Affirmation of the Church’s Teaching on the Gift of Sexuality

We, the undersigned scholars, affirm that the Catholic Church’s teachings on the gift of sexuality, on marriage, and on contraception are true and defensible on many grounds, among them the truths of reason and revelation concerning the dignity of the human person.

Scholarly support for the Church’s teachings on the gift of sexuality, on marriage, and on contraception has burgeoned in recent decades. Moreover, institutes and programs supporting that teaching have been established all over the world. Even some secular feminists and secular programs have begun to acknowledge the harms of contraception.

These facts, however, seem to have escaped the notice of the authors of “On the Ethics of Using Contraceptives” (hereafter, the Wijngaards Statement) which urges the Catholic Church to change its teaching and issue an “official magisterial document [that] should revoke the absolute ban on the use of ‘artificial’ contraceptives, and allow the use of modern non-abortifacient contraceptives for both prophylactic and family planning purposes.” The Wijngaards Statement, unfortunately, offers nothing new to discussions about the morality of contraception and, in fact, repeats the arguments that the Church has rejected and that numerous scholars have engaged and refuted since 1968.

The Wijngaards Statement seriously misrepresents the authentic position of the Catholic Church. Among the most erroneous claims made by the Wijngaards Statement is that neither Scripture nor natural law offers any support for the Church’s teaching that contraception is never compatible with God’s plan for sexuality and marriage. During the past half century, there has been an enormous amount of creative scholarly thinking around the Church’s teaching on contraception, thinking that includes profound reflections on the Theology of the Body, personalism, and natural law. In addition, there has been extensive research on and analysis of the negative impact of contraception on individuals, relationships, and culture.

The Wijngaards Statement, rather than engaging recent scholarship in support of the Church’s teaching, misdirects the conversation from the start by claiming that the argument against contraception in Humanae Vitae is based primarily on “biological laws.” Humanae Vitae instead focuses, as it should, on the person’s relationship to God and to other persons.

The points below briefly outline the true basis of the Church’s teaching that contraception is not in accord with God’s plan for sexuality and marriage. It also responds to some of the erroneous claims found in the Wijngaards Statement.
1. **God is Love**
   The God who made this beautiful and ordered world is a loving and good God. All of His creation is a loving gift to humankind. Even after the Fall, God continued to reach out to His people, gradually revealing Himself and the depths of His love and mercy. God the Father’s gift of His Son Jesus, whose life was poured out on the Cross, was the ultimate and complete self-gift. This great and radical love is borne out in Scripture where the biblical authors in the Old Testament often speak of God in the image of husband and His people as His wife, and in the New Testament where Christ is described as the bridegroom and the Church as His bride. Throughout the history of the Church, many have seen this spousal imagery as a key to understanding God’s relationship to every human soul.

2. **Made in God’s Image**
   Because God is Love—a communion of Divine Persons—He made men and women in His image: able to reason and to choose freely, with the capacity to love and to be in loving relationships.

3. **Gift of Self**
   God invites all people to share in His love. Every person, therefore, is beloved by God and made to be in loving relationships; every person is created to make a gift of self to God and to others. The gift of self means living in a way that promotes the good of everyone, especially those with whom one is in close relationship.

4. **Marriage: A Unique Communion of Persons**
   Marriage was designed by God to enable a man and a woman to live out humanity’s core identity as lovers and givers of life, to enable the two to become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) and for that one flesh to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Human sexual relations fulfill God’s intent only when they respect the procreative meaning of the sexual act and involve a complete gift of self between married partners.

5. **God’s Law, Not Man’s**
   “The doctrine that the Magisterium of the Church has often explained is this: there is an unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning [of the marital act], and both are inherent in the marital act. This connection was established by God and human beings are not permitted to break it through their own volition.” (HV12) The teaching that contraception is always against God’s plan for sexuality, marriage and happiness
is not based on human law: “The teaching of the Church about the proper spacing of children is a promulgation of the divine law itself.” (HV 20)

6. Faith and Reason
God has revealed the truths about sexuality to human beings through the biblical vision of the human person and has also made it accessible to our reason. Several well-argued versions of “natural law” defenses support the Church’s teaching that contraception is not in accord with God’s plan for sexuality and marriage. Each begins with different basic truths and thus each constructs its arguments differently.

7. The Theology of the Body: Saint John Paul II’s Contribution
Saint John Paul II’s Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body (virtually ignored by the Wijngaards Statement) provides a powerful defense of the view that contraception is not in accord with the understanding of the human person as conveyed by Scripture and sacred Catholic Tradition. He speaks of the “language of the body” and has shown that to violate the procreative meaning of the marital act is also to violate the unitive (the “commitment-expressing”) meaning of the marital act. There he demonstrates that our very bodies have a language and a “spousal meaning” -- that they express the truth that we are to be in loving and fruitful relationships with others.

8. Humanae Vitae as Prophetic
Humanae Vitae speaks against the distorted view of human sexuality and intimate relationships that many in the modern world promote. Humanae Vitae was prophetic when it listed some of the harms that would result from the widespread use of contraception. Abundant studies show that contraception, such as hormonal contraceptives and intrauterine devices, can cause serious health problems for women. The widespread use of contraception appears to have contributed greatly to the increase of sex outside of marriage, to an increase of unwed pregnancies, abortion, single parenthood, cohabitation, divorce, poverty, the exploitation of women, to declining marriage rates as well as to declining population growth in many parts of the world. There is even growing evidence that chemical contraceptives harm the environment.

9. A Practical Help to Husbands and Wives—FABMs
In order to live God’s design for married love, husband and wife need moral family planning methods. Fertility Awareness Based Methods of Family Planning (or FABMs, i.e., the many forms of Natural Family Planning) respect the God-given spousal union and the potential to procreate. FABMs are fully consistent with the Church’s teaching on marital chastity. Couples using these methods make no attempt to thwart the power of acts that could result in the procreation of new human persons. They respect God’s design for sexuality; they help
individuals grow in self-mastery; they have the potential to strengthen marriages and respect the physical and psychological health of women. Moreover, science demonstrates that they are highly effective both in helping couples limit their family size when necessary and conceive when appropriate.

10. Respect for Cultural Values, Freedom
International organizations and governments should respect the values and beliefs of families and cultures that see children as a gift, and, therefore, should not impose—on individuals, families, or cultures—practices antithetical to their values and beliefs about children and family planning. Governments and international organizations should make instruction in Fertility Awareness Based Methods (FABMs) of family planning a priority. FABMs are based on solid scientific understanding of a woman’s fertility cycle, are easily learned by women in developing countries, are virtually without cost, and promote respect for women.

11. Christ Provides Grace
Because of Original Sin, men and women became subject to temptations that sometimes seem insuperable. Christ came not just to restore our original goodness but to enable us to achieve holiness. The Catholic Church invites married couples to participate in the life of Christ, to participate in the sacraments, especially in Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist. The Church asks the faithful to deepen their relationship with the Lord God the Father, to be open to receive the direction of the Holy Spirit, and to ask Christ to provide the graces needed to live in accord with God’s will for their married lives, even the difficult moral truths.

We, the undersigned Catholic scholars, hold that the Church’s teaching on contraception is true and defensible on the basis of Scripture and reason. We hold that Catholic teaching respects the true dignity of the human person and is conducive to happiness.

(Those looking for a more extended response to the Wijngaards Statement will find it in “Self-gift: The Heart of Humanae Vitae,” forthcoming, to be posted along with a list of resources that will be periodically updated at CatholicContraceptionStatement.com)

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