae Vitae* abandoned the Scriptural basis for the argument against birth control, failing to quote any of the relevant verses.
5. *Humanae Vitae* abandoned the Traditional basis for the argument against birth control, failing to mention St. Augustine even once, not even in a footnote, never mentioning St. Thomas Aquinas except in a single footnote, and ignoring all the other fathers and doctors of the Church who have taught on this subject.
6. *Humanae Vitae* abandoned the Magisterial basis for the argument against birth control, failing to present the dogmatic statements of past popes, never once

quoting Pius XI's *Casti Connubii*, and stating a determination to present an *entirely new* reply to the question.

7. *Humanae Vitae* (and especially its subsequent defenders) placed too much reliance on consequentialist arguments that are insufficient to establish the morality of an action.

Since Professor Waldstein and I are able to agree on this much, let us turn to the area of disagreement. Waldstein objects to the points in which I stated that *Humanae Vitae* created an entirely new justification for the condemnation of artificial birth control, one based on a personalist philosophy, while it abandoned the traditional teaching of the Church which was based on the teleological philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Here is Professor Waldstein's response:

"My talk has two parts. In the first I will argue that Pope John Paul's teaching on marriage is indeed deeply rooted in a teleological conception of nature in agreement with Aristotle's and St. Thomas' natural philosophy. In the second I will argue that most of what is new in John Paul's personalism is inspired, not by Scheler, but by St. John of the Cross. St. John of the Cross had a good formation in St. Thomas, as did John Paul II."

The first thing that might strike the reader is that this response does not contradict what I had stated. So there is no disagreement that the following statement describes an entirely new and personalist argument:

"The entire teaching of *Humanae Vitae* rests upon the sentence, "That teaching, often set forth by the magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning."

Waldstein himself cited John Paul II's own statement that this particular sentence in *Humanae Vitae* had radically changed the nature of the argument:

"By appealing to the *meaning* of the conjugal act, the Pope [Paul VI] places the whole discussion not only and not so much in the context of the nature of the act, but also and even more in the context of human awareness, in the context of the awareness that should correspond to this act on the part of both the man and the woman—the persons performing this act."

The fact that this personalist argument has proven disastrous in practice is a simple fact of history that is not in dispute by anyone. The percentage of Catholics generously accepting children from God is in the low single digits, so close to zero as to be nearly within the margin of error of most surveys.

Nor does Professor Waldstein dispute that *Humanae Vitae* abandoned traditional Thomistic teleology as it has existed for centuries. He only claims that John Paul's

philosophy represents a new and better teleology. That's fine, but at least we can all agree that it's not the same scholastic philosophy used by Pope Leo XIII, Pope Pius XI and other prominent figures in the magisterial tradition. Even if Waldstein were correct, a "teleology" based on St. John of the Cross such as he describes would be radically different from anything seen previously.

Teleology is the study of ends. It is based upon the concept that we have been created by God to achieve a purpose. Teleology requires creation, design and purpose, and it postulates that every created being is oriented towards an end established by the Creator. In regard to the specific issue of birth control within marriage, teleology found its expression in the teaching that marriage must always remain ordained towards a *primary purpose*. That primary purpose of marriage is the procreation and education of children. All other purposes of marriage must remain subordinated to that primary purpose.

No one questions the fact that a traditional teleology including a description of the primary purpose of marriage is absent from *Humanae Vitae*, despite the fact that only 17 years earlier Pope Pius XII had reiterated in the strongest possible language that this teaching was absolutely essential and foundational to the understanding of Catholic marriage. All commentators at the time of the encyclical's release in 1968 noted this absence as being of particularly great significance.

So what arguments *does* Professor Waldstein make against my position? They are these:

1. The use of the word "meaning" is not illegitimate since other popes have also used the word "meaning."
2. Karol Wojtyla before he became Pope John Paul II mentioned the traditional description of Catholic marriage in his book *Love and Responsibility* published in 1960. Therefore his personalism is not opposed to St. Thomas.
3. The widespread dominance of scientific, mechanistic views offers an alternate explanation for the failure of *Humanae Vitae*.
4. The personalism of John Paul II is rooted in St. John of the Cross.

Regarding point 1: Although he omitted them from his Christendom lecture, elsewhere Waldstein has provided citations demonstrating three instances where popes used the word "meaning" prior to Vatican II. So he says that there is nothing wrong or un-Catholic for a pope to address "the *meaning* of life" rather than "the *purpose* of life."

This is true, but it entirely misses the point that what is objectionable is not the mere fact that *Humanae Vitae* addressed the "meaning" of the conjugal act in some manner, but that every traditional source of support for Church teaching was abandoned and discarded, as we already saw above, and all the weight of this enormous argument bearing eternal consequences for hundreds of millions of Catholics should be made to rest upon a concept that is admitted by all to be a novelty. We have discarded Scripture, we have discarded Tradition, we have discarded the Magisterium, we have discarded scholastic teleology, we have discarded traditional Catholic marriage theology, we have discarded fruitfulness, and when all those things have been jettisoned, what remains? "An inseparable connection between two meanings." This is hubris of the highest order, to

believe that one's own philosophical speculations are capable of replacing 2,000 years of Catholic teaching.

In the paragraphs from my article that were elided by Professor Waldstein, it was made clear that I directed my objections to the specific use of the word "meaning" in this particular instance:

"When it speaks of an "inseparable connection" between "the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning," *Humanae Vitae* is creating out of thin air a concept that has never before existed in any form of Catholic doctrine. After this breathtaking act of bare assertion, the encyclical gives virtually no support to its novel concept. Why are there two meanings and not more than two or less than two? What makes them inseparable? Such fundamental questions are left unanswered. A strained comparison between contraception and marital rape represents *Humanae Vitae's* only attempt to elucidate this new formula."

These questions remain unanswered. Why should there be no more nor less than 2 meanings? After all, there are 3 traditional *bona* or "goods" of Christian marriage: the procreation and education of children, conjugal love and the indissoluble sacramental bond. So why are there only 2 meanings? And what makes them inseparable? Meanings are not inherently inseparable. Nor are purposes for that matter. That's why the purposes are structured in a hierarchy and the lower must always serve the higher. Are meanings similarly structured in a hierarchy? This has never been explained.

And if what the encyclical says is true, how are we to know it? Has it ever been stated in Scripture, Tradition or the Magisterium? Is it a part of the natural law available to reason? Was this novelty accepted when it was presented in *Humanae Vitae*? Clearly not, based on all the evidence from all quarters. Even its defenders such as Archbishop John J. Myers have stated that *Humanae Vitae* contains "a somewhat inadequate formulation of the magisterial teaching. The Catholic clergy as a group have never known how to defend this doctrine well."

Regarding point 2, that in his book *Love and Responsibility* Karol Wojtyla wrote about the traditional description of marriage, Professor Waldstein seems to think this point so crucial that twice he read aloud the excerpt. But if we are dealing with *Humanae Vitae* in particular, it seems to have no relevance to that subject. On the other hand, we might see a connection when we look at personalism in general as represented in the thought of John Paul II.

The first point we must address is that *Love and Responsibility* was published in 1960, a few years before the start of Vatican II. My article in *The Latin Mass* magazine demonstrated that there was complete public unanimity on the Catholic teaching regarding birth control as late as 1962. So nothing published before 1962 would have contradicted the magisterium. Such a piece couldn't even get published. The fact that Karol Wojtyla maintained the traditional view of marriage in *Love and Responsibility* tells us nothing other than that it was published before Vatican II.

The relevant question is whether since the time of Vatican II and *Humanae Vitae*, either as Bishop Wojtyla or as Pope John Paul II, he has ever published a document outlining the traditional Catholic understanding of marriage. Has any document from his pontificate ever mentioned the primary purpose of marriage or stressed that other purposes must remain subordinate to the primary purpose? Has he ever explained that conjugal love is based upon the “order of love,” which Pope Pius XI said must include “the primacy of the husband with regard to the wife and children, the ready subjection of the wife and her willing obedience, which the Apostle commends in these words: ‘Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ is the head of the Church’”?

My reading of post-Vatican II documents indicates that no such words have ever left his pen. In order to make the claim that the personalism of *Humanae Vitae* or the personalism of John Paul II “stands in harmony with St. Thomas,” one must be able to offer contemporaneous statements in which the author deliberately presents personalist and scholastic philosophies side-by-side, preferably in the same document, but at least within the same decade. But it is insupportable to make the claim that the meaning of something written in 1968 must be viewed in the context of a work written a decade earlier, in another era prior to the great cataclysm of Vatican II, prior to the establishment of the Papal Commission, and prior to the beginning of the great debate on the topic of birth control which wasn’t even initiated until several years after the publication of *Love and Responsibility*.

In his third point Prof. Waldstein proposes an alternate explanation for the failure of *Humanae Vitae*: “Teleology is difficult to accept, [Pope John Paul] says, because of the wide-spread dominance of natural science and its mechanistic picture of the world.” Waldstein calls this, “The single most important historical circumstance of the controversy preceding and following the publication of *Humanae Vitae*.”

The facts of reality could not be more completely opposed to such a statement. It flies in the face of every bit of available evidence to claim that a “mechanistic picture of the world” prevented Catholics from understanding the teleological arguments of the Church, when the fact is that Catholics *did* accept such arguments for as long as they were made. And we have already established that the traditional Catholic theology based on teleology and the primary purpose of marriage was never presented in *Humanae Vitae*, so a failure to accept them could not possibly account for its failure.

The famous pro-life advocate and *Humanae Vitae* defender Fr. Anthony Zimmerman SVD lamented the way in which St. Thomas Aquinas was entirely dropped from *Humanae Vitae*. And when he served on the commission for the 1980 synod of bishops that produced the encyclical *Familiaris Consortio*, Fr. Zimmerman was shocked to find that “the pivotal argument of Aquinas” was deliberately excluded because it was not considered “politically expedient.” So in what possible way could a “mechanistic picture of the world” have prevented Catholics from accepting an argument that was never made or presented to them?

The majority of Catholics knew and understood and for the most part abided by the traditional Church teaching for as long as it was taught. Pope Pius XI's *Casti Connubii* had no difficulty gaining acceptance among Catholics when it was promulgated in 1930, and the Catholic birth rate was even higher in 1962. Catholics might not have ever heard the word "teleology," but they understood the concept when it was presented in Catholic marriage manuals such as this one:

"Since Catholics maintain that the primary purpose of the generative faculties is reproduction, they have always prohibited the deliberate exercise of this drive outside of marriage. [Note how the same argument applies against fornication, adultery, sodomy, etc.] ... Happiness and success in marriage can result only from the fulfillment of God's plan in establishing marriage. We want to know, therefore, what God intended when He created man "male and female," and blessed marriage as the union of "two in one flesh," saying, "increase and multiply." *Beginning Your Marriage*, Cana Conference of Chicago (1957).

If a mechanistic worldview could have prevented Catholics from accepting the Church's teleological arguments it would have happened long before 1968. Such a worldview had been common for centuries. So this explanation for the failure of *Humanae Vitae* doesn't stand up to even the most rudimentary scrutiny and must be considered nearly perverse in the way it stands reality on its head.

One might, on the other hand, make the argument that *fears* of teleological arguments being rejected motivated participants to preemptively drop them from *Humanae Vitae* and other post-conciliar documents. We have Fr. Anthony Zimmerman's first-hand report to substantiate that claim. But these fears have proven to be not only groundless but directly contrary to reality, and by encouraging the abandonment of traditional Catholic teaching, they have been harmful to the moral state of tens of millions of Catholic souls. Haven't the 36 years since *Humanae Vitae* provided enough time to recognize that the truth of the Catholic faith must take primacy, and that we cannot allow our agenda to be dictated by fears of secular reaction?

Lastly we reach Prof. Waldstein's point regarding the influence of St. John of the Cross on the young Karol Wojtyla. Waldstein makes several interesting points regarding the comparative influences of St. John of the Cross, on whom Wojtyla wrote his seminary thesis, and of the phenomenologist Max Scheler, on whom he wrote his dissertation. Much of Waldstein's extended presentation of the history of phenomenology and its related philosophy "personalism" makes clear that these philosophies are not compatible with Catholicism.

Waldstein documents one single instance of a use of the word "personalism" by Pope Pius XII, but in a very different context from the personalism that influenced the writing of *Humanae Vitae*. And most of all, as we saw above when we looked at the word "meaning," Pope Pius XII simply used the *word* in one particular instance, but he did not adopt a philosophical *system*. There is a great difference between using the word

“phenomenon,” for example, and becoming a “phenomenologist.” Pius XII never wrote a book proposing a “synthesis of nature’s purpose with the personalistic norm,” as Karol Wojtyla did with *Love and Responsibility*.



[Photo of Max Scheler, 600 x 694 pixels]

Due to the problems inherent in the phenomenological school of Husserl as mediated by Max Scheler, Waldstein rejects the idea that it was the decisive influence on the development of John Paul’s personalism, and he turns instead to St. John of the Cross and finds there an alternate explanation for its origin. Waldstein claims that personalism cannot be as bad as it seems because some of the personalist language used by John Paul resembles some of the language used by St. John of the Cross.

While it’s true that some of the language is similar, Waldstein makes the error of mistaking an allegory for reality. It’s as though someone read Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and took it as a guide to animal husbandry. Or if they heard Christ’s parable about servants investing their gold and believed that the person who amassed the most gold here on earth was the best Christian, not realizing that it was a parable about grace.

As egregious as these blunders would be, they are no worse than believing that St. John of the Cross was speaking about marriage. He was speaking about the mystical union of the soul with Christ in contemplation. Whenever he uses marital language it is only an allegory. Much of his language is taken from the *Song of Songs*. There have always been a few adolescents who believed that the *Song of Songs* was a Biblical sex manual, but everyone else, including mystics like St. Catherine of Siena and St. John of the Cross, have recognized that the metaphorical language represents the soul’s union with God.

To take the following words of St. John of the Cross that are quoted by Prof. Waldstein, “The bride tells of the mutual surrender made in this spiritual espousal between the soul and God, saying that in the interior wine cellar of love they were joined by the communication he made of himself to her,” and to believe that this could form the basis for a marriage theology is to mistake an allegory for reality.

Here is how Prof. Waldstein summarized his theory:

“The core of John Paul II’s teaching on love can be summarized in three theses: First, love between persons can be described as a gift of self. Second, the fullest and clearest realization of this gift of self in our experience is spousal love between man and woman. Third, the origin and paradigm of love and giving is the Trinity.”

Anyone who has taken an elementary philosophy class will recognize first of all that this is not a logical argument. It doesn’t proceed to a conclusion based on the premises. When we turn to examine the individual theses, we see first the topic of the “gift of self” which is too large for me to address comprehensively. Let me just point out that Pope Pius XII strongly denounced placing undue emphasis on this concept in the formulation of Catholic marriage:

If nature had aimed exclusively, or at least in the first place, at a *reciprocal gift and possession of the married couple* in joy and delight, and if it had ordered that act only to make happy in the highest possible degree their personal experience, and not to stimulate them to the service of life, then the Creator would have adopted another plan in forming and constituting the natural act. Now, instead, all this is subordinated and ordered to that unique, great law of the *generatio et educatio prolix*, namely the accomplishment of the primary end of matrimony as the origin and source of life.

So while “gift of self” might be a description – but certainly not *the* description -- of love, placing it at the foundation of marital theology has been condemned by a definitive statement of the magisterium as “a grave inversion of the order of values and of the ends imposed by the Creator Himself.”

We can look quickly at the third thesis, and see that it is nothing more than a simple tautology if it means to say only that God is the origin of love. But if Prof. Waldstein intends by its juxtaposition to the second thesis to imply that the love of the Trinity is a type of spousal love, then he is stating something entirely false. Similar false claims have been made recently by Scott Hahn, but I hope and assume that Waldstein does not share this particular error.

Let us then examine the second thesis which is the core of his argument, “The fullest and clearest realization of this gift of self in our experience is spousal love between man and woman.” This is false, as the following examination reveals:

1. It contradicts Catholic doctrine to claim that the “fullest and clearest realization” of love in human experience is found in spousal love rather than the love of religious for their divine spouse, since the religious life is a call to a higher form of love. The “fullest and clearest realization” of love in human experience is the love between the soul and God which is best experienced in the celibate religious life. It was precisely this sort of love that was described by St. John of the Cross, who was himself a celibate religious, and who experienced mystical union with God, but who never had an “experience of spousal love,” although he used poetic imagery of spousal love *as an allegory*.
2. Spousal love cannot possibly be the “fullest and clearest realization” of love since it does not exist in heaven. Christ was quite emphatic on this point. Marriage exists only on earth, and so spousal love does not participate in the realm of glory where the “fullest and clearest realization” of love is experienced.
3. The great majority of people including Catholics are married to spouses who are not living in a state of grace. What if their marriage partner is unfaithful, even a prostitute, a drug addict or a murderer? This is the real-life situation of millions today, and Catholic marital theology cannot be based on an unrealistic, idealized conception of sinful human beings. The union described by St. John of the Cross can only occur between God who is perfect and a soul which has already reached the highest human perfection after passing through several stages of purgation. It is blasphemous to think that a similar union can occur between the dead souls of two people living in sin.
4. One’s relationship with God is primary for every person, even for those who are married. Each person loves God or hates God in his own heart. Each person will be judged before God individually, and one spouse may go to heaven while the other may go to Hell. They will be separated for all eternity, and the soul in hell will hate the soul of the spouse in heaven with an all-consuming hatred, while the soul in heaven will rejoice in the justice of God which has decreed an eternity of torment for the soul of the spouse in hell. So even those of us who never reach the stage of mystical contemplation and divine union experienced by St. John of the Cross will still experience in our own relationship with God “the fullest and clearest realization” of love that in our own small way we are capable of experiencing.

I hope the above analysis demonstrates that those who try to use a phenomenological method to “improve” Catholic theology are in grave danger of falling into serious errors. Prof. Waldstein’s use of the word “experience” reveals that he is attempting to follow the advice in Wojtyla’s dissertation on Scheler:

“The theologian should not forego the great advantage which the phenomenological method offers his work. It impresses the *stamp of experience* on works of ethics and nourishes them with the life-knowledge of concrete man by allowing an investigation of moral life from the side of its appearance.”

But he should recall the *caveat* that Wojtyla appended onto that advice, “the phenomenological method plays only a secondary assisting role.” If only it were the case

that personalist philosophy played nothing more than a “secondary assisting role” in *Humanae Vitae*. But alas, the abandonment and rejection of traditional sources of Catholic theology forced a personalist philosophy to play a solo role which it was utterly incapable of performing.

In a message which Prof. Waldstein did me the honor of sending me, he said, “If you are willing to respond to my reflections, I will have in you a critic who is not likely to be content with any half-baked ideas that paper over tensions. You will be moved only by a rigorous argument that actually concludes to the truth.” Having paid me such a generous compliment, I feel a strong obligation to live up to his confidence by refusing to accept “half-baked ideas” – both those contained in *Humanae Vitae* and those in Prof. Waldstein’s lecture at Christendom – while continuing to hope that someday he will arrive at “a rigorous argument that actually concludes to the truth.”