

Personal Notes  
060122 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time 68B  
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Raymond J. Jirran

What may be the role of those outside the ranks of authority within the One, Holy, Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Church? How do those out of ecclesiastical power relate to those in power? In the political vernacular, how does truth speak to power? In a lesser vernacular, how does truth determine Church politics, rather than Church politics determine truth? This is one question expressed in different ways, with many unintended consequences. How the very human and, therefore, vulnerable, Church exercises ecclesiastical authority in the matter of birth control is the focus of attention in these Personal Notes.

Until the 1920s, parish priests did not preach about marital sexuality. After Pope Pius XI wrote his encyclical, *Casti Connubii* in 1930, the situation changed. *Casti Connubii* denounced contraception as a sin against "God and nature," after some two thousand years not worrying about the matter. In the practical order, this meant that Catholic birth rates remained relatively steady, while those of non-Catholics fell precipitously during the Great Depression. Was *Casti Connubii* properly vetted before publication, either in 1930 or 2008? Historically the human Church excluded large groups of people from exercising ecclesiastical power.

Examples of those out of ecclesiastical power include all non-clerics, especially women, and even clerical homosexual, Asian, African, and Latino men. The political exercise-of-power focus here is on the history of contraception within the United States of America. Excluding all of the above from participation in the channels of power is abusive. Recognizing the potential for an abuse of power through exclusion by those in power, the spiritual theme of these Notes is repentance.

Those in ecclesiastical power today identify themselves as the faithful remnant of the First Testament. During the Babylonian Exile, the prophets spoke of a remnant that would survive and remain faithful. Some of the Jews came to like it in Babylonia and did not return to Jerusalem when the opportunity arrived. Those returning are like the Faithful remnant today, which shows up for daily Mass, even when the priest does not. Who corresponds more to the Faithful remnant today, the shepherds or the flock? the hierarchy or the Faithful? These are not exactly rhetorical questions. These issues deserve attention, other than non-consideration. Undoubtedly, some of every faction in the hierarchical structure do belong to the faithful remnant, still trying to do God's holy will.

Psalm 25:9 proclaims that the LORD *guides the humble to justice and teaches the humble his way*. The flock is more likely to be humble than the shepherds. The problem chosen for this liturgical reading is with birth control.

Who needs to repent and who is remaining Faithful? Do clerics need to repent for imposing unreasonable burdens on the Faithful or do the Faithful need to repent for ignoring what the clergy dictates? Biblically, the need for repentance is laid first at the feet of those in power and then at the feet of the Faithful. In Jonah 3:15, 10,

Nineveh gives a good example of the need for and effect of repentance. At Jonah 3:10, God repents. It follows that if even God can repent, then so can the teaching Magisterium when it recognizes its errors, as well as the Faithful.

In the matter of birth control, are clerics imposing unnecessary burdens upon the Faithful or are the Faithful wrongly abandoning the teaching Magisterium of the Church? I fall among those who do not comprehend what is happening to the Faithful. A book review in The Journal of American History of Catholics and Contraception: An American History (xiv and 335 pages) is triggering these contemplations.<sup>1</sup>

Catholic and non-Catholic birth rates came back together after World War II, where they remain until the present. As the book reviewer, Stephen Lassonde, words it, "The Catholic Church's promotion of fertility, expounded by men so conspicuously inexperienced with married life, sexuality, and child rearing, increasingly stretched the credulity of the clergy's teaching on contraception."<sup>2</sup> The extreme stress caused by the contraception issue includes the possibility of abusing the Faithful.

The so-called rhythm method that permitted sexual intercourse during periods of infertility appeared as "a specious claim to moral differentiation from more effective contraceptive technologies." The teaching Magisterium was not finished. In 1968, *Humanae Vitae* by Pope Paul VI condemned all forms of contraception, except rhythm. Most of those Catholics in the United States, those who did not leave the Church altogether, ignored *Humanae Vitae*. Lassonde concludes,<sup>3</sup>

The great value of ... [Catholics and Contraception] is its painstaking interpolation of Catholic dogma, a wide-ranging clerical literature, sermons, interviews with priests trained from the 1940s forward, and a variety of lay publications. Instead of the wall of silence that has encouraged Catholics to believe that the church's ratiocinations on contraception have been untouched by time and culture, Catholics and Contraception offers a revealing glimpse behind the pulpit and inside

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Lassonde, review of Leslie Woodcock Tentler, Catholics and Contraception: An American History, in The Journal of American History, Vol. 92, No. 3 (December 2005) 1053-1055.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Lassonde, review of Leslie Woodcock Tentler, Catholics and Contraception: An American History, in The Journal of American History, Vol. 92, No. 3 (December 2005) 1054.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Lassonde, review of Leslie Woodcock Tentler, Catholics and Contraception: An American History, in The Journal of American History, Vol. 92, No. 3 (December 2005) 1054.

the confessional. It will stand as the authoritative work on the topic for years, and yet, while ... [Catholics and Contraception] recognizes that the bankruptcy of contraceptive teaching created both a crisis of faith for married Catholics and a crisis of authority for its leadership by the 1960s, in the end ...[the book] is content to acknowledge this penumbra without comprehending its toll in the numbers of Catholics who abandoned their faith as a result or how profoundly the Catholic Church discredited itself as an authority on the morality of human sexuality by hiding behind the sanctity of papal encyclicals.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Psalmist prays, "Teach me your ways, O LORD." Psalm 25 is an acrostic poem expressing a request for learning within a framework of alphabetic rigor.<sup>4</sup> The Church uses this psalm at funerals<sup>5</sup> and at visits to the sick.<sup>6</sup> Saint Paul echoes the same theme in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31. Paul is proclaiming both to accept the way things are ordered in this life and to anticipate that things will appear differently in the next life, *its present form passing away*, 1 Corinthians 7:31. In the next life, those excluded now will be included then.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P., "The Use of 'Panels' in the Structure of Psalms 73-78," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No 4 (October 2004) 537.

<sup>5</sup> N.a., International Commission on English in the Liturgy: A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and published by Authority of Pope Paul IV: Order of Christian Funerals: Including Appendix 2: Cremation: Approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1998) 224, 254, 262, 268.

<sup>6</sup> The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum: Approved for use in the dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See: Prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy: a Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1983) 172, 283.

<sup>7</sup> Brad Ronnell Braxton, "The Role of Ethnicity in the Social Location of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24," and Demetrius K. Williams, "The Bible and Models of Liberation in the African American Experience," in Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Randall C. Bailey, ed., (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 29-30, 48.

The teaching Magisterium bases its position on contraception on philosophy, rather than Sacred Scripture. Focusing on Sacred Scripture might enable the Faithful to ignore the contraception issue and the abuse of power issue. The teaching Magisterium can abuse its power by imposing needless burdens on the Faithful. The Faithful can abuse its power of self-determination by ignoring the Magisterium in this matter of contraception.

The original ancient Greek does have some relevance to marital sexuality. The critical apparatus for the different surviving ancient manuscripts for 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 has five areas of difference from the commonly accepted Greek. At least one manuscript says that the time is *running* out not simply in the absolute sense of the Lectionary translation, but in the sense that *time is running out* for married men and women to be together. Adding this concern for married couples in the surviving manuscripts of 1 Corinthians 7:27 is relevant to the current position of the teaching Magisterium on birth control. 1 Corinthians is concerned about bodily matters within a context of the spiritual life.<sup>8</sup> Family values implicated in the Gospel according to Mark for this Sunday relate intimately to the morality of contraception.

The Gospel according to Mark 1:14 is about Jesus calling the Faithful to repentance and his disciples to himself, Mark 1:16-20. The full context of the call includes the scandal Jesus takes that the poor widow gives everything she has to the Temple clergy. Preachers usually present the story of the poor widow giving more than the rest as something admirable. Another way of looking at the passage, however, is that Jesus is amazed at her foolishness entrusting so much to leadership with so little to offer in return.<sup>9</sup> If the teaching Magisterium is wrong on contraception, the Faithful following that Magisterium have a spiritual link with the poor widow.

Mark 1:20, where James and John abandon their father in the boat along with the hired men, violates family values. At the time of Jesus, brothers did contribute to family income.<sup>10</sup> I wonder what relationship there is between apparently abandoning family in violation of the Fourth Commandment to honor one's father and mother and a vocation to the institutional Church.

Readings for this Third Sunday in Ordinary Time are about repentance for sin. The readings begin with Nineveh repenting. Psalm 25 continues the sense of repentance

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey R. Asher, review of Karl Olav Sandnes, Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 2003) 480-481.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 53, No. 4 (October 1991) 600.

<sup>10</sup> Robert H. Gundry, "Mark 10:29: Order in the List," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 3 (July 1997) 468-469.

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by asking God to show the Faithful his ways. 1 Corinthians includes the sexual ramifications of what repentance means, whether for the clergy in ecclesiastical power or the Faithful excluded therefrom. The Gospel is about following Jesus in everything.

As I have been rereading previous Personal Notes, I have been making changes before placing them on the web. Beginning with the Personal Notes for January 26, 2003, the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time 68B, I intend to change the copyright date from the time the material was written first to the last time I made revisions. Therefore, I have changed the copyright date for the Personal Notes for January 26, 2003, the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time 68B from 2003 to 2005 and, how to 2008. This change in procedure was added to the Appendix file on the web. For more on sources see the Appendix file. Personal Notes are on the web site at [www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes](http://www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes)