Long after its publication in 1968, Pope Paul VI’s encyclical letter on birth control *Humanae vitae* continues to provoke great interest among Catholic bishops, clergy and faithful alike.\(^1\) At the time of its promulgation and in the years since, many Catholic couples struggled with the teaching contained in the document. Some couples apparently managed to adapt seamlessly to the continuing prohibition on contraception, but others encountered and continue to encounter major difficulties in receiving and living the teaching. Birth control may no longer be an issue for that first generation of couples, yet many of them still view *Humanae vitae* as a watershed in their journey in Catholic faith.

But even though the events surrounding its promulgation and reception have been well documented,\(^2\) the full depths of *Humanae vitae*’s wisdom are yet to be plumbed. In this article I suggest that a little-known feature of the encyclical’s last redaction offers the Church rare insight into the pastoral wisdom of its author and, indeed, of the Catholic moral tradition. A second article will describe how the Church very gradually unfolded the document’s implied theology of conscience, while the final article will develop a ‘pneumatology of conscience’ and return to the theme of pastoral care of couples, with special focus on the priest’s role in the formation of conscience.

### Two Versions of *Humanae vitae*

One effect of the Second Vatican Council was that, by 1968, the media had come to view the Catholic Church as very ‘newsworthy’. The world had become accustomed to ‘leaks’ from the Council,\(^3\) and the press expected (and received) leaks also from the Pontifical Study Commission on


\(^3\) These leaks are well documented: for example, reports from ‘Xavier Rynne’ (Fr Francis Xavier Murphy CSSR) were widely published in the USA - see Arthur Jones, “Another luminary lost: F.X. Murphy dies at 87” in *National Catholic Reporter*, 3 May 2002. Online at [http://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2002b/050302/050302i.htm](http://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2002b/050302/050302i.htm) See also
Family, Population and Birth Problems. One particular leak, which came just a month before *Humanae vitae* was promulgated, may help to solve a small mystery about the encyclical.

On 21 June 1968, *Time Magazine* reported that ‘Pope Paul’s long-awaited motu proprio on birth control was already rolling off the presses in a secret section of the Vatican’s printing office,’ when mysteriously, in the previous week, ‘just before the statement was to be made public, it was suddenly scrapped’. *Time* continued:

The reason was that many leading European prelates considered Paul’s message patently unacceptable. Vienna's Franziskus Cardinal Koenig, who had been informed of its contents in advance, flew to Rome two weeks ago to implore the Pope not to release it. While satisfactory to conservatives of the Roman Curia, Koenig argued, the pronouncement was "most unwise pastorally and apostolically," and it would "do the church much damage." Such other European liberals as Belgium's Leo Josef Cardinal Suenens and Munich's Julius Cardinal Dopfner reportedly telephoned Pope Paul with similar objections.

A later report in Western Australia’s Catholic newspaper *The Record* denied that these three Cardinals had played any such role in Pope Paul’s eleventh-hour decision to delay the document. According to *The Record* the encyclical had been drafted in full before the 1967 Synod of Bishops, and it had been Pope Paul’s own personal decision to revisit the document not once but several times: first in February and March 1968 aided by his personal theologian Bishop Carlo Colombo, and again later that year with the assistance of Cardinal Franjo Seper, the newly-appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This last is probably the revision to which *Time* referred. *The Record* reported that the final revision had included abbreviating the document and deleting a section in which the Pope ‘took the entire responsibility for this answer to the expectations of Catholics’, and was in fact ‘far less extensive’ than earlier revisions.

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6 Ibid.

Whatever their respective merits, these reports offer a clue to understanding a curious anomaly in the
evolution of the encyclical that was first drawn to my attention by the late Archbishop Launcelot
Goody of Perth Western Australia.8

*Humanae vitae* had been promulgated on 25 July 1968 and presented formally by Monsignor
Ferdinando Lambruschini four days later. Some time prior to this the Apostolic Delegation in North
Sydney received advance copies of the document from Rome and forwarded them to Australia’s
bishops with a covering letter dated 26 July 1968.9 At that time mail from Italy to Australia often
took up to six weeks to arrive, so the Polyglot Press copies could have been sent from Rome as early
as mid-June – which would fit the chronology of the *Time Magazine* report. In any event Launcelot
Goody, then Bishop of Bunbury Western Australia, did not receive his copy until 2 August 1968.10

In the margins of his copy Bishop Goody wrote personal notes and observations in preparation for a
pastoral letter he would issue the following week.11 Among his margin notes were two which relate
to Pope Paul’s ‘final revision’: (i) in Paragraph 19 Bishop Goody struck out the last sentence with
the note “omitted in revised version”; and (ii) in Paragraph 29 he wrote “ten lines added in revised
version”. In this paper I will refer to the ‘earlier version’ (the Polyglot Press edition of *Humanae
vitae* received by Bishop Goody on 2 August 1968 and presumably sent from Rome up to six weeks
before that), and the ‘final version’, the encyclical as we now know it which contains the late
revisions Bishop Goody had noted.

At the time these late omissions and inclusions made no impact on a public preoccupied with Pope
Paul’s rejection of the so-called ‘majority report’ of the Papal Commission in favour of a ‘minority
report’. Of the late revisions *The Record* reported ‘there seemed to be no alterations in style or in
substance’, and the late changes were thought so inconsequential that for a while the Vatican
bookshop was selling both the earlier and final versions side by side.12 But consider the

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8 Sir Launcelot John Goody DD PhD KBE was Archbishop of Perth, Western Australia, from 18 October 1968 to 26
9 A covering letter from the Charges d’Affaires of this date also asked the bishops to inform the Delegation of local
responses to the encyclical, with a postscript that Secretary of State Cardinal Cicognani wished the document to
receive ‘maximum publicity’.
10 On the same day, 2 August 1968, the Vicar Capitular of Perth Bishop Myles McKeon replied to the Charge d’Affaires at
the Apostolic Delegation that although the encyclical had been posted from Sydney a week earlier, “the document
arrived here only this morning” and pleaded that “in future an airmail sticker be attached to any mail from the
Delegation [because] any envelopes larger than normal size are forwarded by overland mail.”
11 The text of Bishop Goody’s pastoral letter appeared in *The Record* on 15 August 1968.
12 *The Record*, 12 September 1968. In its edition of 8 August 1968 *The Record* itself had printed the earlier version,
which was the only one then available in either Perth or Bunbury. ACTS Publications in Melbourne published both
significance of Pope Paul making even small changes so late in the piece: after two long years 
preparation, having passed through several drafts and revisions, *Humanae vitae* had finally been 
approved for printing and distribution, and some bishops had already received their advance copies 
(hence Bishop Goody’s ‘earlier version’) – yet the Pope was so anxious to make these two final 
changes that he had the entire encyclical re-issued *de novo*.

However they came about, the intriguing question is: *what do these two alterations tell us about the 
heart and mind of Pope Paul VI during those last days in the excruciating process which produced 
Humanae vitae?* A comparison of the earlier and final versions suggests that in the last phase of its 
presentation Pope Paul was at least as concerned to emphasise the pastoral application of *Humanae 
vitae* as he was to clarify its doctrinal content. In particular, it is clear that he wanted to highlight the 
pastoral role that priests must play if Catholic couples were ever to receive this teaching fruitfully.

**Pope Paul VI’s Heart and Mind**

The contents of the encyclical – or at least of its doctrinal section – are well known. In the first part 
enshrining paragraphs 1 to 6, Pope Paul frames the question he is addressing and is careful to 
state that the teaching is grounded on the dual bases of ‘natural law, illuminated and enriched by 
divine Revelation’ (4).

The next part of the document (paragraphs 7 to 18) is entitled ‘Doctrinal Principles’. Setting his 
frame of reference in ‘an integral vision of man and of his vocation’ (7), Pope Paul charts a course 
through the notions of conjugal love and responsible parenthood to arrive at what Pope Benedict XVI 
might call the ‘intelligible structure’ of the conjugal act. This leads to paragraph 14, in which the 
precise question of birth control is addressed, then various clarifications, the so-called ‘prophetic’ 
paragraph 17, and a final iteration of the Church’s duty to teach on these matters (18).

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13 Pope Benedict XVI has referred to the ‘intelligible structure’ of creation in different ways on several occasions: in his *Encounter with the Youth* (6 April 2006); in the now famous *Regensburg Lecture* (12 September 2006); and most clearly in his *Christmas Address to Members of the Roman Curia* (22 December 2008). All texts are online in English at [http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/)
Almost all published theological comment on the encyclical since 1968 had focused exclusively on this first doctrinal section of *Humanae vitae*, and in some cases specifically on the infallibility or otherwise of paragraph 14. While the encyclical’s authority is a significant issue, it is extraordinary that the second, pastoral section of the encyclical has received comparatively little attention at all. It is in this section that Pope Paul made his late revisions.

*The Lines Omitted from Paragraph 19*

Following the 13 paragraphs of ‘Doctrinal Principles’ (7-18) are 12 paragraphs of ‘Pastoral Directives’ (19-30). These subtitles, lacking in the AAS text but present in the English translation (including online), reveal more than the structure of the encyclical: they emphasise Pope Paul’s sensitivity to the pastoral dynamic of the Church’s magisterium. In the Pope’s view, it is not enough for the Church simply to state universal doctrine; she must also provide ongoing pastoral help so that the faithful might be able to receive that doctrine personally and profoundly, and apply it practically in the concrete circumstances of their lives.

In the final version paragraph 19 consists of just two sentences. The first emphasizes that the Church’s mission to teach in moral matters is not adequately fulfilled without attention to issues concerning the practical pastoral application of its teaching.

> Our words would not be an adequate expression of the thought and solicitude of the Church, Mother and Teacher of all peoples, if, after having recalled men to the observance and respect of the divine law regarding matrimony, We did not strengthen them in the path of honest regulation of birth, even amid the difficult conditions which today afflict families and peoples.  

The rationale for this is given in the second sentence: like Christ himself, the Church must combine an unwavering teaching of the truth of the natural law with practical pastoral compassion.

A third sentence, present in the earlier version but omitted in the final text, read:

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14 For example Shannon (1970), *The Lively Debate* devotes some nine pages to the doctrinal content and the question of the encyclical’s authority, and barely one page to the pastoral directives (105-115). Janet E Smith (ed), *Why Humanae vitae was Right* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993) devotes all twenty-two chapters to questions of doctrine and doctrinal authority, but not a single article to the pastoral directives. And the trend continues today: see Thomas Crean OP, ‘The Infallible Teaching of Humanae Vitae’ *Catholic Medical Quarterly* Volume 62 (4) November 2012, 23f.

15 *Humanae vitae*, 19.
Though We are thinking also of all men of good will, We now address Ourself particularly to Our sons, from whom We expect a prompter and more generous adherence.

These lines suggest that in the second, pastoral section of the encyclical Pope Paul had originally intended to shift his focus from the whole human family to Catholics in particular. But in that case the basis upon which this teaching could make a claim on our attention might also have shifted - from a ‘natural law’ basis to one grounded more in religious affiliation. So why did Pope Paul choose to omit this sentence from the final version? Perhaps to avoid creating the impression that the teaching’s claim on our attention and adherence rests primarily on the filial (not to say tribal) bond between Pope and Catholics.

In terms of promoting full reception of *Humanae vitae* among the faithful, this is an important point. The teaching can make the claim of universality precisely because it is based in the Church’s apprehension of the nature of marriage and conjugal love in themselves: this is the way marriage and conjugal love are, and so this is the real nature of contraception. In the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, this is an exercise of intellect dealing with matters of necessity - the speculative intellect - whose task is to discover what is objectively true. So from the doctrinal perspective, the faithful may be assured that this teaching is sound and certain because it is grounded in the objective ‘intelligible structure’ of marriage and human sexuality. Note however that does not yet address the precise meaning of a Catholic’s ‘loyal submission of the will and intellect’ (‘religiosum voluntatis et intellectus obsequium’) which required further clarification over time.  

Pope Paul recognized that many couples would find the teaching on contraception difficult to implement in practice, so paragraphs 20 to 24 note various considerations necessary for effective reception and application of the teaching: collaboration between personal commitment and divine

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16 Reasoning which addresses a matter subject to necessity is an exercise of what Aristotle calls ‘the contemplative (or speculative) intellect’, as distinct from ‘the practical intellect’ which addresses matters subject to contingency. See *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Book VI, i-ii. Accordingly Aristotle refers to the first as ‘science’ (iii) and the second as ‘art’ (iv), and the virtue governing the latter as ‘prudence’ (v). These distinctions are also important in the moral theory of Thomas Aquinas: cf. ST I 79, 11; and *ST* I-II 47, 1 ad 2. They will recur in the third article of this series.

grace (20), growth in virtue (21), a healthy social and educational environment (22), support from civic authorities (23) and more accurate medical information (24).

In a long paragraph 25 Pope Paul addressed Christian couples in particular. He called them to attend to the voice of the teaching Church and to support one another in trying to live this teaching. Recognising that their struggle with regulating birth might cause their spirits to sink (‘concidant animo’), the Pope reminds couples of many helps along the way, most notably prayer, the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Penance.\textsuperscript{18} His desire that couples should have constant recourse to the sacraments shows his understanding that while many couples might experience practical difficulty in living the teaching on contraception, these difficulties do not in themselves constitute a barrier to full communion in the life of the Church. On the contrary, Pope Paul seems to say that if they were to abandon the sacraments simply because they struggle with contraception, a couple would be denying themselves an essential source of grace in their efforts to live this teaching in practice. In 1968, unfortunately, the faithful often heard a very different message.

The Pope then addresses two paragraphs to priests. Given that married couples themselves attract only one paragraph, we may well ask why priests merit two. The reason, it seems, is that Pope Paul believed priests bore two distinct duties within their pastoral role.

First, in Paragraph 28, a duty to promote the unity of the Church. In the matter of contraception priests are to acknowledge the teaching authority of the Church with due reverence (‘exemplum sinceri obsequii edite’) based not merely in the ‘reasons adduced’ for the particular teaching but also trusting in the light of the Holy Spirit who guides the Church’s pastors. Note that the primary object of reverence here is not the content of the teaching on contraception itself but the Church’s ability and duty, guided by the Holy Spirit, to teach with authority on such important moral matters - and acceptance of that is indeed a matter of faith. This reverence in itself should be sufficient ground for unanimity in communicating moral teaching.

Second, in paragraph 29 the Pope calls priests to communicate the Church’s teaching accurately and integrally, with compassion and pastoral sensitivity to the actual needs and abilities of the faithful. In its original form this paragraph ended with Pope Paul’s profoundly moving hope that married

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Humanae vitae} 25: ‘Si autem peccatis adhuc retineantur, ne concidant animo, sed humiles et constantes ad Dei misericordiam confugiant, quam abunde Paenitentiae sacramentum dilargitur.’
couples would ‘always find, in the words and in the heart of a priest, the echo of the voice and the love of the Redeemer.’

*The Lines Added to Paragraph 29*

These words would have made an aesthetically and theologically appropriate end to the paragraph, but in the final revision the following two sentences were added:

> And then speak with confidence, beloved sons, fully convinced that the spirit of God, while He assists the Magisterium in proposing doctrine, illumines internally the hearts of the faithful inviting them to give their assent. Teach married couples the indispensable way of prayer: prepare them to have recourse more often and with great faith to the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Penance without ever allowing themselves to be discouraged by their own weakness of soul.

Three aspects of this addition are of interest.

In the first place, the same Holy Spirit who guides the magisterium to teach also ‘invites’ the faithful ‘to give their assent’ (‘*ad assentiendum invitare*’). Here the object of ‘assent’ is precisely the content of doctrine discerned by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the activity of speculative intellect, which is proposed universally. Illumined by the same Spirit, the faithful are ‘invited’ to receive as true that which the Church proposes to be true with regard to marriage, conjugal love, and contraception.

In second place, however, the notion of ‘invitation’ implies a sense of movement from one state (receptiveness) to another (responsiveness). This movement may not be instantaneous; it may in fact take some time. There is here no impersonal moral ‘command’ to simply accept the teaching, for a ‘command’ can evoke only obedience or disobedience - and in either case there need be no moral growth or ‘movement’, no truly personal commitment whatever. But it is the very object of this teaching to prompt moral growth in couples by eliciting from them a fully personal response, not merely intellectually but also and especially in the daily living of their sexuality in marriage. This ‘movement’ from receptiveness to responsiveness recurs day after day as couples make many practical moral choices in their particular and often changing concrete circumstances.

*ACR 90 (2013) : 185-195*
attending to ‘what must be done here and now’ is, of course, an operation of intellect addressing matters of contingency - the practical intellect.\textsuperscript{19}

What can we conclude so far? Recognizing that many couples would struggle to live the objective truth of this teaching in the particularities of their daily lives, Pope Paul understood that, in its fullest sense, reception of moral doctrine cannot consist in only intellectual assent or merely ‘religious obsequience’. Fruitful reception certainly includes both intellectual understanding of the content of the doctrine and appropriate reverence for the teaching authority, but it must also extend to experiencing, identifying, and gradually working through the practical challenges of living this truth in the concrete circumstances of one’s conjugal life. Personal, relational, social and cultural factors might constitute existential conditions affecting one’s capacity to receive this moral teaching in its entirety and to live it daily in this fuller practical sense. As the scholastic dictum had it, ‘\textit{quidquid recipitur in modo recipientis recipitur}’.\textsuperscript{20}

Thirdly, therefore, and with faith in the Holy Spirit’s guidance clearly in view, Pope Paul calls upon priests to communicate this doctrine effectively by accompanying and assisting the faithful in their work of receiving it over time. Priests are to help couples to implement the Pope’s pastoral advice in paragraph 25: if couples struggle to apply this teaching in the concrete circumstances of their lives, priests must help them to remain open to the ongoing work of God’s grace through prayer and the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance, so that they never become discouraged (‘\textit{neque umquam pro sua infirmitate animos demittant}’ - ‘nor ever let their spirit/soul/commitment/resolve fall because of their weakness’).

It could be argued that these lines added so late to paragraph 29 merely repeat points the Pope had made earlier in the document, but that is precisely why they are important. In adding these lines and so reiterating a point made in paragraph 25, Pope Paul chose to re-emphasise the need for sound pastoral practice; he was, as it were, doubly underlining the irreplaceable role of priests to provide couples with sensitive, patient and compassionate pastoral care. As he had indicated in paragraph 19, merely clarifying the content of doctrine is not enough - the Church has a positive pastoral duty

\textsuperscript{19} So the same Holy Spirit who illumines the speculative intellect of the faithful inviting them to recognise the truth of the teaching also illumines their practical intellect as they seek to live and apply this truth in the concrete particularities of their married lives. Other articles in this series will explore these objective and subjective aspects of the Holy Spirit’s action and their articulation in subsequent teaching on the relationship between authoritative magisterium and person conscience.

\textsuperscript{20} Various translated as ‘what is actually received depends on the capacity of the one receiving it’. I am indebted to Fra Christopher Ross OSM for drawing my attention to this traditional principle.
to help the faithful to hear, to accept, and as far as they are able to put into practice the truth contained in the Church’s moral teaching. Pope Paul here is affirming that an effective pastoral dynamic is the necessary accompaniment of every doctrinal principle, for the Church must always be truly both ‘mother and teacher’.

The Pope himself seems to corroborate this interpretation of his late revisions. In a general audience held just two days after the promulgation of the document, Pope Paul acknowledged his deep ‘feeling of charity, of pastoral sensitivity towards those who are called to integrate within conjugal life and within the family their individual personalities’, as a result of which he had ‘added to the doctrinal exposition some practical indications of a pastoral nature’. 21

Not two years later Pope Paul expanded on his concern that all couples should be led forward gradually to full reception and practical implementation of the doctrine of Humanae vitae. In his Address to the Teams of Our Lady on 4 May 1970, Pope Paul again counselled couples against becoming discouraged in times of failures: our God is a Father full of tenderness and goodness, filled with solicitude and overflowing with love for His children who struggle along their way.

And he explicitly invited priests to assist couples’ gradual moral growth:

[It] is only little by little that the human being is able to order and integrate his many tendencies to the point of ordering them harmoniously in this virtue of conjugal chastity, wherein spouses find their full human and Christian development. This work of liberation, for that is what it is, is the fruit of the true liberty of children of God. Their conscience demands to be respected, educated and formed in an atmosphere of confidence and not of anguish. The moral laws, far from being inhumanly cold in an abstract objectivity, are there to guide the spouses in their way forward. When the spouses do strive to live in truth the profound demands of a holy love, patiently and humbly without becoming discouraged by failures, then the moral laws, present there as a reminder, are no longer rejected as a hindrance, but recognized as a powerful help. 22

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Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council had called for a renewal in moral theology which would help Christians ‘to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world’. In making these late revisions to *Humanae vitae*, Pope Paul expressed his profound view of what needs to happen if that fruit is to be brought forth. To propose doctrine without offering ongoing pastoral accompaniment would not only be unfaithful to the moral vision of Vatican II, it would also be unjust to the very couples for whom the teaching is intended. Moreso perhaps than any commentator of the time, Pope Paul realized that effective communication of moral doctrine demands a thoroughgoing commitment to sustained pastoral care, personal accompaniment, sacramental strengthening and continuing encouragement of those who struggle to live the teaching in fact. And he realized that it is priests who must play this essential pastoral role.

But many couples in 1968 and in the years since have not experienced the depth of compassionate pastoral care for which Pope Paul had called. Even in their senior years, some Catholics now look back on the late 1960s as a time of confusion, hurt and isolation from the Church for which they still profess a deep love. Bishops and priests of the time were charged with communicating the teaching of the encyclical in its integrity but, like most of the theological community, they generally did not notice Pope Paul VI’s impassioned pastoral plea in the second half of the document. Subsequent theological reflection has been dominated by the issue of magisterial authority, and as a consequence the Church has still not received the full teaching of *Humanae vitae* which, in Pope Paul’s view, is incomplete if it does not include compassionate pastoral care on the part of priests. It must be said that the Church’s magisterium has further developed its teaching to clarify important theological and pastoral issues raised by *Humanae vitae*, but few if any of the faithful have been helped to understand these important and authoritative clarifications. They will be explored in the next article.


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