

# Epiphanies and *Humanae Vitae*

*Janet E. Smith*

ABSTRACT: This essay derives from a casual after-dinner talk delivered at the UFL conference of 2008. It reviews Prof Smith's early participation in the pro-life movement and her decision to promote the truths of *Humanae vitae* as a means of combating abortion. It also includes reflections on some pro-family, pro-life elements of modern films and modern culture and a brief excursus on the concept of "conscious parenthood" as developed by John Paul II in *Love and Responsibility*. The essay argues that tapping into the natural love that people have for children and their desire to be good parents might be another avenue for advancing the pro-life message.

**D**URING THE FORTIETH anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* I received many invitations to write and talk about it. One invitation that really warmed my heart and amused me was from the editor of a pontifical journal. He asked for an article of about fifteen pages, and then added: "if you think you still have something to say on the topic"! I am not sure that I do, but since I have more or less become the "*Humanae Vitae* lady," my name pops up quickly when people are looking for something about *Humanae Vitae*.

When I was casting around for a focus for this talk, I thought of one of my friends who has written a book about the history of the pro-life movement. When I asked her about the focus of her book, she said that she was actually writing what amounted to an autobiography, for it turned out to be about *her* involvement in the pro-life movement. I teased her that this was a rather narcissistic take on the subject.

Not being a stranger to narcissism myself, I have warmed to the idea of doing a history of a movement and using myself as the focus. In fact, that focus may help keep this after-dinner talk the bit of fluffy relief that all of us yearn for after a long day of closely reasoned scholarly work. Nonetheless, I will spare you an unrelenting exercise in narcissism and add a few other elements. Consequently this talk is

going to have a few somewhat loosely connected parts: (1) A review of some moments of my life that provide some insight into the story of *Humanae Vitae* over the last forty years. (2) A suggestion that the pro-life movement would do well to promote a concept developed by Karol Wotyła and incorporated into *Humanae Vitae*—the concept of conscious parenthood. (3) A few cultural signs that indicate some important pro-life shifts in the culture.

When *Humanae Vitae* was issued in 1968 I had just graduated from high school. I had no cognizance of that tumultuous event. Nonetheless, my whole adult life has been lived during the forty years after *Humanae Vitae*, and that is really what drew me to the thought of using various events of my life to tell the story of *Humanae Vitae* forty years later. For some of you this will be a trip down memory lane. For others it will be a history lesson for the decades before your birth.

Often I am asked how I got involved in this work. People find it strange that someone should devote her life to defending *Humanae Vitae*. I am one of those people who find it strange. What I am going to do here is to recount a series of epiphanies that have shaped my thinking about contraception and my choices to do this work.

I grew up in Warren, Pennsylvania, a small conservative Republican town in the western part of the state. My family was considered liberal (if not radical) because my father was a Democrat and an advocate of civil rights. That didn't mean much in our town since there was only one African-American living there, a piano teacher who had followed his wife to live in Warren. But my Dad, a man with a keen sense of justice, spent a lot of dinner hours ranting and raving against racial prejudice and against the Vietnam war. In high school I came to think of myself as something of a radical and tried to choose a radical college, not knowing what it really meant to be a radical. I soon found out. I went to Grinnell College in Iowa, which was about as radical as colleges were at that time, and some of them were really radical. But I must admit that it was an even more trivial reason that led me to choose Grinnell from among the several

radical schools I visited. I chose Grinnell because I was very taken with a young man I saw there sporting very long and bushy sideburns!

It was during the summer between graduating from high school and going to college that *Humanae Vitae* came out. As I mentioned, I don't really recall the event. My research years later made me realize what a turning point 1968 was for the Church as well as for the culture. It was the year Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were killed, it was the year of race riots in many American cities, and it was a year of widespread protests against the Vietnam War, among other disruptive elements. The culture had already embraced contraception. It had been a largely contraceptive culture for much of the century but when the pill appeared in the late 1950s, contraceptive sex and all the irresponsibility and promiscuity and general grossness that come with a diminished view of the value of sexuality became a way of life. Some few faithful theologians warned that if contraception became widely available, then the approval of masturbation, fornication, divorce, and homosexuality and even euthanasia would quickly follow. (The members of this society are well familiar with the connection between these issues.) The dissent that followed *Humanae Vitae* changed things dramatically in the Catholic Church. One encouraging sign that we have begun to emerge from a Church greatly damaged by the dissent is that fidelity has largely returned to the seminaries and there are signs it is returning to some of the universities as well—something I was not confident I would live long enough to see. Some of us are beginning to face the challenges of old age, but one of the benefits to growing older is that we get the satisfaction of seeing some fruits of the battles we have fought. In 1968 I personally knew nothing about the huge revolution that was underway in both the culture and the Church and did not know what a role *Humanae Vitae* would play in my life.

When at Grinnell I decided that if I was going to be radical I had to do what radicals did. So I went to a few meeting of the SDS (Students of a Democratic Society), one of the more anarchic student groups then in existence. My reactionary path began when some of the SDS members started inveighing against policemen by calling them

pigs. A little light went off in my head. I had a little epiphany and thought: “These guys don’t know what they are talking about; my grandfather was a policeman and he wasn’t a pig.” When they spoke about their Marxist commitments and their solidarity with the workers, I had additional reason to doubt their grounding in reality. Many of my relatives were assembly-line workers and would have had no patience with these slackers and their long unwashed hair and unwashed slovenly way of dress.

In 1970, when I was a sophomore at Grinnell, some feminists came to campus to organize support for the liberalization of abortion laws. Iowa was a very liberal and progressive state. Although I was nineteen, I had never heard of abortion. I went to the library to look it up. I was astonished. My immediate reaction was that it was a very bad thing indeed, though I was willing to listen to the arguments of those who advocated abortion. The encyclopedia noted that the key question was when human life begins. It also noted that the Catholic Church was against abortion. At that time I had left the Church for a year and a half or so. I had been raised Catholic. I never went to Catholic schools, but I had received fairly good catechetical instruction. Still, I had never heard of abortion and didn’t know that the Church was against it.

At the time I was taking a course from John Crossett, a professor who was Socrates reincarnate. Through ruthless and unbelievably patient dialectic, he was single-handedly and courageously attempting to argue students out of the prevailing relativism and subjectivism. Crossett was helping some of us have the conviction in our minds and become desirous of asking hard questions and of getting at the truth. Many of the other professors on campus seemed committed to stripping us of confidence that we could know anything at all. In fact, some professors, a few of them card-carrying Marxists, would smoke dope with the students and rally the students to boycott classes in protest of various government actions. Those were confusing times, and I doubt that college campuses have improved any since.

I went to the meeting about abortion and asked when the advocates of abortion thought life begins. I said that I was prepared to write letters to have abortion laws liberalized but that I needed to know when life begins. The presenters started shouting at me, “sit down, shut up, we don’t need your kind here. We don’t need you right-to-lifers here.” I was very confused because it was a very genuine statement and I didn’t know why I had made them so mad. As mentioned, I had never heard of abortion before that afternoon and I certainly hadn’t heard of right-to-lifers. I was perplexed by the statement “we don’t need your kind here.” The fashion of the time was that both males and females were doing our best to look like John Lennon. I had actually succeeded to a remarkable extent and was distressed that my conformity to the norm was not being acknowledged.

I remember walking across campus and having an epiphany. I thought, “if they can’t defend their position about when human life begins, they may well be wrong and if the Catholic Church is right about abortion, maybe it is right about other things.” It wasn’t too long afterwards that I returned to the Church. Sunday mornings were a ghost town at Grinnell College. A handful of us lonely Christians made our way off to church.

From that time on I was a marked woman on campus. I had a few friends who were willing to reason with me about abortion. Before long I realized I was very much against abortion. My fellow students regularly accosted me with all the arguments in favor of abortion, and eventually some of us reasoned out why those reasons for abortion simply didn’t balance against the life of a child in the womb. What if the baby is going to be born deformed? The world is overpopulated. Why shouldn’t an unmarried pregnant woman be allowed to get on with her life? What if a woman has been raped? None of those concerns seemed to me to permit the killing of an innocent unborn child.

When *Roe vs. Wade* was decided, it barely dented my consciousness. I was in graduate school studying classical languages. I thought I would spend my life teaching students to read Latin and

Greek and the ancient classics. When I was studying at the University of Toronto, I looked up Lloyd Gerson, a fellow graduate from Grinnell who was teaching philosophy there. For some reason the topic of abortion came up. He told me he was very involved in the right-to-life movement and that I should get involved. I remember shortly thereafter biking across Toronto to the right-to-life office and asking how I could help. They needed people to speak in the high schools, and since I was going to be a teacher I decided that I should contribute in that way. It eventually got to the point where I was speaking several times a month, sometimes debating members of Planned Parenthood. I also began and ran the student pro-life group at the University of Toronto for the years I was studying there.

I was now very much committed to my Catholicism and had a circle of friends who also were fervent Catholics—much to the consternation of our fellow graduate students. They thought that we seemed intelligent and couldn't understand how intelligent people could be Catholic. They were particularly frustrated with our pro-life views and completely appalled at the possibility that we could support the Church's teaching on contraception (or the ordination of women). We formed a study group and read *Humanae Vitae* (in fact, we had several study groups—one on the thought of Aquinas, another on the documents of Vatican II, and yet another on the Bible). We discussed *Humanae Vitae* and became convinced of its truth. In spite of my acceptance of the Church's teaching on contraception, when asked about contraception in my right-to-life talks, I would quickly dismiss the question and insist that contraception and abortion were two different issues, for one was preventing a life from coming to be and the other was taking a life that had already begun.

When I started teaching at Notre Dame in the great books program there, I was assigned to teach the course on ethics. We were encouraged to include discussion of modern issues in our classes. I decided to have the students read *Humanae Vitae* and was surprised at how receptive they were to the teaching. It was at this time that Pope John Paul II was delivering his theology of the body talks. There was

no internet service at the time, of course, but Gerry Wegemer, then a graduate student in English, was receiving them via fax from Rome. Every week he would slip a copy of the latest one under my office door. My thinking about *Humanae Vitae* was thus being formed by the theology of the body talks as they were being delivered. Ger wangled me into giving a series of evening sessions to students on theology of the body, and again I was impressed with how appealing the students found John Paul II's thought and his defense of *Humanae Vitae*. I also debated one of my colleagues at Notre Dame about contraception—a dear friend of mine who admitted during the debate that he had not read *Humanae Vitae* until the very afternoon of the debate, even though he had been living in contradiction to it for years. I was beginning to realize that a lot of the disobedience from *Humanae Vitae* was blind disobedience. I had the epiphany that when young people read and studied *Humanae Vitae*, they often accepted its teachings.

For some years I did sidewalk counseling outside of the local abortion clinic. I know that most of you have engaged in similar activity and that you probably share my experience that time spent in front of an abortion clinic is powerful time for pondering. After all, one is standing on the divide between life and death. I pondered why women were coming to get abortions. I had a vision of people throwing babies in a river and of those of us at the abortion clinic as lifeguards trying to reach into the river and save as many as we could. I wondered what was causing the babies to be thrown into the river. At some point it dawned on me—I had the epiphany—that these women were engaged in relationships that could not readily accommodate a pregnancy. When I pondered why that would be so, it occurred to me that contraception had enabled them to embark upon relationships for which a pregnancy would be a crisis.

At the same time, many of my friends were getting married and it seemed to me that those who were committed to chastity before marriage and the use of natural family planning within marriage had manifestly better relationships than those who were unchaste and who contracepted. I was seeing the lived out consequences of the violation

of Church teaching and of compliance with Church teaching, and this was providing the support of lived experience to what I thought was the philosophical and theological soundness of Church teaching.

When I was seeking a topic for the book I was required to write for tenure at Notre Dame, Ger Wegemer kept pestering me to write a book on *Humanae Vitae*. He said, “You know it and love it and should write about it.” I told him that was ridiculous. I had never taken any courses in theology, let alone moral theology, and that supporting *Humanae Vitae* was not a stance that was likely to win one tenure at Notre Dame. But one day I found myself looking at the Latin version of *Humanae Vitae* since I was puzzled by a few passages in the English translation. I decided *Humanae Vitae* needed to be re-translated. All the English translations had been based on the Italian version and did not properly convey the nuances of Latin, which was more philosophically more precise. I decided that to do a good translation I needed to consult all the documents cited in the footnotes. At that point I decided I might as well do a commentary as well as a translation, and soon the commentary grew into a book.

Some of you are familiar with work that I did on the word *munus* that appears in the first line of *Humanae Vitae*: spouses have the *munus* of transmitting human life, a *munus* entrusted to them by God. *Munus* is an important concept.<sup>1</sup> It refers to an important task that God asks people to do in this world. It is both an assignment and a gift. I realized more and more that the Church tries to lead people to understand that the connection between sexuality and parenthood is not one to be bemoaned but one to be embraced and celebrated. *Humanae Vitae* is as much about parenthood as it is about any other concept. I have long loved Karol Wojtyła’s book *Love and Responsibility*, and more detailed work that I have been doing recently has led me to see what tremendous influence he had on the themes of *Humanae Vitae*. I hope

---

<sup>1</sup> “The *Munus* of Transmitting Human Life: A New Approach to *Humanae Vitae*,” *The Thomist* 54/3 (July 1990): 385-427.

soon to write a book on John Paul II and *Humanae Vitae*. There may actually be something new in that book. Not a new idea of mine, but a new appreciation on some of the work of John Paul II and *Humanae Vitae* that is not yet fully appreciated. I will give you a preview in a moment.

That book I wrote on *Humanae Vitae* did not, of course, get me tenure. In fact, it worked against my getting tenure, combined (I suspect) with the fact that I had led demonstrations against Hans Kung and Mario Como. I rather miss those days! It would not be wrong to say that for a portion of my life, I was a recycled radical. But the work I did on *Humanae Vitae* launched me on a speaking and publishing career that has brought me here today.

Since there weren't many folks speaking on the Church's teaching on contraception, I began to get a lot of requests. I remember that during the twenty-fifth anniversary year I traveled and spoke nine weekends in a row. I took virtually every invitation I got since I thought interest would soon peter out. It hasn't, thanks be to God. I had begun to realize that the best contribution that I personally could make to the pro-life movement was to try to convince people of the wrongness of contraception. If abortion is very much a result of contraceptive lifestyles, then trying to reduce the number of those involved in such lifestyles should serve to reduce the number of abortions as well.

There were three items that I read that had a huge impact on my thinking. One was an article written by Fr. Ernest Fortin. He was arguing that the designation "right-to-life movement" for the movement that was fighting abortion was problematic in several respects.<sup>2</sup> Chiefly he argued that the focus on rights seemed to pit the mother and the child against each other; it put them in a rather litigious relationship as if it were a contest of the right of the mother to choose

---

<sup>2</sup> Ernest L. Fortin, "The New Rights Theory and the Natural Law," *The Review of Politics* 44 (October 1982): 590-612.

against the right of the unborn child to life. He pointed out that to speak of the mother/child relationship in terms of rights falsified the relationship. Rather, it was one naturally built on love and generosity and self-sacrifice. He noted that the Church had always viewed the chief harm that was done through abortion to be the harms done to the doctor who performed the abortion, to the woman who had the abortion, and to the society that permitted the abortion rather than to the child who died. The child, we believed, would be received lovingly by God, but the agents of abortion had endangered their immoral souls.

Two books solidified and advanced some of the thoughts provoked by Fortin. One was Alasdair MacIntyre's book *After Virtue*<sup>3</sup> and another was Karol Wojtyła's *Love and Responsibility*.<sup>4</sup> These works put an emphasis on how an action affects the agent, how the performance of actions impacts a person's character. *Humanae Vitae* itself places a great emphasis on this personalistic approach to ethics. As mentioned, the emphasis on *Humanae Vitae* is very much on parenthood and what parenthood means for the parents themselves—how it is an opportunity for them to grow in love.

And now at last I have grown tired of talking about myself and will turn my focus to this theme of “conscious parenthood” and how it may be a good focus for cultivation of a pro-life culture as a means of constructing the civilization of love that John Paul II called for.

John Paul II may well have been responsible for the emphasis in *Humanae Vitae* on parenthood. His writings prior to the issuance of *Humanae Vitae*, especially his book *Love and Responsibility*, put a great emphasis on what he called “conscious parenthood,” and I believe many of his concepts worked their way in *Humanae Vitae* through several avenues.<sup>5</sup> His writings after the publication of

---

<sup>3</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, [1981] 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco CA: Ignatius, 1993), p. 331.

<sup>5</sup> Janet E. Smith, “Conscious Parenthood,” *Nova et Vetera* 6/4 (2008): 927-50.

*Humanae Vitae* also stressed this concept of “conscious parenthood.” His theology of the body provides the theological underpinnings for the proper understanding of *Humanae Vitae*. The theology of the body has delivered not only fantastic conceptual advances but has proven to have a powerful ability to affect conversions. Certainly the promotion of his theology of the body by Christopher West and others has converted thousands to lives of chastity, and along with lives of chastity comes a more indelible pro-life commitment.

All of us in the pro-life movement have been trying to find some means of persuading the public that abortion is wrong. We use scientific, philosophical, and religious arguments to defend the humanity and rights of the unborn, we show grisly pictures, we try to educate the public about the bad consequences of abortion for the mothers and fathers of the babies aborted and of the culture that permits abortion. We attempt to pass protective legislation and to elect and appoint pro-life judges. I am in full support of these efforts, and I believe they are making an impact and will continue to do so. Yet one problem with such approaches is that they require an audience that is able to reason and to recognize a good argument when it hears one. We rarely have such an audience.

I am going to suggest yet another factor that we could emphasize, that we could add to our toolbox of approaches. I am not saying that it has been absent from the pro-life movement, but it is one that doesn’t depend so much on an audience that can reason. Rather, it depends upon people consulting experience—a John Paul II focus. I am hoping that a certain appeal to the heart of people might help them grasp what their heads seem incapable of getting.

One experience that all of us have in some shape or form is the experience of family, even though the variety of families in which people grow up is ever more diverse. I have found in speaking with young people that they do recognize that among the deep desires of their hearts is the desire for a stable family, for a long lasting relationship. Many of them have despaired of those as a possibility, either because their parents have divorced or the parents of many of

their friends have divorced. They begin to think that indissoluble marriages are not possible. Another deep desire of their hearts is to be good parents. God has very much planted the love of children in people's hearts. For several decades, such forces in society as some forms of feminism, environmentalism, and materialism/careerism have created a hostility towards children and babies as terrible impediments to the advancement of women, as pollutants, and expensive inconveniences. But the outbreak of child-bearing by celebrities is rather astonishing, and it seems to be an indication that even the glitterati are susceptible to the appeal of babies with all the love and joy and meaning and hope for the future that they bring. I want to suggest here that the emphasis on the wonderment and the natural responsibilities that come with parenthood is something that we should be emphasizing. Perhaps we need an organization into which we should enroll young people called "Future Parents of America." This emphasis on the joys of babies and parenthood might be a path we should travel as well as stressing the humanity and rights of the unborn.

In *Humanae Vitae* there is a section entitled "responsible parenthood." The Latin that is generally translated as "responsible parenthood" is *conscia paternitas*. The word "responsible" does not truly convey what the Latin word *conscia* connotes. When English-speakers hear of "responsible parenthood," they generally think of parents who perform their duties as parents well. In the context of *Humanae Vitae*, it is reasonable for readers to understand that "responsible parents" are those who realize that they are to raise children to be good citizens in God's kingdom. Those senses are present, but they do not capture adequately what Karol Wojtyła meant by "conscious parenthood."

The word "conscious" has several connotations for Wojtyła. Certainly the word "conscious" means that someone is aware of the reality that he holds in his consciousness. There is kind of a focus or lively attentiveness to the awareness. To speak of an agent acting "consciously" indicates that the agent knows what he or she is doing.

It also suggests that he or she is aware of the consequences of the action and accepts responsibility for those consequences. Wojtyła uses the word frequently, much more frequently than he uses the word “rational,” a word that also can be used to indicate that one knows the reality and is accepting of reality. I suspect that Wojtyła speaks of conscious behavior more frequently than rational behavior because to speak of consciousness seems more to emphasize the act of a particular person more than rationality does. To think and act rationally for the most part links the action with some objective universal order, to speak of being conscious reflects the individual’s personal appropriating of some truth. The subjective and objective come together more.

In *Love and Responsibility* Wojtyła does a great deal with the concept of conscious parenthood. It is key to his understanding of sexual ethics. He argues that maturity requires that people be conscious that sexual intercourse leads to parenthood. And he argues that consciousness is crucial to sexual responsibility. That consciousness will include several elements. It will include the consciousness that having a child is a very great wonderful act and that those who have children do us all the service of perpetuating the species. Wojtyła speaks of parents entering into the “cosmic stream of existence.” But the good of a child is much much more than a good for the species. The life given to a child is a gift of infinite value to the child, for a new immortal soul has come into existence. Wojtyła speaks of parents as “co-creators” with God. As the first line of *Humanae Vitae* states, God has “entrusted to spouses” the tremendously important *munus* or gift of transmitting human life. Those who would embrace this great task should be conscious of what a great task it is. They would realize that children need parents who possess virtues and who have made a life-time commitment to live a shared loving life together. One should chose as one’s spouse one with whom one can be a good parent.

I have clearly resisted making this a scholarly address, but I do want to quote one key passage from *Love and Responsibility*. There Wojtyła states:

When a man and woman capable of procreation have intercourse their union must be accompanied by awareness and willing acceptance of the possibility that 'I may become a father' or 'I may become a mother.' ... [Sexual union] is raised to the level of the person only when it is accompanied in the mind and the will by acceptance of the possibility of parenthood. This acceptance is so important, so decisive that without it marital intercourse cannot be said to be a realization of a personal relationship.... Neither in the man nor in the woman can affirmation of the value of the person be divorced from awareness and willing acceptance that he may become a father and she may become a mother.... If the possibility of parenthood is deliberately excluded from marital relations, the character of the relationship automatically changes. The change is away from unification in love and in the direction of mutual or, rather, bilateral, 'enjoyment'. (228)<sup>6</sup>

#### And further:

The proper way for a person to deal with the sexual urge is, on the one hand, consciously to make use of it for its natural purposes, and on the other to resist it, when it threatens to degrade the relationship between two persons to a level lower than that of love, lower than the level on which the value of the person is affirmed in a union with a truly personal character. Sexual (marital) relations have the character of a true union of persons as long as a general disposition towards parenthood is not excluded from them. This implies a conscious attitude to the sexual instinct: to master the sexual urge means just this, to accept its purpose in marital relations.<sup>7</sup>

The appeal to the native desire to be good parents has a power in some surprising places. When I first was counseling outside of abortion clinics, I would tend to argue with the women about the humanity and rights of the unborn child. I was quite ineffective. I started having more success when I would ask the young women if they ever wanted to be a mother. They would all say yes. I would try to paint of picture of that motherhood for them. I would talk to them about them holding their babies and rocking the to sleep and going to parks with them to play with their babies as they became toddlers. They seemed to like getting those images in their minds. I would then inform them that they if they were pregnant, they were already mothers and that what their babies

---

<sup>6</sup> *Love and Responsibility*, p. 331.

<sup>7</sup> *Love and Responsibility*, p. 229.

need from them now was the warmth of their wombs. I had some success with that strategy.

Now some of you might be skeptical and thinking that a culture that is so obsessed with recreational sex is not likely to be able to lead to become pro-life through the avenue of the responsibility that is attached to parenthood. I would like to point to a few pieces of evidence, a few films that suggest there may be some promise to this approach.

Nature always asserts itself eventually. But let me express something that you already know: it is natural to love babies. Many of us were delightfully astonished years ago by the movie *Raising Arizona*, a movie in which a most unlikely cast of characters vie over possession of a baby. There have been other wonderful indirectly prolife/pro family movies. I suppose we should make a list of them. I have loved, for instance, *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *Life is Beautiful* and *Spanglish*.

This past year has featured some films that are pro-life and pro-parenthood in some interesting ways. The film *Juno* and the very crude *Knocked Up* may be sign that pro-life sentiments are infiltrating the culture and may have done so to a rather surprising extent. When something percolates to the surface in a mainstream Hollywood film, it may indicate that some deep and wide changes are taking place. A most amazing scene in the movie *Juno* is when Juno goes to an abortion clinic. Outside is a sweet if somewhat goofy Christian Chinese girl who is chanting something like: "All babies want to be borned." She and Juno are friends and have a little chat. As Juno continues into the abortion clinic, the pro-lifer calls out to her, "Your baby already has finger nails." The young woman manning the desk at the abortion clinic is another story entirely. While discussing some deviant sexual act on the phone with a friend, she asks Juno some crude questions—she even offers her a condom—and is rather surly and insensitive. When Juno begins to fill out the requisite forms, she notices that everyone in the room seems to be doing something with their fingernails and leaves the abortion clinic. I was astounded by the

favorable presentation of the pro-lifer and the negative portrayal of the abortion clinic personnel. Some of my younger friends said they thought the explanation was that such was a realistic depiction of what has in fact been the experience of many women at abortion clinics.

Juno goes on to put her baby up for adoption. She realizes the great value the life of her baby is to the mother who is adopting the child and receives some wonderful loving care from her parents as well. My guess is that the percentage of young women putting up their babies for adoption this year will rise.

The movie *Knocked Up* is also very pro-life, though very crude. The young man—a pot-smoking shiftless loser of a young man who fathered the child in a one night stand—matures into a responsible person as he faces the responsibilities of fatherhood. The young woman never seriously considers abortion in spite of her mother's rather cavalier proposal to her that she do so. We are led to believe that her willingness to have the child has been nurtured by her love for her nieces and nephews. But the plot line follows the maturing of the young man. The closing scene of the movie has him cuddling his newborn and remarking that he failure to use a condom that evening of the baby's conception was the best thing that had ever happened. The audience that would be likely to watch a movie as crude as *Knocked Up* would likely be getting a message it would encounter no where else. What kind of infiltration of the film industry is going on?

There was also a powerful movie featuring an abortion that didn't have the commercial success of *Juno* and *Knocked Up*. This movie was a Romanian film entitled, *Four months, three weeks, two days*. It showed very coldly and graphically a young woman getting an illegal abortion. In order to get an abortion, she and a friend of hers had to have sex with the abortionist. It was a very hard film to watch. While the film seemed intent on getting viewers to see that illegal abortions are horrible, to my mind it simply made the point that abortions are horrible. It is very hard to give a realistic portrayal of abortion and not to have a good portion of the audience conclude that abortion is revolting. Reviewers generally found it to be artistically excellent—and

I agree that the performances were superb and it was very effectively filmed. The reviewers lamented that it did not receive any film awards. Some commentators were frustrated that movies that featured abortion as a rejected choice are those that have happy endings, and those that feature abortion as the choice that is made are dark and dismal and sad. Again, reality kicks in.

The starkness of the difference in these movies perhaps reflects the starkness of the difference that I mentioned of those who stand outside of abortion clinics. On one side is life and love and responsibility and the joys of family life; on the other side is death, and depression, and loneliness. While our culture is still in some respect spiraling downward, the fact that good and evil are being set in stark relief against each other, is, I think a positive development. Back when I was a college student, I feared that some of the trends in our society and in the world meant that eventually the Marxists would win and Christians would be greatly persecuted. Living in these times when the attack on the embryo is more fierce than ever, when such absurdities as homosexual unions are getting legal recognition, when people are salivating over the organs of our dying loved ones, we may tend to think that the forces of relativism and sexual license and the culture of death will surely prevail, but we may be wrong. I won't be around in forty years time, but I do know that the work of the noble souls in this room will surely have an impact for the good. I know that in addition to the great work done by this group in trying to persuade the world through its excellent scholarly work of the evil of abortion and other attacks on life, of equal importance is the witness that we give of our love for our children and our love for our elderly.

Much of my work has led me to maintain that rejection of the good of parenthood that is embedded in the acceptance of contraception has played a major role in the acceptance of abortion and in the advancement of the culture of death. Thus I wish to maintain that we need to heed the wisdom of *Humanae Vitae* that contraception is wrong and that parenthood is good. We may find a delightful responsiveness to this approach even in our very confused culture.

Again, we may find surprising allies in the lifestyles of such folks as Angelina and Brad, of Madonna, and Brittany, for they all seem to have a sense that in a nihilistic world, children can still offer a liferaft of meaning, sanity and happiness. Perhaps as they embrace the responsibilities of parenthood, they will come to recognize the preciousness of all life. And then perhaps they will better be able to grasp the cogency of the arguments of the prolife movement that is trying to protect all life.