

Notes: This text is heavily indebted to [Monsignor Vincent Foy](#), who was for many years the courageous "voice in the wilderness" warning us about the "Winnipeg Statement". In fact, on October 22, 2004, this Winnipeg Statement was still not available on the [CCCCB](#) website (which seems strange, given its importance). I OCRed the hardcopy that the [CCCCB](#) archivist sent me.

I'm not trying here to show the appropriateness of the official teachings of the Catholic Church on contraception, but only trying to see if the Canadian Bishops are consistent with themselves. After all, nobody forces them to be in the Catholic Church, and they have all, before God and Men, professed their Faith, and pledged their allegiance to the Pope.

For an explanation of the colors, see "The Critical Traffic Light".

Plenary Assembly - St. Boniface - Winnipeg

September 27, 1968

[Green] 1. Pope Paul VI in his recent encyclical "[On Human Life](#)" ["*Humanae Vitae*" in Latin] has spoken on a profound human problem as is clearly evidenced by the immediate and universal reaction to his message. It is evident that he has written out of concern and love, and in a spirit of service to all mankind.

[Green] Conscious of the current controversy and deep differences of opinion as to how to harmonize married love and the responsible transmission of life, we, the Canadian bishops, offer our help to the priests and Catholic people believing it to be our pastoral duty.

I - SOLIDARITY WITH THE POPE

[Green] 2. We are in accord with the teaching of the Holy Father concerning the dignity of married life, and the necessity of a truly Christian relationship between conjugal love and responsible parenthood. We share the pastoral concern which has led him to offer counsel and direction in an area which, while controverted, could hardly be more important to human happiness.

[Green] 3. By divine commission, clarification of these difficult problems of morality is required from the teaching authority of the Church (1). The Canadian Bishops will endeavor to discharge their obligation to the best of their ability. In this pursuit we are acting consistently with our recent submissions to the federal government on contraception, divorce and abortion,

[Yellow] nor is there anything in those submissions which does not harmonize with the encyclical.

I haven't scrutinized everything Canadian Bishops have written, so I can't agree or disagree here.

II - SOLIDARITY WITH THE FAITHFUL

[Yellow] 4. In the same spirit of solidarity we declare ourselves one with the People of God in the difficulties they experience in understanding, making their own, and living this teaching.

The expression "to be one" with the laypersons who find it difficult to avoid contraceptives seems a bit out of place, for people having promised absolute continence. Moreover, it sounds as though the Bishops don't understand why the Pope condemned contraceptives.

[Green] 5. In accord with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the recent encyclical (2) recognizes the nobility of conjugal love which is "uniquely expressed and perfected through the marital act" (3).

[Yellow] Many married people experience a truly agonizing difficulty in reconciling the need to

express conjugal love with the responsible transmission of human life

If God exists, if He is Almighty and He loves us, then at some point of time, He is going to help us! See among others " Going to Heaven is Fun and Easy!".

[Green] 6. This difficulty is recognized in deep sympathy and is shared by bishops and priests as counselors and confessors in their service of the faithful.

[Yellow] We know that we are unable to provide easy answers to this difficult problem, a problem made more acute by the great variety of solutions proposed in an open society.

We must neither exaggerate the difficulty of these problems, nor let ourselves be overwhelmed by the tempest of false doctrines disseminated by bad shepherds. A good shepherd, solidly supported by the Rock of Ages and guided by the Prince of Light (Jesus Christ), should not be overwhelmed by the difficulties and the darkness sent by Satan.

Moreover, we shouldn't forget that: "Those who live 'by the flesh' experience God's law as a burden, and indeed as a denial or at least a restriction of their own freedom" [[Veritatis Splendor](#), #18].

[Yellow] 7. A clearer understanding of these problems and progress toward their solution will result from a common effort in dialogue, research and study on the part of all, laity, priests and bishops, guided by faith and sustained by grace. To this undertaking the Canadian bishops pledge themselves.

They speak as if the solution didn't exist yet! That's a bit strange! The Pope didn't write an Encyclical in which he said: "We don't have a solution, so break out into small groups and share your tenderness and your life's experiences in order to find one"!

III - CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE AND DIVINE LAW

[Green] 8. Of recent years many have entertained doubts about the validity of arguments proposed to forbid any positive intervention which would prevent the transmission of human life. As a result there have arisen opinions and practices contrary to traditional moral theology. Because of this many had been expecting official confirmation of their views. This helps to explain the negative reaction the encyclical received in many quarters.

[Yellow] Many Catholics face a grave problem of conscience.

If their way of seeing things is "contrary to traditional moral theology" as the Bishops say three sentences earlier, the detractors of [Humanae Vitae](#) don't have a problem of conscience, but a problem of moral theology!

[Green] 9. Christian theology regarding conscience has its roots in the teaching of St. Paul (5). This has been echoed in our day by Vatican II: "Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths" (6). "On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created" (7).

The dignity of man consists precisely in his ability to achieve his fulfillment in God through the exercise of a knowing and free choice.

Yes, as long as his choice is done according to **right** reason, and not just according to his reason.

[Green] 10. However this does not exempt a man from the responsibility of forming his conscience according to truly Christian...

[Red] values

The word "value" is often dangerous these days. See among others: "Good Scouts Don't Have Values". The Catholic Church doesn't "propose values", She proclaims the truth concerning Jesus Christ, true Man and true God, and Jesus teaches us the whole moral truth.

[Green] ... and principles. This implies a spirit of openness to the teaching of the Church which is an essential aspect of the Christian's baptismal vocation. It likewise implies sound personal motivation free from selfishness and undue external pressure which are incompatible with the spirit of Christ. Nor will he succeed in this difficult task without the help of God. Man is prone to sin and evil, and unless he humbly asks and gratefully receives the grace of God, this basic freedom will inevitably lead to abuse.

IV - TEACHING OFFICE OF THE CHURCH

[Green] 11. Belief in the Church which is the prolongation of Christ in the world, belief in the Incarnation, demands a cheerful readiness to hear that Church to whose first apostles Christ said: "He who hears you hears me" (8).

[Green] 12. True freedom of conscience does not consist, then, in the freedom to do as one likes, but rather to do as a responsible conscience directs. Vatican Council II applies this concept forcefully. Christians therefore "must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive towards the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love, and impels it towards truly human fulfillment" (9).

[Yellow] 13. Today, the Holy Father has spoken on the question of morally acceptable means to harmonize conjugal love and responsible parenthood.

Why say "the Holy Father"? Why not say "Us", as in "the Holy Father **and we** the Canadian Bishops"? Why distance themselves from the Pope, when the Canadian Bishops say a few paragraphs earlier [#2, above] that they "are in accord" with this teaching? If we are in accord with what somebody else has said, it's as if we had said it ourselves.

This brings to mind the bad fathers who brag about THEIR beautiful baby, but when junior fills his diaper, they suddenly change their way of talking to say: "Honey, YOUR baby needs a change".

We can also wonder why say "Today", since Pope Paul VI just repeated the teachings of the Church on this topic. Many Popes had already condemned these practices (even if the pill didn't exist yet).

[Red] Christians must examine in all honesty their reaction to what he has said.

Of course, in certain circumstances, you can look at what are your desires, your emotions, your feelings! But the **duty** of Christians in this case is not first and foremost to examine their emotions and desires. If your mother asks you nicely to take out the trash, are you going to examine your emotional reaction to her request, or are you going to take out the trash? The duty of Christians is first of all to examine what the Pope teaches. Then, the duty of Christians is to obey the Pope, because Jesus said: "Those who hear you, hear me" [Lk 10:16].

[Green] 14. The Church is competent to hand on the truth contained in the revealed word of God and to interpret its meaning. But its role is not limited to this function. In his pilgrimage to salvation, man achieves final happiness by all his human conduct and his whole moral life. Since the Church is man's guide in this pilgrimage, she is called upon to exercise her role as teacher,

[Yellow] even in those matters which do not demand the absolute assent of faith.

Bizarre. The expression "in those matters" seems to be related to the "human conduct and his whole moral life". The text seems to imply that a Christian must believe what the Church teaches concerning dogmas of Faith, like the divinity of Christ, or the Immaculate-Conception, etc., but not concerning things that are "human" like abortion or the contraceptive pill.

The assent of faith of a Catholic is not limited to dogmas of Faith, but also to moral truths taught by the Church as being necessary. [Denzinger, #4877]. The Magisterium has the authority to rule even concerning questions of natural Morality: "Christ instituted the Church as 'pillar and support of the truth'. With the Holy Spirit's assistance, She continuously keeps and transmits without error the truths of the moral order, and She authentically interprets, not only the divine revealed Law, but also the principles of the moral order flowing from the very nature of man" [Denzinger, #4581]. This is explained by the intimate connection between our "human" moral behavior, and Eternal Salvation (see among others "What is Morality?"). If the Church was not infallible in the interpretation of Natural Law, She could not have been founded by God (see among others "Papal Infallibility, and the Stupid Gods").

[Green] 15. Of this sort of teaching Vatican II wrote: "This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*. That is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme teaching service is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will" (10).

[Yellow] 16. It follows that those who have been commissioned by the Church to teach in her name will recognize their responsibility to refrain from public opposition to the encyclical

Hilarious! The official teaching of the Vatican II Council speaks **in the preceding sentence** of "religious submission of will and of mind", not of the absence of "public opposition"!

[Green] to do otherwise would compound confusion and be a source of scandal to God's people.

[Yellow] However, this must not be interpreted as a restriction on the legitimate and recognized freedom of theologians to pursue loyally and conscientiously their research with a view to greater depth and clarity in the teaching of the Church.

Iffy. The freedom of theologians is real, but not absolute. When the Church declares that a question is no longer open, then the freedom of theologians stops for that question. For example, Catholic theologians don't have the freedom of considering women's ordination [Denzinger, #5040]. Same thing for the immorality of contraception [See among others [Humanae Vitae](#), #14; [CCC](#), #2370; [Veritatis Splendor](#), #80, #110, and #113; Etc., etc]. A theologian has full liberty to find better ways of explaining why the use of contraceptives is immoral, but she or he doesn't have the freedom of putting into question that immorality.

[Red] 17. It is a fact that a certain number of Catholics, although admittedly subject to the teaching of the encyclical, find it either extremely difficult or even impossible to make their own all elements of this doctrine.

See my comment for #5 above.

[Yellow] In particular, the argumentation and rational foundation of the encyclical, which are only briefly indicated, have failed in some cases to win the assent of men of science, or indeed of some men of culture and education who share in the contemporary empirical and scientific mode of thought.

It seems to be implied that if we're well-read and scientific, we won't see that the Pope is right. It's precisely the opposite: the more we learn about the Science that studies the aspect of good or evil of human acts (Ethics or Morality), the more we can see that the Pope is right.

[Green] We must appreciate the difficulty experienced by contemporary man in understanding and appropriating some of the points of this encyclical, and we must make every effort to learn from the insights of Catholic scientists and intellectuals,

[Red] who are of undoubted loyalty to Christian truth, to the Church and to the authority of the Holy See.

Really? If they reject the authority of the Pope on even a single point where their assent is required (like contraception, for example), they are specifically not loyal to the Holy See!

[Red] Since they are not denying any point of divine and Catholic faith nor rejecting the teaching authority of the Church, these Catholics should not be considered, or consider themselves, shut off from the body of the faithful.

You don't need to reject a dogma of Faith to be excommunicated. Even rejecting a **moral** truth declared ex cathedra will cut you off from the Church (like for the immorality of abortion, for example).

[Red] But they should remember that their good faith will, be dependent on a sincere self-examination to determine the true motives and grounds for such suspension of assent and on continued effort to understand and deepen their knowledge of the teaching of the Church.

If this statement were true, Adolf Hitler could "suspend his assent" to the condemnation of concentration camps, while continuing to examine his motives! In itself, "continuing one's efforts" is not a kind of magic wand which absolves us of all our sins automatically!

[Green] 18. The difficulties of this situation have been felt by the priests of the Church, and by many others. We have been requested to provide guidelines to assist them. This we will endeavor to accomplish in a subsequent document. We are conscious that continuing dialogue, study and reflection will be required by all members of the Church in order to meet as best we can the complexities and exigencies of the problem.

[Green] 19. We point out that the particular norms which we may offer will prove of little value unless they are placed in the context of man's human and Christian vocation and all of the values of Christian marriage. This formation of conscience and this education in true love will be achieved only by a well balanced pastoral insistence upon the primary importance of a love which is human, total, faithful and exclusive as well as generously fruitful (11).

V - PRELIMINARY PASTORAL GUIDANCE

[Green] 20. For the moment, in conformity with traditional Christian morality, we request priests and all who may be called to guide or counsel the consciences of others to give their attention to the following considerations.

[Green] 21. The pastoral directives given by Pope Paul VI in the encyclical are inspired by a positive sacramental approach. The Eucharist is always the great expression of Christian love and union. Married couples will always find in this celebration a meeting place with the Lord which will never fail to strengthen their own mutual love. With regard to the sacrament of penance the spirit is one of encouragement both for penitents and confessors and avoids both extremes of laxity and rigorism.

[Yellow] 22. The encyclical suggests an attitude towards the sacrament of penance which is at once less juridical, more pastoral and more respectful of persons. There is real concern for their growth, however slow at times, and for the hope of the future.

Ambiguous. Nowhere in the Encyclical "[Humanae Vitae](#)", nor in the Bible, nor in the teachings of the Church do we find any incentive to be slow to do good. Acting well is acting well here and now.

"Doing evil now, in order to do good in the future" is a proverb of the Devil, not a teaching of the Church

[Green] 23. Confession should never be envisaged under the cloud of agonizing fear or severity. It should be an exercise in confidence and respect of consciences. Paul VI invited married couples to "...have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is poured forth in the Sacrament of Penance" (12). Confession is a meeting between a sincere conscience and Christ Our Lord who was "indeed intransigent. with evil, but merciful towards individuals" (13).

[Green] 24. Such is the general atmosphere in which the confessor and counselor must work. We complete the concept with a few more particular applications.

[Yellow] 25. In the situation we described earlier in this statement (para. #17) the confessor or counselor must show sympathetic understanding and reverence for the sincere good faith of those who fail in their effort to accept some point of the encyclical.

Yes, confessors must be merciful and full of empathy with these people, but their job doesn't stop there! Confessors must also explain nicely to these people that they are wrong! Confessors must explain the soundness of the teachings of the Church! Confessors must finally courageously proclaim the truth in contradiction with the spirit of the world: the use of contraceptives is a mortal sin, and a single mortal sin makes us worthy of the punishment of Hell.

If a Priest obstinately disagrees with official teachings of the Catholic Church, then what he needs is not weasel-wording of the Gospel of Christ. What he needs is to ask himself why he tells people he's a Catholic Priest. Is it because he agrees with all the teachings of the Church (as he is obliged to do, and has promised to do)? Or is it because he prefers the paycheck of a Catholic Priest over that of, say, a Pastor of the United Church of Canada?

[Green] 26. Counselors may meet others who, accepting the teaching of the Holy Father, find that because of particular circumstances they are involved in what seems to them a clear conflict of duties, e.g. the reconciling of conjugal love and responsible parenthood with the education of children already born or with the health of the mother.

Yes, but in that case, the counselors must explain to these people why they are mistaken. See my comment for #25, above.

[Red] In accord with the accepted principles of moral theology, if these persons have tried sincerely but without success to pursue a line of conduct in keeping with the given directives, they may be safely assured that whoever honestly chooses that course which seems right to him does so in good conscience.

This is perhaps the most debatable passage of this "Winnipeg Statement"! See "To Act Well, We Just Need To Obey Our Conscience!".

Notice also the lighter side of the situation: we are here at the very heart of the debate, in the most important part of this "Winnipeg Statement". This is where, according to some authors, the Canadian Bishops appear to cut themselves off from Rome and reject an official teaching of the Catholic Church. And what is their justification? What official document of the Church do they quote to support their position? What passage in the Bible? Nothing!

The Bishops do a little rhetorical sleight of hand, by asserting that everybody knows what official document of the Church they are talking about, so they don't need to quote it! Of course they don't quote such a document, such a document doesn't exist!

[Yellow] 27. Good pastoral practice for other and perhaps more difficult cases will be developed in

continuing communication among bishops, priests and laity,

Of course, a "good pastoral practice" is in itself a good thing, but this idea of a "dialogue among all stakeholders at all levels", to use the popular buzz-words, must be accompanied by fidelity to the Magisterium. Dialogue, when it cuts itself off from Rome, becomes just another hot-air factory working for the Devil.

Notice also the similarity between this passage, and the following excerpt, in which the Pope apparently condemns such silliness:

"In order to justify these positions, some authors have proposed a kind of double status of moral truth. Beyond the doctrinal and abstract level, one would have to acknowledge the priority of a certain more concrete existential consideration. The latter, by taking account of circumstances and the situation, could legitimately be the basis of certain exceptions to the general rule and thus permit one to do in practice and in good conscience what is qualified as intrinsically evil by the moral law. A separation, or even an opposition, is thus established in some cases between the teaching of the precept, which is valid in general, and the norm of the individual conscience, which would in fact make the final decision about what is good and what is evil. **On this basis, an attempt is made to legitimize so-called "pastoral" solutions contrary to the teaching of the Magisterium**, and to justify a "creative" hermeneutic according to which the moral conscience is in no way obliged, in every case, by a particular negative precept." [[Veritatis Splendor](#), #56] .

[Green] and in particular in the document we have promised to prepare. In the meantime we earnestly solicit the help of medical scientists and biologists in their research into human fertility. While it would be an illusion to hope for the solution of all human problems through scientific technology, such research can bring effective help to the alleviation and solution of problems of conscience in this area.

VI - INVITATION TO SOCIAL PASTORAL ACTION

[Green] 28. The whole world is conscious of the growing preoccupation with the social impact of all men's thoughts, words and actions. Sexuality in all its aspects is obviously an area of the greatest human and social impact. The norms ...

[Red] and values

See my comment for #10 above.

[Green] ... which govern this so vital human concern merit the attention and cooperation of all. Our world evolves at a frightening rate, creating at once a vivid sense of unity and a set of conflicting forces which could destroy us.

[Green] 29. This concern will be fruitful only if it leads all of us to recognize our true human worth in the possession of our inner powers by which we are distinctively ourselves with the full recognition of our complementary sexual differences on the physical, the psychological and the spiritual plane. Only in this manner will we achieve marriages that are truly unions of love in the service of life.

[Green] 30. To this end there must be brought into play all the positive forces of the family, the school, the state, the Church. No one may stand aloof, nor are there really national boundaries in a matter of such universal application. With this in mind we call on all members of the Church to realize the importance of the process of education for marriage on every level from the very youngest to the various possibilities of adult education.

[Green] 31. Without wishing to specify in detail we single out for special mention a few aspects which may have richer possibilities. We place first the dialogue and cooperation, which have been so

encouraging, among all members of the Church and,

[Yellow] through the ecumenical movement, with other Churches.

Of course, in itself, dialogue and cooperation are great goods. On the other hand, we can wonder what relationship there could be between the ecumenical movement and contraception! It's probably because ecumenism was popular at the time. In itself, contraception is precisely not a problem of beliefs, but a scientific problem.

[Green] 32. We note with deep satisfaction the spread and strength of so many activities calculated to prepare for marriage or to deepen the appreciation of married persons of this sublime state. For example, marriage preparation courses, family apostolates, discussion groups, etc.

[Green] 33. Educators, too, are to be commended for their growing attention to the question. Everywhere the problem of sex education and family life is being studied. And this education is happily being deepened by scientific research and diffused through the creative use of mass media. Nothing less than this mobilization of all human forces will suffice to meet the challenge of divisive and destructive forces which begin deep in the willful selfishness of man and inhibit the true expression of his love. We pledge ourselves to the pastoral priority of encouraging and promoting these programs whenever and wherever possible.

[Green] 34. We conclude by asking all to pray fervently that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide his Church through all darkness and suffering. We, the People of God, cannot escape this hour of crisis but there is no reason to believe that it will create division and despair.

[Red] The unity of the Church does not consist in a bland conformity in all ideas, but rather in a union of faith and heart, in submission to God's will and a humble but honest and ongoing search for the truth.

Conformity on all points of Faith and Morals is **necessary** to be Catholic. See "[Excommunication, That Gesture Of Love!](#)". Some Protestants consider that the unity of the Church is based on a community of emotions, and an endless quest for a truth that is always slightly out of reach. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, teaches that She only has the **actual** and **full** deposit of truth transmitted to men by Jesus Christ [[Dignitatis Humanae](#), No. 1].

Anyway, it's impossible to be "submitted to the will of God" without at the same time being in conformity with all of the teachings of the Church. If God exists, and if God has founded the Catholic Church, then the will of God is clearly that we should hold all the official teachings of the Church. If the Church teaches baloney, then it is not the Church of God!

[Green] That unity of love and faith is founded in Christ and as long as we are true to Him nothing can separate us. We stand in union with the Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, the sign and contributing cause of our unity with Christ and with one another. But this very union postulates such a love of the Church that we can do no less than to place all of our love and all of our intelligence at its service.

[Yellow] If this sometimes means that in our desire to make the Church more intelligible and more beautiful we must, as pilgrims do, falter in the way or differ as to the way, no one should conclude that our common faith is lost or our loving purpose blunted.

"Faltering" or "differing as to the way" is not necessarily a heresy or a schism, because they are metaphors in the context above. On the other hand, it's false to claim that Canadian Bishops are unable to cause a schism. Unfortunately, any Bishop can cause a schism anytime.

To decide, we must not examine the pretty metaphor, but the "faltering" in question, to see if Yes or No

these Bishops are still Catholics, and if they've blunted their love for the Church and Her leader, Jesus Christ.

What is worse in this passage is that the Canadian Bishops don't reiterate the eternal teaching of the Church according to which they, the **Canadian Bishops**, are **infallible** in matters of dogma and morals, **as long as they remain united to the Pope!** "[The Bishops] proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and **morals**, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held." [[Lumen Gentium](#), No. 25].

[Yellow] The great Cardinal Newman once wrote: "Lead kindly light amidst the encircling gloom" (14). We believe that the Kindly Light will lead us to a greater understanding of the ways of God and the love of man.

Poor Cardinal Newman never insinuated that the light of God would guide people who cut themselves off from Rome! **On the contrary**, the whole existence of Cardinal Newman is precisely the story of an Anglican who discovers that he cannot fully be a Christian, that he can't go to Heaven, unless he is in **full communion** with the Pope! (Funny detail: the poem quoted above dates from his serious illness in Sicily, therefore **before** his conversion to Catholicism!).

Conclusion? Did the Canadian Bishops really create a new non-Catholic church the day they signed this "Winnipeg Statement"? Please see the Legal Consideration #3.

I'll just say that, according to me, the Canadian Bishops would do well to meet here at the *Château Frontenac*, in order to sign a "Quebec City Statement" more openly compatible with [Veritatis Splendor](#), than this "Winnipeg Declaration"!

Footnotes

- (1) [On Human Life](#), #4 & #18.
- (2) [On Human Life](#), #8.
- (3) [The Church Today](#), #49.
- (4) [The Church Today](#), #51.
- (5) Rom. 14:23 and 1 Cor. 10.
- (6) [The Church Today](#), #16.
- (7) [On Religious Freedom](#), #3; [The Church Today](#), #16, #17.
- (8) Luke 10:16.
- (9) [The Church Today](#), #50.
- (10) [Constitution on the Church](#), #25.
- (11) [On Human Life](#), #9.
- (12) [On Human Life](#), #25.
- (13) [On Human Life](#), #29.
- (14) J. H. Newman.