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Redefining the Roles of Women and Sexual Ethics in the Roman Catholic Church

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REDEFINING THE ROLES OF WOMEN AND SEXUAL ETHICS
IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts
with Honors College Graduate Distinction at
Western Kentucky University

By

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May 2017

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Kenny and Dee Dee Nauert, who have been very supportive and encouraging of me. Without them and their constant love, I would not be where I am today. Thanks, Mom and Dad, I love you.

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ABSTRACT

The Second Vatican Council was one of the most seminal councils in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, and had far reaching and engaging effects on the wider universal institution. One of the most important outcomes of Vatican II was not the reforming of orthodoxy, but the dialogue that developed within the Church regarding specific issues, two of which are the transforming dynamic of women's roles in Church life and of Catholic sexual ethics. The decades following Vatican II became a new era of religious dialogue amongst Catholic scholars and theologians, which established new discussions on women's ordination and sexual ethics in the contemporary world. This paper discusses dialogue concerning women's ordination into the priesthood and/or permanent diaconate, as well as the dialogue that developed from Pope John Paul II's moral teachings in his *Theology of the Body*. This paper explores the dialogue amongst Catholic scholars and theologians on the changing role and opinion of women in ministerial positions, as well as the shifting of understanding of sexual morality in the contemporary Church that developed due to the broadening emphasis on discussion established by Vatican II.

Keywords: Roman Catholic Church, Vatican II, Women's Ordination, Sexual Ethics, Pope John Paul II, Pope Francis

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INTRODUCTION

“What a treasure there is, dear brothers and sisters, in the guidelines offered to us by the Second Vatican Council ... a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.”

- Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Inuente*, 2001

Perhaps one of the most decisive and influential councils regarding Church doctrine and reform of Church practices, the Second Vatican Council ushered in an era of scholarship, religious intrigue, controversy, and change to the modern contemporary Roman Catholic Church. Pope John XXIII, in 1962, called together bishops and other leaders of the universal Church to an extraordinary meeting to discuss changes and reform in the Catholic Church. Most notably, the Second Vatican Council was designed to bring the ancient Church into the coming new millennium. Out of this emerged new ideas, thoughts, and social movements, designed to enhance the Church's orthopraxy. The council was designed to formulate responses to myriad concerns regarding orthodox teaching, and translate the Church's teachings into its wider global social context. Most notably, though, was the Council's extremely important address of the foundational changes to the sociocultural, moral, and ethical norms of the 1960s and 70s.¹

However, many scholars and lay readers today would question the importance of such an event, especially one that has passed into modern memory. My thesis in this case then addresses how the important issues at hand are not so much the specific decrees or changes that Vatican II addressed, but the dialogue and emerging ideas of reform that were brought into being during the Second Vatican Council. Dialogue during this period

¹ William O'Brien ed., *Riding Time Like A River: The Catholic Moral Tradition Since Vatican II* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993), ix-x.

that had not previously existed emerged and continued to gain importance in the ever-progressing state of ideas and culture in the world today.² The social and scientific progression of the world has left its mark on the slow to change Roman Catholic Church, forcing its leaders to address certain issues that, since the Second Vatican Council, have blossomed in the public eye as key issues in need of attention. With the shifting of ideas and issues that have traditionally been considered to be gender-specific or ethical norms, and the advancement of medical science, the situation has become distinctly more complex. Therefore, these issues are without a doubt influential facets of religious life in the Church and in the secular life.

Particularly, I am seeking to understand how the Church has framed, and responded to, issues related to women in the Church and Catholic sexual ethics. Previous rulings of Church Doctrine concerning the role of women predominately place the woman within the patriarchal viewpoint, forever casting the woman in the light of the man. However, this does have religious implications. According to the Church, the role of the woman is multiple, identifying that women have different positions and responsibilities in the life of the Church concerning their vocational status, whether or not they have entered into the Sacrament of Marriage, professed religious vows, or committed to generous single life.³ However, changing trends in the modern global sphere has influenced a possible fourth or even fifth role to enter into contention within the Church.

² William O'Brien ed., *Riding Time Like A River: The Catholic Moral Tradition Since Vatican II* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993), 1-3.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition, (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 241, 400-403.

The concept of women ministers, pastors, and deacons has influenced many of the mainstream Protestant denominations in both Europe and America, and has caused intrigue and controversy, often even anger, among secular and religious men and women regarding the Church's traditional stance of men-only presbyters and administrators of the sacraments.⁴ However, this controversy has created factions within both confessional and academic communities researching the traditional teachings of the Church, the history of the early Church, and the possibilities of reform and inclusivism in the pastoral ministries of the Catholic Church. In this instance, it is necessary to undergo a detailed approach to the scholarship and movements associated with both traditional and reformed roles of women in the Church, analyzing the doctrinal stance regarding women, addressing the impact of women and feminist movements and theology, examining post-Vatican II encyclicals and teachings from Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, and examining the possible future for reform or change in the Church's stance on the role(s) of women.

Sexual ethics, on the other hand, is a diverse and multifaceted area of scholarship in comparison to the women's roles in the Church. With the emergence of Vatican II, and the advancement of medical science, ethics was transformed during the 1960s and 70s, particularly in regard to such concepts as contraception, abortion, capital punishment,

⁴ Please note that lay women and women religious can be Eucharistic ministers during the Mass, however, that does not mean that they are the "Ministers of the Sacraments." In fact, they are more like "administrators" of the Eucharist. The Minister of the Sacrament is the priest, who through the Holy Spirit and his ordination, has the power to administer the Sacraments. Only the priest, and in some few cases the deacon, can be the administrator of the sacraments.

assisted suicide and euthanasia, and marriage.⁵ Sexual ethics is composed of discussions on human sexual morality and the dynamic of sexual intercourse in the development of Catholic pedagogy.⁶ The social and cultural impact of these different aspects of Catholic sexual ethics has influenced political activism and policy making, seen extensively in the Church of the United States. However, traditionally the Catholic Church's stance has remained largely the same, but has progressed to encompass these specific ethical principles in Catholic moral teaching. The development of medical and scientific systems and practices regarding these issues has influenced Catholic theologians, activists, historians, church leaders, and feminist groups. Therefore, it is important to address the development of Catholic moral teaching regarding sexual ethics in order to come to a more cohesive understanding of the contemporary scholarship and practical application. Thus, this understanding of scholarship and application then become examples of this larger framework, relating to this broader and ever-increasing dialogue.

Since Vatican II's initial addressing of these issues, changing social norms and practices have expanded and influenced the teachings that are supported by the Church, especially when discussing sexual intercourse, cohabitation, and marriage. Due to this, Pope John Paul II spent much of his public addresses discussing what he called a "Theology of the Body," highlighting the scriptural and spiritual importance of conducting oneself in accordance with Catholic moral teaching, specifically in regard to

⁵ John W. O'Malley, "Opening the Church to the World," in *The New York Times*, (Oct. 10, 2012), accessed December 14, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/11/opinion/vatican-ii-opened-the-church-to-the-world.html>.

⁶ William E. May, "Catholic Sexual Ethics," *Veritas Series: Proclaiming the Faith in the Third Millennium* (New Haven: Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, 2001).

orthodox behavior concerning the sacrament of marriage and the subsequent consequences of the sexual union between man and woman, i.e. reproduction. Pope John Paul II's teachings regarding orthodox nuptial behavior, sexual interaction, contraception, abortion, and sex education established a precedent among Catholic educational institutions, families, and church organizations during the late 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and impacting the ones still continued today. Some of the more popular moral teachings have even crossed the religious spectrum, influencing components of mainline traditional Protestant ethics, as well.⁷

Yet, some opponents of Catholic moral teaching argue that the Catholic family life as etched out in John Paul II's theological principles creates a crippling socioeconomic factor for the large Catholic families that adhere to them, sending them into debt and poverty.⁸ Others decry the sociopolitical maneuverings of a papist and Roman plot to take over the central tenets of personal family life, describing the inappropriate role of Church in state governance.⁹ Also, the emergence of women and feminist movements blaming certain aspects of religion for its judgmental and interfering policies that inhibit the freedom of personal choice when concerning aspects of their own bodies established a social precedent that inhabits much of the outward secular policies that do not align with Church doctrine.¹⁰ Movements such as these against the political,

⁷ KET – PBS. *God in America: The Soul of a Nation*, <http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/view/>.

⁸ KET – PBS. “The Pill,” (2001), accessed on December 14, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peopleevents/e_church.html.

⁹ John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2003), 22-25.

¹⁰ Mary Daly, *Beyond God The Father*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 48-50.

social, and personal influence of the Church have impacted the reception of Church teachings among the larger populace. Some of the questions the Church is struggling with include how they can regain their influence among the faithful and provide what they consider to be proper moral guidance? How does it address these issues to maintain a closer dialogue with its adherents? It is necessary then to examine the overarching effects of John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* on the larger Catholic and non-Catholic populace, especially in the United States, and identify how Catholic intellectuals and lay activists have responded to Catholic moral teaching.

Each of these issues on their own are significant and can be discussed individually and at great length. However, each of these issues developed from the same social and religious concerns during the 1960s and 1970s, and are instrumental in the development and discussion of the other. They work well together as larger issues, and pertain to the Church's universal aspect and coherence to ministering to the wider world. Thus, it is the attempt of this thesis to bring together and highlight the dialogue, events, changes, and discussion regarding each individual issue in light of its social, moral, and theological background and connection to modern day reform movements in the Church. Therefore, as the thesis progresses, I will discuss each issue as it pertains to the modern world and its relationship to the Catholic Church's traditional doctrinal stance. For the reader to understand the importance of the issues after Vatican II, I will briefly discuss the rulings regarding each issue, and relate their importance and relevance to the discussion. These issues will ultimately be separated into coinciding chapters titled, "Women's Role in the Life of the Church" and "Catholic Sexual Ethics in Today's Modern World."

CHAPTER ONE: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

“The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing a deep transformation, women imbued with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling.”

- *Gaudium et spes*, Second Vatican Council, 1965¹¹

“Invited to leave everything to follow Christ, you, consecrated men and women, no longer define your life by family, by profession, or by earthly interests, and you choose the Lord as your only identifying mark. Thus you acquire a new family identity.”

- *Homily of Pope Saint John Paul II, Jubilee of Consecrated Life, February 2, 2000*¹²

As stated previously, the role of women in the life of the Catholic Church is a long and multifaceted entity, steeped in hundreds of years of religious tradition and ecumenical dialogue. Traditionally, the roles of women in the Catholic Church have always been guided by particular understandings of the teachings of the Bible and the early Church Fathers in accordance with the Magisterium, the official teaching body of the Church.¹³ Popes and other bishops, along with women religious and laypersons, have discussed the situation of women and their involvement and influence in Church matters, and have evaluated the distinct place of women in regard to the Sacrament of Marriage, the Family, and in Consecrated Life. However, just as these traditional roles of women have been promulgated and effectively championed, there has been a move towards women having a more active and involved role in the ministerial life of the Church,

¹¹ Fides Dossier, “The Role of Women in the Life of the Church,” *Fides News Service* (August 2008), 2.

¹² John Paul II, accessed December 14, 2016, <https://www.vocationnetwork.org/en/articles/show/460-consecrated-life-words-of-wisdom>.

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 27-29.

particularly in the Mass. This move has been led by countless men, women, and other church activists to install women as either deacons or priests, or both.

Yet, to even mention the involvement of women's in the Mass in such a way garners strong opposition from established Church leaders, theologians, and traditionalists. How then does the Church respond to these inquiries and questions on women involvement in the Church? Are women only allowed to be wives, mothers, and religious sisters? If not, then how do individuals go about challenging the Church's ideals of women?¹⁴ Is it possible to allow women into the permanent diaconate or the priesthood? It is my goal, therefore, to examine and analyze the traditional placement of women, and, engaging with relevant conversation partners, outline some possibilities for women's involvement in the ministerial work of the Church.

Summary of Church Doctrine on the Sacrament of Marriage

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* describes the vocation of marriage as “written in the very nature of man and woman as they come from the hand of the Creator.”¹⁵ Within the context of official teachings of the Catholic Church, marriage is a sacred covenantal bond that reflects the divine covenant between humanity and God. According to current Church teaching, the sacrament of marriage was established by Jesus Christ when he performed his first miracle at the Wedding Feast of Cana.¹⁶ Church doctrine recognizes this event as Jesus' confirmation of marriage as sacred and

¹⁴ Please note that though there are both women and men interested and invested in this challenge, the focus, however, is primarily on women not men.

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 400.

¹⁶ John 2: 1-12 RSV.

conforming to the will of God.¹⁷ Thus, within the context of official Catholic teachings, the marriage bond is a sacred vow that brings together two souls who are both striving for perfection and holiness in Jesus Christ, and unites them to become one being that reflects the inner sanctity and divine love of God the Father.¹⁸ In this divine context, the Church teaches that Adam (man) was created alone, but that from Adam, God created Eve (woman), to be his companion, his confidant, and eternal love.¹⁹ The Genesis creation account of man and woman recognizes and raises the position of women in the marriage bond.

Before Vatican II, Church doctrine made the case that the nature of the marriage bond placed women as the lower role, reflecting the belief that the wife should be truly submissive to her husband.²⁰ However, after Vatican II reforms of the marriage rite and the understanding of the relationship of husband and wife, the doctrine was adjusted so that the woman was equal with the man; equal in love, equal in faith, equal in partnership, and equal in all shared authority.²¹ The dynamic of relationship within the marriage bond itself shifted and changed to reflect a shared sense of recognition of the dignity and worth of the partner soul that has become one with the other. The official Church teachings understand this as a reflection of the relationship and love that Christ

¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 403.

¹⁸ Mark 10:8 RSV. This in itself reflects the biblical tradition of marriage, where Jesus himself describes marriage and the marriage bond as a sacred union, where “the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

¹⁹ Genesis 2: 18-2 RSV. In this creation account, woman is born from Adam.

²⁰ Margot Patterson, “Theology of Marriage Evolving Since Vatican II, Church Challenged by Richer Understanding of Sacrament,” *National Catholic Reporter* 38, no. 8 (Jan. 11, 2002): 6.

²¹ Ephesians 5: 31-32 RSV.

has for his Church. In this framework, Jesus is the Godhead, the husband of the Church, and guides his bride, the Church, in all holiness. She herself, the Church, as the bride of Christ, upholds his teachings with authority and equal measure before God the Father as the purveyor of truth.²²

Official Church doctrine goes on to argue that this dynamic of husband and wife is divinely reflected with Christ and his Church, establishing the covenantal nuptial bond as holy and without fault. The role of women in this regard then is to be faithful wives, and uphold their husband's path to holiness and perfection in God. The goal of the sacrament of marriage is to help each other achieve perfection in heaven, to be reunited with God their Creator. This is the goal of marriage, and the role of women within that marriage is to be the reflection of God to their husbands, to uphold them in truth and virtue, to be their support in times of hardship, but to also lead them towards a more fruitful relationship with God. Yet, in this official context, the role of women does not end with just being a faithful wife, but Church doctrine argues that with the marriage bond comes the full agreement and openness to have children, and to rear those children in the faith of the Church.²³ A woman's role does not end with marriage, but is rather just beginning. Marriage is only the first step, as a woman is called to the role of wife, so is she also called to the role of mother. For, it is argued, to enter the marriage bond is to enter an agreement with both the husband and God, to be fruitful and multiply for the procreation of the earth.²⁴

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 204, 218.

²³ *Ibid.*, 412-416.

²⁴ Genesis 1:28 RSV.

Summary of Church Doctrine on the Role of the Mother in Family Life

The doctrine of the Catholic Church argues that when a man and woman enter into the sacrament of marriage and profess their vows before God and his Church, they agree that they consent to and accept any and all children that God will grant them.²⁵ Thus, the central aspect of the family transcends as a Godly established unit that the Second Vatican Council describes as *Ecclesia domestica*, or the Domestic Church.²⁶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes that the element of the Christian family is one of the most sacred and important aspects of Christian life, for it is the beginning of Christian worship, teaching, and adherence to Sacred Scripture.²⁷ In this model, the Christian family is a reflection of the Holy Family and the central love found between Mary the Mother of God, Joseph her spouse, and the child Jesus.²⁸ The Church teaches that Mary's profound *fiat*, or "Yes," to God's call of motherhood, to rear his Son for the sake of salvation, is a model for all mothers, in the same way that Joseph's adherence and faith in God's divine plan caused him to bring Mary into his home and under his protection is a model for all fathers.²⁹ Official Church teachings place Mary as the epitome of Motherhood, and the supreme example the Church sets for all women called to be mothers. Mary's foundational answer to God's call is a reflection of the call all mothers answer when they enter the bond of marriage.

²⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 412.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 413.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Synod of Bishops: XIV General Assembly, "The Final Report of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father, Pope Francis," in *The Vocation and Mission of the family in the Church and in the Contemporary World* (Vatican City: 24 October 2015).

²⁹ Luke 1:38 RSV, Matthew 1:18-25 RSV.

For Catholic women who are mothers, official Catholic Church teachings call them to rear their children within the faith, a process of Christian education that begins with Baptism.³⁰ According to the Catholic Church, Baptism is an assertion by both parents to rear their child in the conduct of the Church, teaching them and guiding them in the truth of the Gospel message, showing them the divinely revealed message of Christian filial love, mercy, and forgiveness.³¹ However, the Church states that Baptism is only the beginning of the process of Christian teaching in the family, and must continue to grow in love and support through the guidance of the parents as they rear their children with right understanding.³² The mother, together with her husband, are the main providers for Christian teaching towards their child, thus a woman's role as mother is divinely significant in the life of the Church. Raising and teaching, healing and watching, guiding and protecting; these are the jobs of parents within the familial context of the Church. Without the mother or father, the Church cannot continue, for the family is the central body of teaching in Christian life. God is introduced into this loving relationship in the sacrament of marriage, and continues to work through them as their family continues to grow. This cycle continues even further when their children are grown and begin families of their own. Thus, in the life of the Church, motherhood is sacred and vastly important. Yet, women are not solely called to marriage or family life.

³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 319. Infant Baptism is a tradition within the Church that has foundations in the belief that all humans are born with the stain of original sin, as a result of the Fall of Adam and Eve from Grace. The belief is that Baptism washes away the stain of Original sin, making us pure in the light of Christ. We become adopted children of God, members of the divine family as brothers and sisters in Christ.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 319-320.

The Church teaches that it has a special place for those women who have decided to follow God in holiness through consecrated religious life.

Summary of Church Doctrine on Female Consecrated Life

Official Church doctrine describes consecrated life as “the state of life which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the Church, belongs undeniably to her life and holiness.”³³ It is presumed that women who enter the consecrated life do so with the faith that God has called them to a heightened state of holiness. The Church teaches that those who enter into consecrated life experience a more intimate connection to God and his call for Christian holiness, particularly through their vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity.³⁴ The profession of vows in consecrated life, particularly for women, is understood by many to be an outward expression by those faithful in the Church who feel that they are moved by the Holy Spirit to a more intimate lifestyle designed around an inward expression of God for the outward profession of God’s kingdom.³⁵ Those women who wish to profess the evangelical counsels usually choose to join a religious community that is designated around a specific Christian virtue as their outward expression of their Christian mission to love and serve others and proclaim the kingdom of God.

³³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 241. Consecrated life in this sense is an outward expression to the Church and their community to uphold lives of astute holiness in accordance with the Church. Those who wish to consecrate themselves make vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the so-called evangelical counsels. At this point, they make the conscious decision to give up their worldly possessions, titles, monies, and place themselves in the mercy of Christ and his Church. Their whole lives at this point on are solely designated for the propagation of faithful worship, prayer, and holiness.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 242-245.

These women are known to the outer world as nuns or religious sisters. The organization of consecrated peoples has a long history, and originally rose out of the East during the early centuries of the Church's foundations.³⁶ These early centuries saw the formation of communities dedicated to certain professions of the Gospel message, and were committed to living lives of holiness, and the Church saw fit to enable many of these groups to form institutions guided by the Church's teachings.³⁷ Many of these institutions still exist today and many were added as the centuries wore on, including but not limited to, the Benedictine sisters, Order of St. Clare, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Sisters of Mercy, and so on.³⁸ Each of these religious organizations profess to be centered and guided around specific Christian virtues, and are educated around these virtues and in professions that are designed to help proliferate their message of charity, mercy, and forgiveness. In fact, many of these virtues such as charity, mercy, and faith, become the driving forces behind religious involvement in the outer lives of lay followers.

Before Vatican II, the dynamic of female religious life was based around the sacrifice of the individual, severing ties to earthly and secular life, and entering into secluded communities and convents designed around the close, communal encounter of Christ.³⁹ Female religious entering into these convents and religious communities gave up all earthly possessions, and so wore habits, designed to enhance personal modesty and

³⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 243.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 241-243.

³⁸ Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, "Religious Orders," *Theology Library*, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://theolibrary.shc.edu/orders.htm>.

³⁹ Institute on Religious Life, "What is Cloistered Life?" (2016), accessed Dec. 14, 2016, <http://www.cloisteredlife.com/>.

sacrifice as an outward physical sign of their devotion to God and their profession of poverty.⁴⁰ Often women religious orders were designed around a particular profession that allowed them to emulate their profession to live out the Gospel message and proclaim God's kingdom.⁴¹ This led to the development of Catholic schools, universities, hospitals, nursing homes, and orphanages becoming more active in the communities in which the nuns lived, though they still maintained strict observance of their professed vows, rituals, and lifestyles. Women religious then upon entering the convent or order were trained in professions of caretakers, teachers, and nurses so that their order's mission of sharing Christ's saving love and mercy could be fulfilled.⁴²

However, the Church fathers involved in the Second Vatican Council decided that these efforts were not enough in the changing lives of Catholics during the 1960s and 70s.⁴³ The Church fathers felt that these jobs the women religious had were not enough, and should establish a closer, more intimate connection to the people. Therefore, the council decided that religious orders, especially those who did not have an outward expression of ministry, such as teaching, should become more readily available to the public, as they were all called to Christian mission and discipleship.⁴⁴ The emergence of the Second Vatican Council saw an increase in orthopraxis by religious sisters and nuns as they entered the outward community. An even larger change was the Council's call for religious sisters to dress more like those on the streets, and become more approachable to

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Pope Paul VI, "Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life," in *Perfectae Caritatis* (Vatican City: October 28, 1965).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

the laity they ministered to, especially to those who were not necessarily Catholic.⁴⁵ This dynamic shift of religious life from a cloistered communal lifestyle of prayer to an outward expression of ministerial love and support through teaching, nursing, and care for the disenfranchised allows for a more personal connection to Christ in the lives of those these women help to guide and change. This has become a role for women within the Church who do not feel they are called to be married, but wish to have a profession that allows them to become connected to the outward community and share in the Gospel message of Christ's love and mercy.

What else is there?

Traditionally, wife, mother, and religious sister or nun are the standard roles the Church has to offer for women, with the exception of the generous single life where women do not profess religious vows, but remain as members of the laity who feel that God is calling them to live lives of celibacy as single women within the life of the Church.⁴⁶ The Church does not have any other main roles for women in the hierarchy of the Church. However, this absence or limitation of roles has garnered a large response by many men and women faithful who feel that there should be an option for women to enter

⁴⁵ Ibid. The Council Fathers saw the changing of attitudes regarding religious activity within the world outside their cloistered and closed communities as a necessary component to ministerial outreach. The ability for nuns, religious sisters, and brothers to become more involved in the ministries within their own communities saw an increase in entrance into religious orders. Also, the changing of regulations regarding the wearing of habits allowed for the religious sisters to become more approachable to lay community members, as well as the poor and disenfranchised and non-Catholic individuals and families within their communities.

⁴⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981).

Catholic seminary as candidates for the priesthood and permanent diaconate.⁴⁷ Yet, there are none within the Church today. Why is this? In the modern memory of the Church, there have never been ordained women in the priesthood or the diaconate.⁴⁸ Primarily, the Church has taught that “only a baptized man validly receives sacred ordination,” meaning only men can be ordained as priests or deacons.⁴⁹ The reasoning is that because Jesus only chose men to be his apostles, and the apostles likewise only chose men to succeed them in their ministry, then only men, based on this sacred tradition and example, can be ordained.⁵⁰ The Magisterium has declared that they are bound by the sacred example of Christ in this instance.⁵¹

However, this reasoning has brought much controversy to the Church. Largely, many scholars and lay activists, particularly since the turn of the century, believe that this tradition is outdated and sexist, and a product of the misogynistic and patriarchal attitudes of the early and medieval Church. They argue that the Church, as it approaches a new era and embraces life in the new millennium, should be embracing of equal representation in the ministerial offices of the Church. To further their arguments, some Catholics have used the example of some Protestant churches as Christian denominations who began

⁴⁷ Judy Roberts, “Clearing the Air on Women Deacons: What Is — and Isn’t — Possible,” *National Catholic Register* (June 2016).

⁴⁸ Roman Catholic Women Priests, (2016), accessed January 17, 2017, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/>. There are numerous women movements who argue that they are should be allowed into the priesthood. Some, such as the RCWP have argued that they have validly been ordained in the Roman Catholic Church. However, it should be noted that *officially* the Roman Catholic Church, under the rule of the Pope, does not accept, approve, or acknowledge women priests at this current time.

⁴⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 394.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

ordaining large scores of women in the 1970s.⁵² Yet, continuously, the official answer of the Church is no, that the Church cannot break tradition, as it was sacredly established by Christ. However, in June 2016, Pope Francis established a commission to study the issue and possible inclusion of women in the diaconate, appointing six men and six women, as well as charging several renowned biblical scholars to actually address the real-life issue.⁵³ Yet, this still leaves us with questions. What are the arguments for female clergy and deacons? Is there any biblical foundation for female deacons? What led to Pope Francis calling this commission? How do Church officials feel about it? Is it plausible to have women deacons? If so, does this open the cause for women priests?

Arguments for Women Clergy: A Look Into Feminist Theology

Even though what I have discussed so far are the roles prescribed by the Church for women, they are still only the Church's official stances on women's involvement. However, as is common knowledge within and outside the Church, both men and women do not all adhere to the traditional, prescribed rank and file ways of the Church. For many, the rules of the Church do not hold true. Some do not view marriage as particularly binding, resulting in separation, adultery, or divorce, as seen in rising divorce rates.⁵⁴ Others do not find it even a viable way of life. Some people believe that the monogamous

⁵² Patricia M. Y. Chang, "Female Clergy in the Contemporary Protestant Church: A Current Assessment," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 4 (1997): 565.

⁵³ Cindy Wooden, "Pope Francis Sets Up Commission On Women Deacons," *Catholic Herald*, August 2, 2016, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/08/02/pope-sets-up-commission-on-women-deacons/>.

⁵⁴ B. A. Robinson, "U.S. Divorce Rates for Various Faith Groups, Age Groups, & Geographic Areas," (July 2009), accessed January 17, 2017, http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm.

lifestyle of marriage inhibits their personal and social freedom, and so live life with one, or several different, sexual partners without the feeling of having to stay with them out of a sense of commitment.⁵⁵ Opposite of marriage, many men and women believe that a life of virginity and personal chastity offered by the Church's prescribed single life, does not allow them to have a close connection to God, or grant them a viable relationship with the Church universal.⁵⁶

Many women who do not find marriage attractive, or believe that they are called to a closer connection with God, believe that the religious options open to women, such as becoming a religious sister or nun, are part of an old tradition that does not embrace the cultural and social movement of empowering women to be the best they can be.⁵⁷ Polling data of Catholic men and women who feel this way, indicate that most believe that the Church is stuck in an era of patriarchy and masochism that refuses to become more gender inclusive, and some even go so far as to call the Church sexist.⁵⁸ Therefore, many men and women who see the Church as backwards, or living in the past, believe that the Church must now be open to change and reform, particularly by allowing women the ability and capacity to become either priests, deacons, or both. Due to this discontent,

⁵⁵ Anjani Chandra, William D. Mosher, and Casey Copen, "Sexual Behavior, Sexual Attraction, and Sexual Identity in the United States: Data From the 2006–2008 National Survey of Family Growth," *National Health Statistics Report* 36 (March 2011): 11-13, 17-21.

⁵⁶ Karl A. Schultz, "A Vibrant Vocation," *America* 214, no. 1 (January 2016): 1-2.

⁵⁷ Irene Linder, "Some Factors Influencing Women To Choose Church-Related Vocations: A Study In Occupational Sociology" (Ph. D. diss., University of Iowa, 1956), 1-12.

⁵⁸ Ari L. Goldman, "As Bishops Meet, Catholics Voice Differences With Church's Doctrine; Poll Finds Backing of Female Priests," *New York Times* (June 1992), accessed September 15, 2016, 1-4.

and the popular call for allowing women into the ordination rites of the Church, many theologians have attempted to address and understand the reasoning and possibilities around women ordination. Mary Jo Weaver, Simone St. Pierre, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Arlene Swidler, and Karen Torieson are a few examples of theologians who have attempted to address the possibilities around allowing women into the ordination process of the Catholic Church.

Mary Jo Weaver, a Catholic feminist theologian, discusses her arguments primarily in her book, *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Church Authority*. Her stance begins by addressing how the current Church exists in a state of sexism and provides unequal opportunity for women within the Church, though the Church has stated that men and women are granted the same opportunities by the nature of the dignity of their divine origins.⁵⁹ She discusses that the Second Vatican Council opened up an “age of renewal” within the authority structure of the Church, and argues that the Church should now incorporate women within the teaching and ministerial authority of the Church today.⁶⁰ Weaver identifies that the movement towards allowing Catholic women into the priesthood began during the 1970s in reaction to the majority of Protestant churches allowing women to be ordained as ministers, beginning with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious who actively pursued women’s rights during the early 1970s and the International Year of Women in 1975.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 109-110.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 110-112.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

Based upon the feminist ideology of equality between men and women that encompasses equal opportunity, Weaver upholds that the Church should reflect an identity of equality by incorporating women into the rite of ordination.⁶² She argues that the teaching of men-only priests reflects the selective interpretation of Scripture and the tradition of Jesus' example by selecting only men to follow him, and is purely a product of the patriarchal European feudal society that developed in the early centuries of the Church.⁶³ She states that the official standing on women's ordination is at best confused, and at worst inconclusive, identifying that the Biblical Commission states that Scripture leaves the option for female priests open, whereas the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith reportedly denies women ordination as scripturally impossible.⁶⁴ Her analysis indicates two areas of the Church's teaching authority on doctrine as incompatible, which further advances her argument and support for allowing female membership into the priesthood. Weaver also discusses how the development of women's groups within parish churches establishes a disconnect between female laity and Church authority, as the leadership among these women's groups are primarily priests and other men, which further exacerbates the lack of shared responsibility between men and women within official Church capacities.⁶⁵ It is because of this lack of shared responsibility that many women's rights activists founded certain women led groups to challenge the traditionally held views of women in the churches, especially the stance on

⁶² Ibid., 113.

⁶³ Ibid., 113-114.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 114-115.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 118-119.

women's ordination, such as the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) and the Grail Movement.⁶⁶

The NCCW was founded by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 1920 as a way to allow women a broader role within their local church communities, and to focus more energy on supporting the national, and larger global Church.⁶⁷ The early years of the NCCW saw an expanding focus on upholding Catholic teaching, while at the same time fighting for such avenues as female suffrage and equal rights for women.⁶⁸ They maintained their striving for equal rights and eventually succeeded with ratification of the 19th amendment to the Constitution.⁶⁹ Their goals, however, did not end there. Gradually their role expanded to give them focus in the succeeding decades as purveyors of equal rights for not only women, but also for the poor and marginalized, such as African Americans and the disenfranchised, which enabled them to be purveyors of social justice during the 1950s and 60s.⁷⁰ Though the NCCW largely focused on expanding the social and political rights of women and others, they still maintained a strict adherence to Catholic doctrine and teaching, especially in regard to ordained ministry.⁷¹ Other groups, such as the above mentioned Grail Movement, did not, and did change focus towards a more inclusive opportunity for women in Church life.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁶⁷ Jeanne Petit, "Organized Catholic Womanhood: Suffrage, Citizenship and the National Council of Catholic Women," *US Catholic Historian* 26, no. 1 (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008): 83-84.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 84-86.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 87, 90-95.

⁷¹ Ibid., 98-100.

The Grail Movement emerged in Holland in 1921 during the lay activist period of the pre-Vatican II era which focused on social collective action, especially in regard to helping the poor and disenfranchised, while also battling for the security of women's political and religious rights in a male dominated society.⁷² It moved and grew in numerous countries in Europe and settled in areas of Canada and the US.⁷³ The Grail Movement believed that the Western world was in a state of crises, both spiritually and culturally, and needed a new influx of religious revival to bring it back to a more Godly path.⁷⁴ Particularly, in the late 1920s and 30s, the group developed the ideology that lay women were the best tools and activists to inspire new trends in Catholic spirituality that did not focus on the male dominated ethos of Western Europe and the Americas, but instead embraced a new feminine spirituality.⁷⁵ The 1940s, 50s, and 60s saw a new emerging ideology that developed among the lay women of the movement, in the belief that women should take a more advanced role within the hierarchy of the Church, including priestly ministerial positions. Thus, eventually the Movement began to break away from dominant mainstream Catholic ideology, especially in regard to the priesthood and women's roles, and focused instead on a larger concern for allowing women the right to pastoral ministries.⁷⁶ Therefore, as the Grail Movement entered the new era created by

⁷² Alden V. Brown, "The Grail Movement to 1962: Laywomen and a New Christendom," *US Catholic Historian* 3, no. 3 (1983): 149.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 149-151.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 151-154.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 162-165.

the Second Vatican Council, it focused concern on women's ordination and women's role in liturgical ministries became the dominant factor among such groups.⁷⁷

However, Weaver acknowledges that what began as a women's rights group that supported women's involvement in the Church, the NCCW transformed into an organization that supported traditional Church teaching on female subordination and deference to men.⁷⁸ Yet, the Grail Movement transformed into a Catholic women's rights group that was focused on advocating for a more inclusive way for women to become involved in Church rites and ceremonies, which consequentially developed into a campaign in support of women ordination.⁷⁹ The dominant ideology among women's groups such as the Grail Movement, beginning in the 1960s, is the belief that today's world should promote and support the inclusivity of women within the pastoral and ministerial care of the parish church.⁸⁰ The involvement of women in church life, Weaver notes, is the primary goal of groups such as the Grail Movement, though they are opposed by other women's groups, like the NCCW.⁸¹ Even within the Church universal, there are numerous individuals and groups who are split regarding the Church's traditional doctrine on ordination. However, despite this opposition, Weaver highlights that the inclusivity of feminist theology should be the contemporary framework of a post-Vatican II Church, because it demonstrates a Catholic Church that incorporates the personalities and dignities of God's human creation.⁸² She establishes that this allows for

⁷⁷ Ibid., 165-166.

⁷⁸ Mary Jo Weaver, 119-120.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 125-127.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 150-155.

a universal Church that recognizes the Holy Spirit can call both men and women into pastoral ministry.⁸³

Simone St. Pierre similarly identifies the struggle for women to serve the Church in an official authoritative capacity. In her seminal work, *The Struggle to Serve*, St. Pierre agrees with Weaver's sentiments on allowing women the same opportunities as men within the priesthood, stating that women should be recognized and included into Church ministry because of their God-given gifts and talents, regardless of Church doctrine and their status as women.⁸⁴ St. Pierre recognizes that Vatican II created a universal reorganization of how Catholics viewed the Church as an institution.⁸⁵ Vatican II restructured popular thought of the Church away from the official organization of priests and bishops towards a recognition of the Church as structured around the Body of Christ, the members of the Church who are predominantly lay people.⁸⁶ St. Pierre establishes that this restructured understanding provided a greater focus on involvement in Church life, which during the 1960s and 70s, was primarily focused on men.⁸⁷ In turn, this focus allowed both men and women to come together and campaign for women's involvement in the pastoral ministry of the Church, namely the priesthood.⁸⁸ St. Pierre describes that the main focus of many of these activists was how the priesthood was not receiving as

⁸³ Ibid., 155-157.

⁸⁴ Simone St. Pierre, *The Struggle to Serve: The Ordination of Women in the Roman Catholic Church* (North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 1994), 93.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 94.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 94-95.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 95.

many male candidates as it had in the past, and that it was this decline in priests that should open up the opportunity for female priests.⁸⁹

However, St. Pierre identifies that the Church officially states women cannot become priests, and she argues against this, citing her home country of Canada to explain her reasoning.⁹⁰ She evaluates that there are fewer and fewer candidates entering the priesthood each year, and as a result, particularly in the rural communities of Canada, where there is a distinct lack of priests, which forces women in nursing and administrative roles in parishes to become the dominant voices of ministry to the poor, sick, and dying.⁹¹ She establishes that because of the lack of priests graduating from seminary, women should be allowed to enter seminary and make up for the lack of men.⁹² Besides this, though, St. Pierre indicates that women within the universal Church are denied active roles within the Church, believing that women are regularly passed over or ignored for leadership positions within parishes, which reflects her argument of there being a dominant theme of sexism within the larger Church.⁹³ St. Pierre describes that the situation of women in the Church reflects a larger theme of women being treated as secondary to men, or not having a particular opinion that counts or matters, citing the poor treatment of women by priests in family homes and the larger community.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Ibid., 95-96.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 96-97. The official Church document, *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*, describes this.

⁹¹ Ibid., 97-98.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 99.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Through analysis of several other feminist theologians, St. Pierre has concluded that the current understanding of Catholic priesthood reflects a larger Roman identity than that of a cohesive Christian identity, referring to the roles men assumed within the Christianized Roman Empire.⁹⁵ She explains that the structure of the lifestyle of the male celibate priesthood reflects the patriarchal denotation of men as the leaders and heads of household, which places women as subordinate and beneath the social and religious standing of men.⁹⁶ Thus, St. Pierre believes that in this post-Vatican II era that is supposed to reflect a period of spiritual renewal within the universal Church, the Vatican authorities should seriously consider the opportune advancement of the Church in the progressive new millennia by allowing women to make up for the lack of men entering seminary and steadily move away from what she considers its sexist and misogynistic past.⁹⁷

Likewise, Rosemary Radford Reuther contributes to the discussion by highlighting several examples of women's ordination within the Catholic context, and searches for validity among the dynamics of Catholic congregations, showing how valid ordination is subjective, and can be interpreted differently according to one's perspective. Reuther argues that the reasoning behind allowing women into the ordination process of the Church can be found through careful analysis of Scripture, and is exemplified by the fact that most Protestants now ordain women in official ministerial capacities.⁹⁸ Her

⁹⁵ Ibid., 101. The term "Roman" in this case indicates the historical context of the Catholic Christian Church.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 101-102.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Rosemary Radford Reuther, "Pope's Letter Ups Ante on Ordaining Women," *National Catholic Reporter* 30, no. 33 (1994): 1.

argument is that Protestants have found women's ordination as not only based on Scripture, but also as one of the only ways for Christians to maintain full faithfulness to the Gospels, by having a gender-inclusive ministry.⁹⁹ To correlate this, Reuther states that the crises caused by fewer men entering into seminary means that more and more, Catholic Bishops will have to appoint theologically trained lay people, often women, to chaplaincies and parish ministries that will cause ordinary Catholics to be confronted with the idea of women in leadership and ministerial positions.¹⁰⁰ Reuther discusses that the crises then becomes even more circumstantial as the controversy over who can perform sacraments enters the public thought.¹⁰¹ Her argument places a contradiction within the Church's leadership, particularly over who is best suited to lead the faithful in ministry and the sacraments. It creates a chasm within theological principles that must be addressed, particularly with her research regarding the situation of Roman Catholic Womenpriests.

To support her discussion on the gender-inclusiveness of public ministry that she believes the Catholic Church should take part of, she identifies a group of individuals who argue that women's ordination is both valid within the Church and within the confines of Apostolic succession. In an article written in 2010, Reuther identifies a movement among the Catholic faithful called "Roman Catholic Womenpriests," that is built upon women who believe that their ordination within the Roman Catholic Church is

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

valid.¹⁰² She describes that in 2002, several male bishops of the Roman Catholic Church ordained seven women on a boat in the Danube River, and then ordained some of them as bishops, who in turn ordained other women and some men.¹⁰³ Reuther reports that their official statement reads:

The ordination of Roman Catholic Womenpriests are valid because of our unbroken line of apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic church. The principle consecrating Roman Catholic male bishop who ordained our first women bishops with a line of unbroken apostolic succession within the Roman Catholic church in full communion with the pope.¹⁰⁴

However, according to Pope Benedict XVI in 2008, the then pope of the Catholic Church, and to official Church teaching, the bishops and womenpriests who participated in the consecration on the Danube River were immediately excommunicated *latae sententiae*, and no longer in communion with the Catholic Church and the pope in Rome.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, how can the Roman Catholic Womenpriests believe that their congregation and movement exists within the confines of the Church's teaching? Reuther concurs, and undergoes an investigation of the viability of Apostolic succession. She states that not only does the Catholic Church hold this teaching, but also the Orthodox, most Anglican, and some Lutheran churches hold fast to this ideal.¹⁰⁶ How then, Reuther

¹⁰² Rosemary Radford Reuther, "Two Views of Valid Women's Ordination Emerge," *National Catholic Reporter* (Sept. 2010): 16.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*; see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 368.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 16-17. The idea of Apostolic Succession is held by these institutions because of their shared liturgical and theological past, coming from the same strain of Church authority that existed before the separation of the East and West Christian Churches.

argues, does this theological stipulation hold true?¹⁰⁷ She identifies that Apostolic Succession was claimed by the early Church in the 2nd century to affirm that the Church's teaching descended from Jesus, to the apostles, and to the churches they established as they worked their public ministries, and was not originally attached to bishops and their successors.¹⁰⁸ However, according to Reuther, the identity of bishop to priest succession did develop later on and was codified into canon law in the 12th century.¹⁰⁹ Yet, Reuther identifies this is a major problem, because many modern historians do not believe in Apostolic Succession as a true avenue of Christianity's spread, and argue against this teaching.¹¹⁰ Therefore, she identifies another what she considers to be another "valid" ordination attempt that some communities have taken up.

Reuther discusses that this other valid attempt is found in the writings of Hippolytus of Rome in the third century, where the community elected a priest and laid hands on him, which is opposite of today's understanding of the bishop ordaining the priest.¹¹¹ Reuther describes that the Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community of San Diego ordained such a woman in this way, using the pastoral guidance of a Roman Catholic Womenpriest bishop, but ordaining a woman by having the entire community to lay hands on her.¹¹² In the eyes of this community, and to Reuther, both of these are valid forms of ordination. Reuther argues that the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement and the Mary Magdalene Catholic Community are equally clear that ordaining women is

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 16, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

“an expression of the true nature of Christianity as a faith community that vindicates the full and equal humanity of women and men.”¹¹³ She argues that refusing to ordain women to the priesthood because they cannot represent Christ is wrong, and that their ordinations are both apostolic in their roots by upholding early Christianity and are vibrant ways to express the Church today.¹¹⁴ Reuther believes that the example of these two organizational movements are products of the abilities of men and women faithful to express their discontent with official Church teachings, a dialogue that can trace itself back to the Second Vatican Council.¹¹⁵

However, other theologians, despite the popular movement behind women’s ordination to the priesthood, cannot reconcile the Church’s teachings and traditions with the calls for women entering the priesthood. Even though many Protestant churches have incorporated women into leading ministerial positions, theologians such as Rev. Haye Van der Meer, SJ, cannot see the same for the Catholic Church. Van der Meer wrote his book, *Women Priests in the Catholic Church?* in reaction to the popular movements that called for an inclusion of women in the priesthood. Van der Meer describes several reasons for why women cannot be priests, but highlights his reasoning based on Scripture. Primarily, according to Van der Meer, women cannot be priests because in the Gospels, Jesus did not choose women as his apostles, and thus did not grant them power to confer sacraments.¹¹⁶ Van der Meer describes that, though Jesus instrumentally

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Haye van der Meer, *Women Priests in the Catholic Church?* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), 10-11.

challenged the societal norms of his era, and associated himself closely with several women followers, he did not specifically appoint them in his inner circle, and thus did not give them the same spiritual authority as the apostles.¹¹⁷

He also highlights the writing of the early Church fathers, such as Jerome and Ambrose, who describe that women are unable to become priests because their status as women inhibits their capacity to reflect the nature of Christ to their congregation, which theologian Thomas Aquinas describes is due to their gender and appearance.¹¹⁸ Jerome and Ambrose, according to Van der Meer, detail that women are equal among God's creatures, but that they do not have the capabilities of purveying Christ to their respective congregations.¹¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas explains that because Christ himself was male, then only men can accurately portray Christ at the altar. Women are unable to be *in persona Christi capitis* because they do not have the correct anatomy to accurately represent Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass.¹²⁰ Though Van der Meer dismantles the opportunity for women priests in his understanding of Catholic doctrine, he does not touch on the possibility for women deacons. Due to many traditional Catholic theologians focusing on polemics against allowing women into the priesthood, many theologians have turned to dialogue concerning admittance for women into the permanent diaconate.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 11-12.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 76-79. Van der Meer describes that Thomas Aquinas discusses the sexuality of women in his work, *Origins*, and postulates that women cannot be priests because they cannot reflect the maleness of Christ, who the priest is supposed to represent.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid. The phrase, "in persona Christi capitis" is Latin for "in the person of Christ the head," meaning that the priest at the altar during Mass becomes the spiritual representation of Christ during the sacrificial offering. Literally, he acts as Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass.

Arguments For Women in the Diaconate

Arlene Swidler and Karen Torieson are two of several theologians who believe that there is another option left open for women that does not inspire the ire of traditional, Catholic theologians and others who do not believe priesthood is a viable option for women's involvement in the Church. This other option is the permanent diaconate, a role in Church life that has also traditionally been filled by men. However, they argue that the role can be open to the inclusion of women based on a number of key reasons. Swidler states in her co-edited work with Virginia Ratigan, *A New Phoebe: Perspectives on Roman Catholic Women and the Permanent Diaconate*, that women held the position of deacon during the early years of the Church, and that it was only after three or four centuries that the tradition of all male deacons was made official.¹²¹ Her evidence is found in Romans 16:1, where Paul refers to a deacon, Phoebe, in the church at Cenchreae in Corinth.¹²² She establishes that the word used in the original Greek, *diakonos* – deacon – was used in the early church to denote both men and women, and only later was the female version of the term, *diakonissa*, developed to distinguish between liturgical roles among men and women to better fit the established gender norms.¹²³

Another Bible passage that Swidler uses to support her argument is 1 Timothy 3:8-12.¹²⁴ The passage describes how deacons must conduct themselves, and specifically

¹²¹ Arlene Swidler, "Women Deacons: Historical Highlights," in *A New Phoebe: Perspectives on Roman Catholic Women and the Permanent Diaconate*, ed. Virginia Ratigan and Arlene Swidler (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 81. Romans 16:1 reads, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae."

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

mentions women in the denoted deacons' description.¹²⁵ Using these two passages, Swidler compares them to early writings of Origen and John Chrysostom, and uses their interpretations of the two passages to support her arguments for the installation of women in the diaconate. Origen, writing in the early third century, wrote that the Phoebe passage meant that women had been ordained into the early Church hierarchy, and were thus part of the tradition of the Church.¹²⁶ John Chrysostom concurred with Origen's account of Phoebe, but took it a step further by stating that Paul's personal recognition of Phoebe, along with his description of deacons, places female deacons as an actual institution in the early Church, and were meant to remain within its hierarchy as they were installed by an apostle.¹²⁷

Based on this evidence, Swidler argues that women in the diaconate have existed since the early Church, and remained as part of it for a couple centuries, but at some point women were denied access to the Church office as male officials gained prominence because of the legalization of Christianity in the Roman Empire.¹²⁸ Therefore, she argues that women should be allowed to be ordained as permanent deacons because the Bible provides evidence, and early Church Fathers also knew of and supported the institution of women as deacons.¹²⁹ Karen Torieson likewise establishes the connection of women

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 82-83.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 83-84.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 84-86. Christianity was legalized within the Roman Empire under the Emperor Constantine with the Edict of Milan.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 86-89.

deacons in the early Church, and the establishment of separate offices to better institutionalize gender roles during the later years of the Roman Empire.¹³⁰

Torieson corroborates Swidler's argument regarding the gendered term of *diakonos*, stating that since the early Church, women had held local and regional religious offices, including that of the deacon.¹³¹ She asserts that during the first and early second century women had a strong authoritative place in the early Church, but by the late third century, that dynamic shifted as the Roman Empire rose in prominent power, and the persecution of Christians increased.¹³² Due to the shift, women became less empowered, and took on more household roles while men stepped in to take over the local and regional churches.¹³³ Torieson discusses that the presupposition of public offices as masculine roles and the focused submission of women in public society changed the perception of religious officials, which fundamentally shaped how women and men were perceived in the diaconate as leaders of the Church.¹³⁴ Her argument states that because Jesus' ministry created equal opportunity for men and women in the early Church, and that this dynamic only changed because of the shift of gender norms of the expanding Roman Empire, then the contemporary Church should include the reception of women into the permanent diaconate.¹³⁵ Based on these arguments, how has the modern Church responded to calls to the women in the diaconate?

¹³⁰ Karen Torieson, *When Women Were Priests* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 4-5.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Conclusions – The Future of the Church

As discussed, the Church has traditionally held three roles for women within Church life: marriage and motherhood, consecrated life, and single life. The Church has stated that each of these are a woman's individual vocation, their call that God designed for them to get them into Heaven.¹³⁶ However, since the emergence of the reform movements, and the greater chance for lay women to participate in the Mass as lectors, altar servers, Eucharistic ministers, and cantors since the closing of the Second Vatican Council, many theologians have championed for an even larger opportunity for women to participate in the life of the Church. This particularly meant allowing women to become ordained ministers. Feminist theologians Weaver, St. Pierre, and Reuther discussed that many modern women both in and out of the Church believe that the Church should fully enter the modern world and allow women into ministerial positions. They describe that the Church should leave behind its misogynistic past and become a more opportunistic, gender-inclusive institution by allowing women into the priesthood, thus becoming more "equal."

However, Church theologians, like Fr. Van der Meer, insist that the Church cannot allow women into the priesthood because it goes against Christ's example established in the Gospels. Since Jesus only chose men, and the disciples themselves only chose men, then because of that example, Van der Meer argues, only men are to be allowed into the priesthood. Officially, the Church has supported this reasoning by issuing a document called *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the*

¹³⁶ James Socias, *Vocations and the Universal Call to Holiness* (Midwest Theological Forum, 2015), 21-22.

Ministerial Priesthood, which forbids women from entering the priesthood.¹³⁷ Yet, in reaction to this, other theologians, such as Swidler and Torieson, have discussed the possibility of allowing women into the diaconate. Their arguments are based around both Biblical evidence and writings by the early Church Fathers where female deacons were both known and accepted. Each have corroborated that it was historical events in the expanding Roman Empire after Christianity's legalization that proscribed standard gender norms for presbyters and deacons. Therefore, it is evident that this discussion, which emerged from the Second Vatican Council, has influenced the modern Church's response.

Through careful analysis of Church teachings and the studying of arguments by both lay and Church theologians, an understanding of the situation regarding women's ordination can be made. Currently, the Church will not allow women to become priests, and probably will not in the next century or so, for many reasons, despite the broadening of dialogue in the wake of Vatican II. Predominantly, the large majority of the Roman Curia can be described as very traditional and conservative, and often are of the opinion to maintain and uphold traditional values and ways of thinking. However, particularly in this instance, much of the Church's teachings are steeped in what it calls "Sacred Tradition," and will not deviate away from it in any circumstance. To deviate from these traditions would mean that the current Magisterium would have to go against hundreds of years' worth of teaching, undermining the work of Church scholars before. At the current

¹³⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood* (Vatican City: Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1976).

time, I do not believe the Church is ready for that, and I believe that the document banning women from the priesthood is evidence of that.¹³⁸ However, it is possible that allowing women into the diaconate can soon be a reality for the Church. Women deacons had existed since the Church's very inception, and were addressed by such key members as Paul of Tarsus and John Chrysostom. The case for women deacons has even further advanced in the modern Church by Pope Francis in June 2016, when he established a commission to study the possible inclusion of women in the diaconate.¹³⁹ He appointed six men and six women, as well as several biblical scholars, to formulate a response to the question.¹⁴⁰ Thus, in this understanding of the conversation, it is found that the current Church is more open to the inclusion of women in the Mass as deacons, and may possibly allow them to enter the seminary for formation within the next century. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that Vatican II has indeed opened and expanded the possibility for dialogue among issues related to women within the Roman Catholic Church.

¹³⁸ This refers to *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*.

¹³⁹ Cindy Wooden, "Pope Francis sets up commission on women deacons," *Catholic Herald* (August 2, 2016), online article, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/08/02/pope-sets-up-commission-on-women-deacons/>.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER TWO: CATHOLIC SEXUAL ETHICS IN TODAY’S MODERN WORLD

“The most basic principle of the Christian moral life is the awareness that every person bears the dignity of being made in the image of God. He has given us an immortal soul and through the gifts of intelligence and reason enables us to understand the order of things established in his creation. God has also given us a free will to seek and love what is true, good, and beautiful. Sadly, because of the Fall, we also suffer the impact of Original Sin, which darkens our minds, weakens our wills, and inclines us to sin. Baptism delivers us from Original Sin but not from its effects—especially the inclination to sin, concupiscence. Within us, then, is both the powerful surge toward the good because we are made in the image of God, and the darker impulses toward evil because of the effects of Original Sin.

“But we should always remember that Christ's dying and rising offers us new life in the Spirit, whose saving grace delivers us from sin and heals sin's damage within us. Thus we speak of the value, dignity, and goal of human life, even with its imperfections and struggles. Human life, as a profound unity of physical and spiritual dimensions, is sacred. It is distinct from all other forms of life, since it alone is imprinted with the very image of its Creator.”

- *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* (2016)¹⁴¹

Just as Vatican II opened dialogue to encompass women’s ordination, so too did it open discussion on sexual ethics within the universal Church. Before Vatican II, Christian morality and ethics focused on the guidance and correct understanding of moral actions by individuals through broad explanations.¹⁴² The Church depended on its priests to dispense Catholic moral teaching within their congregations through their sermons, as well in the theology courses taught in Catholic schools.¹⁴³ However, these teachings, by both priests and nuns, focused primarily on laying out the dogma and doctrine, stating in

¹⁴¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Morality,” (2016), accessed December 30, 2016, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/morality/>. This quote is references the Catholic Church’s moral understanding of the dignity of the human person.

¹⁴² Gerard Mannion, “After the Council: Transformations in the Shape of Moral Theology and ‘the Church to Come’,” *New Blackfriars* 90, no. 1026 (March 2009): 232-237.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

black and white terms what was Godly and what was sinful.¹⁴⁴ It was not until after Vatican II, with the succession of the then Bishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyla, to the papacy, that the Church truly entered an era of what it considered as focused concern on human morality.¹⁴⁵ During the papacy of Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Church established a more detailed and focused dialogue on Christian moral teaching that outlined the Church's position regarding multiple areas of doctrine, including Christian marriage, sexual purity, contraception, and abortion, among others. Ultimately, these new teachings were made known in Catholic schools and sexual education programs across the globe, as well as in church catechetical classes, and other parish information courses. The result then, of these changing conceptions regarding sexual morality influenced a rise in discussion and dialogue on these issues and how they should be lived, acknowledged, and addressed in the ordinary Catholic Christian life. In this chapter, I will discuss Pope John Paul II's teachings and their relationship to the modern Catholic Church. I will discuss several different scholars and theologians' discussions, arguments, and concerns regarding the major issues within Christian morality and ethics, and how they have developed since the closing of the Second Vatican Council.

What is *Theology of the Body*?

Pope John Paul II, on September 5, 1979, less than a year after his election, became the first pope to use his Wednesday General Audiences in St. Peter's Square as systematic sessions of catechesis from which he expressed a message of Christian

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 237-240.

¹⁴⁵ Jane Barnes and Helen Whitney, "John Paul II: His Life and Papacy," *PBS: KET Frontline* (2014), accessed December 30, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pope/etc/bio.html>.

morality.¹⁴⁶ This series of catechetical instruction ended over five years later after only a few interruptions, on November 28, 1984, and became a central component of the Bishop's papal legacy.¹⁴⁷ Originally, Pope John Paul II had been working on his compilation as a book to be titled *Man and Woman He Created Them*, but his ascension to the papacy interrupted this process.¹⁴⁸ Instead, his foundational work became a series of 129 lectures on human dignity and sexuality in God's plan for humanity. His weekly sermons became largely influential amongst Catholic theologians, teachers, and schools as they taught a return to the basic principles of Christian ethics, human dignity, and sexuality.¹⁴⁹ His teaching became so influential in the wider Catholic Church that it even was fundamental to the education process of young Catholics in the different Catholic school systems across the world.¹⁵⁰

Pope John Paul II's moral teaching became the foundation for post-Vatican II moral theology. His moral reasoning and descriptive analogies were highly praised by Vatican officials in the Roman Curia, and were welcomed enthusiastically by the different Catholic bishops across the world, especially in the United States and in parts of

¹⁴⁶ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II's 'Man and Woman He Created Them'* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2007), 7.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Bishop Karol Wojtyla, as he was known then, had been working on his book *Man and Woman He Created Them* as a response to the rising concerns of humanity on what he considered to be sexual immorality during the late 1960s and early 70s. However, by the time of his election to the papacy in October 1978, his work had not been completed, and thus became part and parcel to his larger ministry as Bishop of Rome and Shepherd of the Universal Church.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

¹⁵⁰ Silvio J. Fonseca-Martinez, "Pope John Paul II's Understanding of Education in Moral Values and Its Application to Catholic Secondary Education in Present-Day Nicaragua" (Ph. D. diss., Catholic University of America, 2011), i-iii.

central and northern Africa.¹⁵¹ The context of the Pope's sexual morality greatly impacted the Church's stance and relationship towards teaching and preaching to the multitude of adherents across the globe, especially when discussing the dignity of the human person, concepts on sexual purity, marriage, contraception, and abortion. Pope John Paul II's moral teachings established a structure of Catholic theology that he believed fought against the culture of the 1970s and 80s, which he thought promoted attitudes of sexual impurity that led Catholics astray from Church teaching. His *Theology of the Body* was his attempt to reconnect Catholics across the globe to the mother Church by, in his opinion, providing a moral instruction based in what he considered to be "religious truth."

Theology of the Body on Marriage in the Church

Pope John Paul II began his catechetical teachings by explaining his views of how humans are a spiritual reflection of the invisible God.¹⁵² However, in this spiritual reflection of the divinity of the soul of humanity is the physical reflection of human sexuality, and the purpose for "male and female he created them."¹⁵³ John Paul II establishes a connection between humanity and the body, the physical apparatus God created for men and women to procreate. The joining of man and woman in sexual union is expressed in the Catholic sentiment as a biblical and sacramental union that reflects the glory of God, and the relationship which God established between Himself and

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained*, 109-110.

¹⁵³ Genesis 1: 27 RSV. This is in reference to the Christian creation account in Genesis that depicts man and woman as partners for each other, to bear children and be fruitful so as to populate God's earth.

humanity.¹⁵⁴ Marriage then becomes a sacred union, a covenantal bond that reflects not only the sacred bond between a man and a woman, but also the relationship that God has with his Church. Thus marriage, in this view, is a sacred bond between man and woman, and is expressed as the true practice of moral sexual conduct in the orthodox doctrine of the Church.

However, Pope John Paul II reiterates the traditional message of the Catholic Church that the sexual union of man and woman can only be allowed through the Sacrament of Marriage.¹⁵⁵ Before a man and a woman can enter into the marriage bond, they must maintain a lifestyle of sexual purity, living a chaste moral life.¹⁵⁶ John Paul II argues that living a pure life constitutes living a life that respects the dignity of your body as created by God and deserving of respect; purity “is the glory of the human body before God.”¹⁵⁷ The Pope makes the case that in order for one to maintain moral purity, sexual purity must become first and foremost in a good Christian’s life, where the denial of lust and sexual impulses such as masturbation and pornography are ignored, and sexual intercourse is saved for a loving relationship between husband and wife.¹⁵⁸ Christian celibacy, a term meaning to refrain from sexual intercourse of any kind, becomes reinforced as a Church practiced institutional force of remaining pure for the redemption

¹⁵⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 400-403. The second edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was fully formed in 1997 after Pope John Paul II’s series on the *Theology of the Body* was complete. Its current form is heavily influenced by Pope John Paul II, and is reflection of his moral teachings and guidance as the head of the Church’s Magisterium.

¹⁵⁵ West, *Theology of the Body*, 302.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 253-256.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

of Christ, and paired with abstinence, the chaste living of a man or woman before marriage, become attuned to the living example of the Christian life.¹⁵⁹ Even though the Pope has given instruction on how to live a proper moral Christian life before marriage, there are still stipulations that are established within the sanctity of marriage that are designed to further establish proper moral teaching.

Pope John Paul II's teachings regarding moral marriage extend from Pope Paul VI's encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*. Pope Paul VI wrote, "The Church, nevertheless, in urging men to the observance of the precepts of the natural law, which it interprets by its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marriage act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life."¹⁶⁰ John Paul II expounded upon this central teaching and enforced that because the nuptial union of husband and wife in the conjugal bond makes them one flesh, then the marriage is open to the possibility of new life, welcoming God's gift of procreation and call to populate the earth.¹⁶¹ In this openness and willingness for children resides the moral teaching against contraception. Contraception, according to the Catholic Church, prohibits the true joining of man and woman in the marriage bond, establishing a false connection. It also is understood to inhibit and go against God's plan for man and woman to procreate, and bring life into the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 337-339. According to Christopher West's commentary on Church doctrine, celibacy is the refraining by Christian men to never enter into an immoral, or impure, relationship with a woman before marriage. Abstinence is another term denoted for both sexes to refrain from non-marital sexual action.

¹⁶⁰ Pope Paul VI, "Observing the Natural Law," *Humane Vitae*, 11. By this, marriage must, at each and every sexual union of husband and wife, be open to the possibility of having children. This means that there should never be any form of male or female contraception used during sexual intercourse.

¹⁶¹ West, *Theology of the Body*, 524-526.

world.¹⁶² Thus official Catholic moral teaching places contraception as an invalidation of the marriage sacrament, and an immoral practice.¹⁶³

Connecting Purity of Soul with Purity of Body

Individual purity becomes the sole objective for Catholic catechesis among both students and adults, and focuses on establishing a wholesome connection of purity of soul with purity of body.¹⁶⁴ Catholic teaching regarding humanity being made in the image of God was one of the larger tenets in John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, particularly in how it was portrayed in the public context and media outlets of news channels, especially in countries where news stations were given more specific freedoms to report, such as in America.¹⁶⁵ A majority of Catholic action towards purity of the body in accordance with Pope John Paul II's teachings has been a reaction towards the secular public's concepts regarding human sexuality, such as pre-marital sex, contraception, masturbation, and the proliferation of pornography, as being okay within the larger context of the global populace.¹⁶⁶ However, such proliferations were taught against within the context of Catholicism.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 570-571.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Katharine Hennessey, "Education as Formation: Virtue Ethics and Catholic Education," (Ph. D. diss., University of California, Berkley, 2013), i.

¹⁶⁵ Genesis 1: 27 RSV. The delegation of the human spirit as reflecting the divinity of God created a connection between spirit and body. A person's body came to be recognized as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a home for Christ who lived in us (Galatians 2: 20). A person's body must then remain pure of sin and defilement, which was caused by a reoccurrence of sexual impurity perpetrated by non-marital sexual acts such as masturbation, pornography, and pre-marital sexual intercourse.

¹⁶⁶ May, "Catholic Sexual Ethics," 20-28.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

For example, Catholic school systems and catechetical formation classes began teaching programs that established a firm connection of moral sexuality as being within the confines of Holy Matrimony. It was taught that pre-marital sex violated the relationship between humans and God by creating a rift in the true purpose of the sexual union, that of creating life through the marriage bond.¹⁶⁸ It was also taught that pre-marital sex was a satisfaction of sinful lust and pleasure, thus a mortal sin that removed a faithful Catholic from a pure relationship with God.¹⁶⁹ Masturbation similarly was reflected in newly constructed terms. However, unlike pre-marital sex, masturbation itself did not violate the friendship that is expressed and developed with marriage.¹⁷⁰ It was, however, sexually immoral. Masturbation was taught as a violation of the recognition of the human dignity of the human person.¹⁷¹ It “used” oneself for an escape to satisfy personal lust, and in conjunction with the pornographic business that became highly prevalent and available to minors during the 1980s and 90s, was described as a major mortal sin that violated one’s personal relationship with God.¹⁷² Viewing pornographic images became inscribed in moral teaching as “adultery of the heart,” also a mortal sin within the Church.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Pre-marital sex was denoted as a sin long within the history of the Catholic Church. However, during the 1980s and 90s, the stigma for non-married sexual relationships within the confines of young American youth began to deteriorate. Thus, the American Bishops sought that a tougher, stricter, Church teaching should be laid out for the youth that perturbed them from going against these moral teachings.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 564-566.

¹⁷² William E. May, “Catholic Sexual Ethics,” 23-24.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Same-Sex Attraction in John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*

It is evident in Catholic moral teaching that during this time-period before the new millennia, there was a conscious effort by Catholic Bishops and diocesan authorities to educate both Catholic children and adults on the mortal sin of sodomy. Largely, this emerged in both American and European politics and religious scrutiny of what the Church called liberal, or progressive, relationships that developed between same-sex couples. Sodomy, as taught by the *Veritas Series*, are any anal or oral sexual acts that are not expressly conducive to the creation of human life.¹⁷⁴ The Church describes that these acts are similar to those of masturbation, where the physical use of one's own and another's body is for the express release of physical pleasure.¹⁷⁵ However, if the act of oral sex was a premeditator of penile-vaginal sexual intercourse, denoted as foreplay, according to Pope John Paul II, the act then is not immoral as long as it ended in penile-vaginal intercourse.¹⁷⁶ If it did not, though, it violated the marriage contract, as the sexual release was for pleasure instead of the propagation of human life.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, due to the denotation of sodomy as inherently contrary to God's plan for marriage and procreation, the sexual union of same-sex couples violated what John Paul II describes as "the indissolubility of God's natural plan for humanity."¹⁷⁸

The sexual union of same-sex couples could not be allowed within the Catholic Church as they distinctly were unable to provide opportunities for the establishment of

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 565.

¹⁷⁶ Foreplay as a premeditator to penile-vaginal sexual intercourse.

¹⁷⁷ William E. May, "Catholic Sexual Ethics," 25.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

new life in the form of natural-born children.¹⁷⁹ Yet, because new life could only morally be achieved through unity in marriage, this also meant that it was immoral for two men or two women to become married, because no fruitful progeny would be created through their sexual copulation. Catholic schools, to approach this sensitive subject and identity of homosexuality in their growing charges with careful consideration for the dignity of the human person, established that though men and women who are born with same-sex attractions are not inherently sinful, their attractions are systematically disordered.¹⁸⁰ Thus for these individuals, the concepts of chastity were expressly established as the only “moral” path for those with same-sex attraction.¹⁸¹

Catholic Teachings Against Contraception

In the context of moral engagement during sexual intercourse for married couples, Catholic catechesis began teaching the sin of contraception in their lessons. Ultimately, the emergence of doctrine within the universal Church began as a call against the rising use of oral birth control and use of condoms that proliferated during the “era of free love and sex” during the 1970s, and was widely discussed by the council fathers of Vatican II.¹⁸² Largely, these concerns were directed towards the United States in response to the perception that American youth on the East coast and the Midwest were living extravagant lifestyles.¹⁸³ However, it was not just American youth who were involved in

¹⁷⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 566. This does not exclude penile-vaginal intercourse between infertile married couples.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Pope Paul VI, in *Humanae Vitae*.

¹⁸³ John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 282-285.

the use of contraception, but also married Catholics in the Americas, Europe, and Africa. The institutional Catholic Church did not believe it was possible to condone any type of contraception within the confines of marriage. Married individuals had vowed to the Church that they would be open to the responsibilities and opportunities of children, thus the prohibition of children within the sacrament of marriage was framed by the official church teachings as highly immoral.¹⁸⁴ Due to this, the Bishops decided upon a program that would be taught to couples undergoing pre-marriage counseling and those already married, called Natural Family Planning.

Natural Family Planning and Abortion

Natural Family Planning is the Catholic response to abstaining from having children within a Catholic family.¹⁸⁵ The concept of Natural Family Planning is the conscious acknowledgment by both the husband and wife to design their sex life around the woman's ovulation cycle. The belief is that by having sex outside of a woman's opportune period of fertilization, the married couple could enjoy their sexual union without the stain of sin, and the chance of having children.¹⁸⁶ The Church teaches that the correct implementation of Natural Family Planning, without the use of any contraception, is a completely moral and ethical choice between consenting married couples.¹⁸⁷ It allows for God's design of sexual union to remain within the confines of sacramental marriage, but also allows for the married couple to retain their moral standing by abstaining from

¹⁸⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 571-572.

¹⁸⁵ James Trussell et al., "Natural Family Planning," *British Medical Journal* 307, no. 6910 (1993): 1003.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1003-1004.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1004-1005.

the use of physical implements of contraception.¹⁸⁸ However, even the Natural Family Planning programs cannot prevent every pregnancy. Therefore, since the conjugal act in Catholic teaching is established with an agreement upon remaining open to the possibility of children, even those children who are unexpected within a family setting are to be cherished, loved, and brought up in the faith. Yet, that is not always the case.

The conscious and willing action of ridding one's body of a fetus, or unborn child, is known as abortion.¹⁸⁹ Abortion, in the strictest Catholic sense, is denoted as murder, for it is argued that this goes against the direct commandments of God.¹⁹⁰ Often, those who face pregnancy through improper use of the Natural Family Planning Program, failed attempts of using what the Church calls immoral methods of contraception, become pregnant by choosing to not use contraception, or through rape or incest, find themselves unable to care for their new child or do not want the burden of a child, and consciously choose to rid themselves of the unborn baby through the only way they know how – abortion.¹⁹¹ Abortion, however, is entirely contrary to official Catholic moral teachings. The Church declares that it cannot condone the harming of innocent life, and

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1005.

¹⁸⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 547.

¹⁹⁰ Exodus 20: 13 RSV, Deuteronomy 5:17 RSV. This references the ten commandments where God explicitly stated to not kill. The Church finds that any action that destroys the life of an individual, born or unborn, is morally reprehensible.

¹⁹¹ Olivia Gans and Mary Spaulding Balch, "Rape, Incest, Fetal Abnormality," *Catholic News Agency* (July 1998), accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/abortion/defending-life/rape-incest-fetal-abnormality/>. The Catholic Church teaches that though many women, through absolutely no fault of their own become pregnant due to rape, the new mother is urged to respect the innocence and dignity of the child she now has growing inside of her. Though the action of rape against her was horrible, the Church teaches that the child created in the act is innocent of all guilt and blame, and should be granted the same right to life as all other people.

always preaches for the conservation, protection, and sanctification of human life from conception to natural death.¹⁹² This singular moral doctrine within the Church is perhaps the most influential of all Catholic precepts in the Church's involvement in the public sphere. Despite what the Church teaches, however, a large majority of Catholics do not adhere to the moral teachings that developed from Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*.¹⁹³

Discussions Around Catholic Moral Teaching

In the aftermath of Vatican II and the onset of Pope John Paul II's moral teachings, multiple theologians and faithful Catholics have taken up the call to address individual issues that they perceive to either go against what they perceive as natural science or to go against their own understanding of scripture and interpretations of moral theology. In this spirit of opening dialogue, discussions and arguments regarding these issues are stemming from an understanding of Catholic teachings as being unfaithful to the message of the New Testament, or inaccurate understandings of or unwillingness to listen to modern science. These perceptions also garner interest in how individuals view the context and teachings of the New Testament. Some view the New Testament as being able to legitimately be interpreted in a range of ways, while others view the New Testament in a contextualized approach, viewing it as a product of its time, and needing to be specifically applied to our modern understandings in certain ways. Thus,

¹⁹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 548-549.

¹⁹³ Tara Culp-Ressler, "Birth Control Goes Against Catholicism's Teachings, But Most Catholics Use It Anyway," *Think Progress* (August 4, 2015), accessed April 26, 2017, <https://thinkprogress.org/birth-control-goes-against-catholicisms-teachings-but-most-catholics-use-it-anyway-d22f2da560a1>.

theologians have argued their own reasoning behind both rejecting and supporting Catholic moral teaching, largely based upon their own interpretations of scripture and personal experience. In this way, theologians Mark Jordan, Margaret Farley, Lisa Cahill, Paul Lauritzen, and Sidney Callahan lend their own expertise in discussing these matters.

Ethical Marriage and Family

Mark Jordan is a theologian who specializes in the morality behind the Church's theology on marriage and moral sexual behavior. Jordan's background in researching the origins of sexual morality and marriage in the early Christian tradition, which the modern Catholic Church states it descends from, enables him to look at the moral prescriptions of sex and marriage in the context of its first believers. In doing so, he analyzes the early Church, and focuses on how the early Church stressed the New Testament's teaching of virginity and celibacy and its connection to the Christian family. In his book, *The Ethics of Sex*, Jordan describes that the New Testament contains several passages from both the Gospels and Paul's epistles where often Jesus does not maintain or uphold to conceptions surrounding family unity, and often breaks down the connections between individuals and their families.¹⁹⁴ He cites such passages as Matthew 10:21, 34-37 and Luke 9:60-62, showcasing the importance of having no family obligation for the sake of the kingdom.¹⁹⁵ Jordan states that Jesus even prescribes that true disciples of his should "be like angels in heaven," neither married nor given in marriage.¹⁹⁶ In Paul's epistles, Jordan similarly highlights that the concept of marriage or having a family was to protect against sinful

¹⁹⁴ Mark D. Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2002), 47-49.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 49.

desires of the flesh by placing sexual pleasure within the context of a sacred bond.¹⁹⁷ Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman,”¹⁹⁸ thus, according to Jordan, Paul will uphold marriage as long as it prevents sinful lust, but he still prefers lives of celibacy for faithful Christians.¹⁹⁹

By analyzing the writings of the early Church fathers, such as Gregory, Augustine, and Jerome, Jordan denotes quickly that the most prominent ideological factor that most early Church scholarship shares is the concept of Christ-like celibacy and the maintaining of one’s virginity.²⁰⁰ Jordan describes that the concerns of Church regulation of sexual morality continued in this vein for centuries, and was not until arguments over Church authority which emerged during the Reformation with figures Martin Luther and John Calvin that the people began to take a more concerned interest in the government of their lives, particularly their sex lives.²⁰¹ Jordan identifies that Luther heavily wrote and preached against the concept of regulated celibacy in the lives of the faithful, and in compliance, Calvin heavily stressed marriage as the truest form of Christian worship because it prescribes to God’s command in Genesis to be fruitful and multiply.²⁰² Due to this heavily concentrated focus in the 16th century on the morality of marriage, marriage and not monastic life, became the norm. However, the Church took this into a new light,

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 49-51.

¹⁹⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:1 RSV.

¹⁹⁹ Jordan, *Ethics of Sex*, 49-51.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 52-57.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 58-59.

²⁰² Ibid., 60-65.

and began to focus teaching on the moralities of sex in marriage instead of focusing on the celibacy of Christendom.²⁰³

According to Jordan, the Church focused on providing proper moral guidelines based on the concept that marriage did not prevent lust, and thus sex in marriage should remain as chaste as possible, and done in moderation.²⁰⁴ The later centuries of Christian living focused on this concept of moral sexual exchange between husband and wife, and carried on up to what some scholars have called the “Sexual Revolution” in the 1960s and 70s.²⁰⁵ Jordan explains, however, that the so-called Sexual Revolution was a social and political maneuvering that cannot be measured to a specific period of time, but exists in a more flexible swath of decades that became synonymous with a perceived change in understandings regarding the permissibility of “free” sexual actions outside of a prescribed sexuality and gender norm.²⁰⁶ The result still identified a relationship where the Church decried the supposed period’s immorality, but that the Church’s authority in the matter has disappeared.²⁰⁷ Jordan discusses that despite the Church’s attempts to respond and regulate the sexual life of Christians, outer social and political culture in North America and Western Europe inhibited Church authority in these specific matters, and instead cast issues regarding moral sexuality into the public sphere.²⁰⁸ Jordan describes that in this period, sexuality and ethics regulation was placed largely outside of

²⁰³ Ibid., 108-110.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 119.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 131-132.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 132-133.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

the proverbial familial curtain, and away from Church control.²⁰⁹ Jordan identifies that, historically, the Church's relationship with the bureaucratic state has been one of necessity. The Church and the state, through mutual benefits, supported one another for what they perceived to be the good of the society. However, around the turn of the 17th century, the dominance the Church played in social control began to shift, granting more power and authority to the state, including the regulation of morality and sexuality.²¹⁰ The past two centuries have only served to increase this dichotomous relationship, forcing the Church to be a secondary voice in the regulation of sexual activity and ethical issues amongst Catholics and the broader populace. This new role the secular state has succeeded to control, Jordan discusses, includes the regulation of populations and reproduction.²¹¹

Jordan discusses that today, the Church has especially lost, to an extent, some of its regulatory power when it comes to maintaining traditional teachings on celibacy, virginity, and chaste marriage.²¹² Thus, today, the regulation of sexuality and marriage, and all those things attributed to them, Jordan notes, has been given to the secular bureaucracy, of which he is highly critical.²¹³ He believes that this is evidenced by how much the laity have been following the state's ordinances regarding marriage and sexuality over the Church's teachings. He argues that the Church, especially the lay faithful, must now shift and change its focus away from adherence to these rules and

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., 133-135.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

regulations of the secular authority, and return to the Church's moral guidance.²¹⁴

However, he also argues that the laity need to problematize the Church's regulatory role in these issues, and should look at these in light of new understandings towards sex and sexuality, especially concerning what he calls Christian love and wholeness.²¹⁵ He asserts that the laity today must be wary of this increased power the secular state has gained, and should always place a modicum of caution when dealing with concepts of moral sexuality as issued by the state because one could run the risk of becoming "docile subjects of the secular bureaucracies for sexual reproduction."²¹⁶

In response to this, Jordan identifies that Christian theologians, such as James Fletcher and those involved in the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA), have attempted to readdress the seemingly denigration of Church authority in the public sphere. Particularly, Jordan describes that these individuals and organizations have attempted to reinvigorate the Church's position in guiding moral sexuality and ethics.²¹⁷ Particularly, the CTSA for example, issued a large volume titled *Human Sexuality* and supported traditional Church teaching in a new progressive voice to establish a closer connection to Catholics and other Christians to provide the Church a more assured authority.²¹⁸ However, bishops and other Church officials condemned the volume for its progressive tone.²¹⁹ Jordan states that this example identifies the current situation within the Church, particularly how the officials of the Church and the Church itself are

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 133-138.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 145-149.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

confused in their stances regarding their particular authority and their traditional teachings. On one hand, the Church is trying to uphold traditional teaching, but on the other, they are trying to rectify their position as the moral authority in the Christian world.²²⁰

For Jordan, this identifies that the Church is trying to accurately represent the Body of Christ (the people) in this progressive era, but are having difficulties doing so because of the influence of the secular state and because of their fixation on the regulation of bodies. He also believes that the bureaucratic state should not be involved in the regulatory process of human sexuality and sexual action, because the state developed out of the realm of Christendom, with the Church, and still uses language and laws that are representative of the Christian ethos and heritage from which they emerged.²²¹ The identification of the Church as a secondary source of moral guidance for Catholics is wrong, and that the primary responsibility granted to the secular state administration of proper moral teaching on sexual behavior and social norms is abhorrent.²²² He identifies that the secular state should not be given the authority by modern Christians to govern proper sexual morality. Yet, neither should the Church be worried about preaching what is moral or immoral.²²³

Instead, the Church should be more concerned about the people of the Church turning away from the governing authority of the state, otherwise they would become

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 143-149.

²²² Ibid., 144-145.

²²³ Ibid., 144-149.

subject to their teachings.²²⁴ He argues that the Church should not relinquish its control over governing sexual morality, nor should they stop teaching it, but should transform its teaching to include the modern day focus so that the historical and traditional roles of the Church as moral guiders can be recognized again. Jordan asserts that the modern Church must increase its efforts to be recognized as the moral authority in the lives of Christians, and that in doing so, they need to become more inclusive of the attitudes and issues of the modern laity.²²⁵ Therefore, with Jordan's concepts in mind, it is easier to understand the direction that many of the modern activists and scholars are taking in these issues. However, Jordan's voice in this is only part of the discussion. There are other voices in this discourse who attempt to delineate these issues even further.

Moral Reasoning and Tension Around Concepts of Human Dignity

Margaret Farley, a prominent Catholic feminist theologian, focuses on the ideas surrounding respect for persons within the context of the Catholic moral tradition. Her writings appear in the context of the post-Vatican II discussion of the importance of self-autonomy and the rights of women inherent in their personal dignity.²²⁶ Farley identifies that there is a tension in the dialogue found among intellectuals and lay activists regarding individual choice and the ideals of socially constructed identities found within society. This tension, she argues, has appeared in the wake of a global social movement that has been evolving since the 1950s towards an empowerment of women and an active

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Margaret Farley, "A Feminist Version of Respect for Persons," in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles Curran et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 164-165.

involvement in the sociocultural and religious attitudes of the contemporary Church.²²⁷

Along with this rising tension, Farley identifies that there is a rising concern for the ethics surrounding how others care for individuals and the institution of moral norms within the familial context.²²⁸

She discusses that the two arise from a directed concern towards the respect for persons, highlighting the importance of human dignity that exists within the Catholic moral tradition.²²⁹ Farley identifies that those individuals who believe that the dignity and focus of the human person should be based upon the concept of freedom of choice because they believe that the human person has a regulated sense of personal autonomy, primarily the capabilities to make their effective decisions. Farley states that this camp believes that God's gift of free choice enables them to make their own moral choices regarding their own persons and filial relationships.²³⁰ The other camp, however, Farley identifies, is primarily concerned with the upholding of sociocultural and religious norms, mainly those norms that establish a "correct" behavior for both partners within marriage.²³¹ This camp focuses on creating and identifying moral precedencies for normative-gendered behavior within social and political arenas, while maintaining a modicum of concern for individual human dignity.²³² Her evaluation of these two camps establishes a complex tension within the relationship between moral care and the dignity of the human person.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 166-167.

²²⁹ Ibid., 167-168.

²³⁰ Ibid., 168-170.

²³¹ Ibid., 170-172.

²³² Ibid.

Farley discusses that these two tensions, between personal choice and socially determined roles, stems from dialogue on the pervasive attitude of the value and role of human life.²³³ She argues that feminist discourses concerning these specific attitudes come from “the conviction that persons are of unconditional value.”²³⁴ The tension lies in the socially instituted belief of women as caregivers, and the amount of focus placed on this ethical role highlights the importance and stance held by individual men and women.²³⁵ Farley identifies that neither feminist nor non-feminist persons disagree with the fundamental dignity of the human individual, but that the concern regarding the appropriated role of women established by society is the predominant concern regarding this social and religious tension. She establishes that for many men and women, the socially stigmatized role of woman as caregiver creates an environment that reduces the autonomous ability of women to embrace their true potential and nature.²³⁶ It places them in a role that greatly reduces their God-given free will.²³⁷ Other individuals, proponents of women embracing their socially prescribed roles as wives and mothers, establish that it is naturally freeing to be embracive of their so-called “womanly” identity.²³⁸ Farley asserts that these individuals believe that by accepting their socially established roles within the contexts of marriage and family, they are able to be accepting of life and love,

²³³ Ibid., 174-175.

²³⁴ Ibid., 175.

²³⁵ Ibid., 175-176.

²³⁶ Ibid., 176-178.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

while also maintaining a trueness to their indelible self. Meaning, that by coinciding with the social deterministic lifestyle, they are embodying their true potential.²³⁹

Farley's description of these distinct concepts surrounding human dignity have been expressed, and can be seen, in the broader global social and political arena. These two sides have appeared in both the religious and secular contexts of life, predominantly in understandings related to the sanctity of human life in regard to both contraception and abortion. Though Farley outlines the intrinsic nature of humanity's concern for human life and the dignity of the human person, she also identifies that this concern is separated into two distinct ideologies. One upholds the dignity of life to the unborn and the role of women in the dual partnership of care in parenthood. The other establishes capabilities of women to choose and direct their lives, as a product of God's grace, to make their own ethical decisions based on their own consciences. Moral theologians and scholars have taken this emerging dialogue in stride, and have compared it to their own research. They have identified increase in discussions regarding these moral issues, and have begun to investigate and lead discussions surrounding the morality of contraception and abortion.

Discussions Surrounding Contraception, Reproductive Technology, and Abortion

Lisa Cahill is one such theologian, and specializes in the ethical norms and reasons behind contemporary Church teachings, and reactions thereof. Cahill carries on this discussion by establishing that much of the reasoning behind what people call ethical principles is the realization of the standards of truth are found to reach not only ourselves,

²³⁹ Ibid., 177-178.

but others as well.²⁴⁰ It is this realization, Cahill explains, that enables religious institutions and individuals the capacity to make ethical claims.²⁴¹ Cahill focuses then on the capabilities of morality and ethics to be conducive to the development of dialogue and action for a better understanding of the well-being of others. In this vein, she also asserts that ethical norms and behavior must be reexamined based on the development of scholarship, medicine, and psychological understanding in the academic field, which must then combine to inform theological and spiritual discourse.²⁴² Cahill describes that many theologians and scholars have taken to this approach, detailing the value of scholarship on third world issues and those related to the promotion of quality human life.²⁴³ She evaluates several different scholars' research, describing her understanding of the sociocultural appropriation of ethical normality, focusing on the issues that she considers to be truly important in the conversation of Christian ethics, namely contraception and abortion.²⁴⁴

Cahill discusses that many theologians and scholars involved in the conversation surrounding ethical practices, especially when concerned with contraception and abortion, are debating the ethical reality of concern for common humanity.²⁴⁵ Particularly, these concerns have developed around third world and impoverished countries, as well as other situations, where having children inhibits the physical well-

²⁴⁰ Lisa Cahill, "Feminist Ethics: Differences and Common Ground, A Catholic Perspective," in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles Curran et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 190.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 191-193.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

being of the woman involved.²⁴⁶ Cahill is just one of many scholars who have addressed the ethics of contraceptives and abortion in the wake of the rise of the AIDS pandemic in Africa, the rise of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in the Americas and Europe, as well as the focused concern for population control that the United Nations and the World Health Organization have invested interests in.²⁴⁷ These common concerns that Cahill and others have studied address key concerns that affect the social and personal wellbeing of individuals and groups of people. Cahill has addressed that these larger concerns, mainly those she attributes as necessary to be addressed for the common good of all, should be evaluated in the light of ethical and moral principles.²⁴⁸ Overpopulation, the protection against STIs and AIDS, protection against increased poverty, rape, incest; these are all attributes of the human condition that Cahill analyzes as taking an ethical precedence.²⁴⁹ She continuously asserts that the dignity of human life is precious, and should be protected at all costs, but that those living on earth now are the most precious.²⁵⁰ Her philosophy, shared by numerous other scholars, believes in the wellbeing and protection of the living, and establishes a focused concern for the poor and marginalized whether that concern comes in the form of money, modern medicine, or contraceptives.²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 191-193, 194.

²⁴⁷ Giuseppe Benagiano et al., "Condoms, HIV and the Roman Catholic Church," *Reproductive Biomedicine Online* 22 (2011): 706-708.

²⁴⁸ Lisa Cahill, "Feminist Ethics," 195-199.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. For Cahill, those "living on earth now" would include fetuses.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

There are many who share this focused concern on the welfare and common good of all over what the Catholic Church identifies as a collective adherence to the sanctity of all stages of human life. Many scholars, considered to be more liberal and progressive when compared to the Catholic Church, identify that a more pressing concern for the modern world is the allowance and use of artificial contraception techniques, such as condoms, as well as using medical practices to increase the chances of pregnancy, such as in vitro fertilization. They believe that both are moral choices that can be used to uphold the dignity of human life, and act as moral goods in the broader context. However, both suggested methods are taught within the Catholic Church as strongly immoral and contrary to God's plan for humanity.

Both lay men and women and Church scholars have argued over the efficacy of Cahill's argument, which is also supported and condemned by other scholars. However, a leading research team out of Belgium did a study on the Catholic Church's response to many organization's attempts to protect against STIs and HIV/AIDS in the rural regions of northern and sub-Saharan Africa by implementing both male and female condoms to the populace there, which the Catholic Church officially condemned.²⁵² They reported that Church officials condemned the use of condoms as they were not completely effective in the prevention of AIDS.²⁵³ However, the researchers argued that the benefits of condom use were more significant than the efficacy of it as a contraceptive tool. The statistics showed that condoms helped to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS among

²⁵² Giuseppe Benagiano et al. "Condoms, HIV and the Roman Catholic Church," 701-702.

²⁵³ Ibid.

closely connected groups, while also maintaining a manageable population size that did not change the levels of poverty within the rural community.²⁵⁴ Even among Church officials, there are differing opinions, between those officials who believe that condoms are a lesser evil and a moral option for the protection of one's partner in the spread of HIV/AIDS, as opposed to those who continue the fight for unscientifically founded propaganda on condoms as being the purveyors of the disease.²⁵⁵

Despite this controversy in the Church hierarchy, the Belgian research team notes in their article, "Condoms, HIV and the Roman Catholic Church," that in 2010 the then Pope Benedict XVI had changed his original stance on condoms, citing an interview the pope had with a German journalist.²⁵⁶ They report that Pope Benedict XVI believed that though contraceptive use, such as condoms, was still considered a moral evil, that their use in the protection against HIV and AIDS, especially among prostitutes, could be considered a lesser evil so that those using them may take the first step towards morality by protecting and caring for the wellbeing of others by protecting against the spread of diseases and infections towards one another.²⁵⁷ Both progressive and liberal activists in the Catholic Church and other organizations viewed this admission as a step towards a greater discussion on the more ethical reasons behind certain issues, and an even greater step towards ethical dialogue, even though many conservative Catholics, lay and

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 702-703.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 703.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 703-704.

otherwise, were not happy with the decision.²⁵⁸ This is just one example of how the conversation on the applied ethical principles of Christian morality still continues.

In a similar way, just as issues regarding contraception were addressed, so have Catholic theologians and scholars deigned to address the issues regarding artificial fertilization and the ethical principles surrounding it. Officially, the Catholic Church has decried the use of artificial fertilization as having an equal in the sin of contraception.²⁵⁹ Paul Lauritzen, a Catholic theologian specializing in the ethics surrounding ethical reproduction, examines the relationship surrounding the discussion of moral and ethical reproduction. Lauritzen describes that the Church views artificial fertilization as an immoral action that defies the natural laws God prescribed for reproduction because it takes the conjugal act of intercourse away from the creation of life, just as contraception removes the procreation of life from intercourse.²⁶⁰ Catholicism's stance on this issue largely developed after Vatican II during the 1980s when such technologies as in vitro fertilization, and others, were just beginning to take shape.²⁶¹ Lauritzen describes that the Church draws its beliefs from the concept of natural reproduction being founded in the thesis of creation, in natural law, and that the use of technology excludes the humanity of reproduction, demoting the procreation of life as a dull facet of human existence and not worthy of dignity or respect.²⁶² This stance then places the Church argument against any

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Paul Lauritzen, "Whose Bodies? Which Selves? Appeals to Embodiment in Assessments of Reproductive Technology," in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles Curran et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 402-403.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 403.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 404-405.

²⁶² Ibid., 408.

and all forms of artificial fertilization and gestation based on what it considers to be the “unnatural” way in which the life is created, regardless of the fact that life *was* created.²⁶³

Along this same line, Lauritzen identifies proponents of reproductive technology who argue that this is a viable and ethical choice for procreation, especially among those couples who are infertile and unable to have children the “natural” way.²⁶⁴ They by and large view artificial fertilization, and all that it entails, as a viable ethical choice to establish a family. Lauritzen discusses that many scientists and contemporary theologians view that the Church should embrace technology and scientific advancement such as this, as it would identify a Church that is willing to advance and progress away from archaic principles that have forced many away from the Church, particularly where scientific evidence and methodology are concerned.²⁶⁵ There is also a similar stance in regard to personal autonomy that Cahill discussed, that artificial reproduction enables women to have a greater control and command over their bodies and livelihoods, especially in this case in regard to having children.²⁶⁶ By and large, though, there is a strong connection between mainstream Catholicism and feminism that Lauritzen denotes as having a general consensus of reproductive technology as taking away the connection and identity of women from the procreation of another human being.²⁶⁷

This discussion on procreation and the dignity of human life carries over into the larger discussion on the Church’s stance towards abortion. As stated previously, the

²⁶³ Ibid., 408-409.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 416-418.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Catholic Church is vehemently against what it sees as the killing of innocent human life in the act of abortion. Sidney Callahan, in “Abortion and the Sexual Agenda: A Case for Pro-life Feminism,” explores the discussion and dialogue that has enveloped religious, social, and political discourse since the 1970s. Callahan discusses that most pro-choice Catholics and non-Catholics view abortion as their morally indelible right to control their bodies.²⁶⁸ Many pro-choice women view abortion as morally acceptable when the pregnancy is forced upon them, especially in cases of rape and incest, and when they are unable to physically, financially, or medically care for the child before and after the birth.²⁶⁹ Other pro-choice proponents explain, as Callahan describes, that abortion enables women to morally uphold their status as equal persons of autonomous value and equality, by being able to have the option to terminate a pregnancy if it inhibits their rights and privileges as free agents in the socially democratic world.²⁷⁰ Also, just as pro-choice individuals argue for the ability to terminate pregnancy if it goes against their financial or medical capabilities, Callahan asserts that they also argue for pregnancy termination if the child born will have a birth defect or low chance of quality life.²⁷¹ She discusses that arguments such as these are answered by pro-life individuals in similar, yet contrasting ways. Callahan establishes that these pro-life proponents argue that life, no matter how the fetus was conceived, how it affects the life of the mother, or how it affects the possible

²⁶⁸ Sidney Callahan, “Abortion and the Sexual Agenda: A Case for Pro-life Feminism,” in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles Curran et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 422-423.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 423.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 424-425.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

future of the child, that the child is precious and should be granted the opportunity to live because it is innocent, regardless of how the mother became pregnant.²⁷²

Callahan reveals that prolife arguments continuously assert that the moral role of the mother in her pregnancy, regardless of station or faculties in life, is to care and provide for her future child, and if she cannot, then she is to carry to term and give the child up for adoption.²⁷³ Callahan establishes that it is a moral responsibility among prolife activists for the woman to use her full capabilities as an equal citizen to create a more equal opportunity for the child by being a source of justice and equitable teaching for the new individual.²⁷⁴ Prolife views also establish that it is immoral and unethical to remove the child from the father by way of abortion, because the Church identifies that the child must have a connection to both the father and mother for proper guidance and upbringing. Similarly, the rights of the fetus are challenged by prolife supporters because of the belief that life begins at conception, and that each new life contains an individual soul that reflects the indelible divine nature of God, which Callahan describes acts as a moral protector in the eyes of prolife men and women.²⁷⁵

Based on these arguments discussed by Callahan, it is easy to establish a connection amongst Catholic moral tradition and the dialogue that has developed surrounding particular ideologies. Each idea and component deals with understandings of human dignity and worth, and creates a network that enables these issues to be discussed in regard to the other, because they are all related in some aspect. Therefore, it is

²⁷² Ibid., 427.

²⁷³ Ibid., 427-429.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 430-432.

reasonably and increasingly beneficial to view the connection that circumvents the moral arguments and discussions surrounding such ideas as marriage and family, innate human dignity, contraception, reproductive technology and artificial fertilization, and abortion. The connections surrounding this ethical dialogue identifies the transforming nature of morality in the context of the ever-changing nature of the sociopolitical and medical world. The world has truly entered a new era that embraces different ideas and viewpoints, to which the modern Catholic Church must make itself known in the discussions surrounding such incidences.

Conclusions

Roman Catholic teaching after Vatican II was largely influenced by the moral theology of Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* which largely affected the teaching institutions of the global Catholic Church. Predominantly where pre-Vatican II Catholic moral teaching was promulgated by priests and nuns, post-Vatican II moral teaching made itself known in the purity of soul and body teachings that condemned sexual actions the Church viewed as deviant, and prohibited such the using of contraception and the act of abortion. Within the family context, these teachings were established as reactionary measures towards what the Church hierarchy, with John Paul II in the lead, described as an era of moral ambiguity that began in the 1950s and has continued to today. However, what is notable in this is the realization that the post-Vatican II era also establishes a period of increased dialogue, discussion, and determination to address key issues within the Catholic Church and how they relate to the broader world at large.

The discussion begins with an identification of family values and sexual morality surrounding family relationships as, according to Jordan, being historically intrinsic to

the authority of the Church.²⁷⁶ Yet, after centuries of dependence upon the secular state to support the moral claims of authority, the dynamic shifted so that the state became the powerful authority in moral issues. However, he believes that Christians should be wary of becoming docile subjects to the secular bureaucracy.²⁷⁷ Jordan argues that the Church's failure to provide its own moral guidance without the aid of secular authorities through a united Christendom has caused the modern laity's lack of adherence to moral teaching, despite the Church's claims regarding its religious and moral authority.²⁷⁸ He identifies that the Church must now consider to reform and reshape their understandings of morality to better fit the rich and meaningful Christian teachings so that they can reclaim their original power over Christian theology.²⁷⁹ Farley continues the discussion by analyzing the relationship between the dignity of the human person and the later influences of discourse regarding feminist theologians, scholars, and lay activists in response to concepts of contraception, reproductive technology, and abortion that scholars Cahill, Lauritzen, and Callahan address.²⁸⁰

Attitudes regarding contraception, reproductive technology, and abortion are multifaceted and exist within their own theological and moral realms of human reason. Cahill, Lauritzen, and Callahan identify a common trend of thought shared by many of the theological discussants. Mostly, these individuals share a common belief that humans should be free to choose their own moral code based on an examination of their

²⁷⁶ Jordan, *Ethics of Sex*, 132-133.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 133-138.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Farley, "Feminist Version of Respect for Persons," 164-168.

consciences. However, they also believe that humanity contains an indelible dignity and should not be harmed.²⁸¹ Therefore, for all intents and purposes, these individuals and scholars are largely supportive of orthodox Catholic teaching. However, just as with marriage, the concepts surrounding moral choices are multifaceted, and can be interpreted in numerous ways. Thus, the discourse found supporting and refuting these myriad claims are evidence of this larger discourse that is readily available after the closing of Vatican II.

The context of dialogue opening between the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy and the larger world establishes a connection between the opening of dialogue since Vatican II and the results that the discussions had on relevant global issues. One instance is the leniency granted by Pope Benedict XVI towards the use of condoms in regard to protecting one another against the spread of STIs and HIV/AIDS.²⁸² The result of this may not have been a large change or reform in doctrine, but what is evident is the willingness of the Catholic Church to talk and open dialogue concerning the myriad issues that theologians, scholars, and lay individuals deem important. Though the Church may not change its stance towards particular issues, such as abortion, the relative change in the promulgation of academic and theological discussion has increased the Church's availability to connect to and maintain strong relationships to lay and secular leaders and institutions. It has enabled the Church to more fully enter this period of focused change and discussion for the better.

²⁸¹ Cahill, "Feminist Ethics: Differences and Common Ground," 190-194.

²⁸² Benagiano et al., "Condoms, HIV and the Roman Catholic Church," 702-703.

CONCLUSION

“Before Vatican II, in theology, as in other areas, the discipline was fixed. After the council there has been a revolution - a chaotic revolution - with free discussion on everything. There is now no common theology or philosophy as there was before.”
- Godfried Danneels²⁸³

As one of the most seminal councils in the Catholic Church, Vatican II established some of the most important discussions in Church history. As a council that revolutionized the Catholic Church into the modern world, Vatican II created internal and external change in Church practices, dialogue, and attitudes regarding certain issues and subjects within the universal Church. Vatican II's most well-known revolutionary change in Church practice was the Church's concern and regard for orthopraxy, which steamrolled the Church into the new millennium, allowing for the Church to be more embracing, open, and inclusive to the younger generations and to the on-looking world. However, I have argued that one of the most important consequences for the Church has been the evolution of dialogue concerning multiple sociopolitical issues and important ideas among practicing Catholics and the wider public. Two such issues were the changing role of women in Church life and the importance of sexual ethics in Catholic moral teaching.

The Church's traditional roles of women as devoted wives, mothers, religious sisters, or single individuals seemed to many lay individuals and groups to be restrictive of women's potential in Church life. Thus, the years after Vatican II opened discussion among scholars and activists that brought forth concerns regarding a more active role for

²⁸³ Doris Donnelly, “An Interview With Godfried Danneels,” *America: The Jesuit Review* (July 30, 2001), accessed March 21, 2017, <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/325/article/interview-godfried-danneels>.

women in the Church into a more focused and cohesive light. There are many scholars and activists, like Mary Jo Weaver and Simone St. Pierre, who believe that the modern Church in the post-Vatican II era still exhibits characteristics of a world where patriarchy and male dominated class systems are the generalized norm, influencing the lack of women in active ministerial positions.²⁸⁴ They believe that since the Church exists within the context of the new millennium, that the Church needs to advance along with its people, and become more gender inclusive in official offices and pastoral positions.²⁸⁵ To reflect the changing times, attitudes, and social behaviors of the lay Church, these particular scholars and activists have joined this discussion by supporting and advocating for a change in the Church structure due to the necessity to exude a more well-rounded and inclusive clerical class that is more representative of the global Church.

Other voices in this conversation, like Rosemary Radford Reuther, argue that women have a legitimate ability to become ordained, citing the legitimacy of such groups as the Roman Catholic Womenpriests and the Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community in San Diego as examples of Catholics who believe that they are living the true Catholic tradition by maintaining a clergy comprised of ordained women.²⁸⁶ However, traditionalists in the Church, such as Haye Van der Meer and Pope Benedict XVI, have constantly opposed these arguments, even going so far as to write documents prohibiting the ordination of women within the priesthood.²⁸⁷ However, for many individuals, this conversation does not end there. Scholars and concerned lay people

²⁸⁴ Weaver, *New Catholic Women*, 110-114.

²⁸⁵ St. Pierre, *The Struggle to Serve*, 96-99.

²⁸⁶ Reuther, "Two Views of Valid Women's Ordination Emerge," 16-18.

²⁸⁷ Van der Meer, *Women Priests in the Catholic Church?*, 76-79.

believe that opening the Church up to the possibility of women deacons should be within the possibility of the modern Church. Arlene Swidler and Karen Torieson are two such voices in this discussion, arguing that the Church has a very early history and scriptural basis for women deacons, so much that they stress the importance of the modern Church embracing this opportunity for women's involvement in Church pastoral ministry.²⁸⁸ This discussion, though, does not end with scholars debating back and forth on the efficacy of such a move, but is showcased by recent events involving decisions made by Pope Francis.

Pope Francis' decision to invoke a committee made up of scholars, Church officials, laity, and others to determine the historical, traditional, and religious basis for women deacons in the Church is certainly a product of this ongoing discussion caused by Vatican II.²⁸⁹ Without the Council's ability to open the Church to a more inclusive atmosphere of discussion with both religious and secular voices, the Commission established by Francis would not be possible. The climate of the Church under Francis exhibits an atmosphere of greater concern for the Church's position in the broader world, and identifies the Church's precedential relationship with Catholics across the globe, showcasing how the Church today understands the discussion, and attempts to implement some form of concern or thought into its mission to care for the needs and desires of its flock. As a scholar, and as a faithful Catholic, I believe that this is a positive reaction for the Church, and is evidence that the Church is trying to respond to this broader discussion.

²⁸⁸ Swidler, "Women Deacons," 82-86; Torieson, *When Women Were Priests*, 4-7.

²⁸⁹ Wooden, "Pope Francis Sets Up Commission On Women Deacons."

Fifty years ago, the concept of allowing women to become deacons would have been absurd, and the individual who had brought it up would have been severely reprimanded. However, the fact that this is happening today identifies this attitudinal shift. If this Commission does find evidence for women deacons to be favorable, then this opens the door for a more inclusive and well-rounded Church community. Though it may not come about soon, I believe that allowing women to become part of this ministerial process will be beneficial for the Church overall. Women make up half of the Church, and I believe that their inclusion will provide a renewed sense of joy to their ministry of the Gospel. However, even if women are allowed to be ordained as deacons, I do not believe that women will be accepted into the priesthood. At the present time, the majority of the Magisterium and Roman Curia, the Church's decision making bodies, are made up of conservative traditionalists. Thus, at present, the Church is slow to change. However, the current administration will pass away with time, and new appointees and fresh ideas will make their way in. Perhaps, in the next hundred years it will be different, but at this current point, women ordination to the priesthood will not be possible within the official Catholic Church. Even then, if women are allowed into the diaconate, it will probably not take place for at least another twenty to thirty years. The current Church is just not ready for such a dynamic shift in pastoral leadership. Perhaps, though, as time goes on, it might be.

Similar to this discussion of women's ordination, though, is the advancing concern perpetuated by Catholics across the world for a renewed interpretation of Catholic sexual ethics. This fundamental aspect of the Church's administrative theology and teaching authority has, like women's ordination, developed as an important issue of

concern for many lay Catholics. Therefore, scholars and activists have also brought this into discussion, joining it with the dialogue that has been broadening since the cessation of Vatican II.

Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* has been accepted today as a canonical teaching authority for Catholic moral theology, influencing the thoughts and processes of Catholic catechesis and norms regarding marriage, reproduction, contraception, abortion, and other issues the Church has deemed important enough to be viewed as morally subjective. However, as with traditional views of priesthood and the diaconate, Catholic sexual ethics as taught by the Church under John Paul II, and still taught today, has been taken up by both scholars and activists across the globe who have developed discussions regarding particular issues, further cementing the post-Vatican II era as the era of religious discussion and intrigue inside and outside the Church.

In his *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II addressed several different issues regarding the sanctity of marriage and childbirth, human dignity, contraception, and abortion.²⁹⁰ Largely, John Paul II upheld traditional Church teaching, reacting to what he perceived as the outer world falling away from the Church's message of morality. His teaching, though, can be identified as just one voice in this ongoing discussion of sexual morality since Vatican II. However, his voice has been a large one, and has affected the understandings and reactions since. Still, this voice is only one, and is joined by the multitudes of others who believe that the Church should uphold or move away from certain attitudes and issues. Scholars and lay activists, such as Mark Jordan and Margaret

²⁹⁰ West, *Theology of the Body*, 302, 524-526.

Farley, acknowledge the importance of marriage and the upholding of human dignity.²⁹¹ However, some believe that the morality of marriage, the private actions of the married couple, should not be governed by any sole institution or bureaucracy; that the human dignity of each individual should be respected.²⁹²

Some scholars, such as Lisa Cahill and Paul Lauritzen, have urged the modern Church to view such entities as contraception and reproductive technology in light of what Cahill called personal autonomy within the scope of human dignity.²⁹³ These scholars identify that in instances such as the AIDS epidemic that the use of condoms can be viewed as a moral good to protect the dignity and wellbeing of others, and for cases where women are infertile, the use of artificial insemination can be a viable, moral option to build a family and support the propagation of human life.²⁹⁴ However, these issues are hotly contested and argued among the conservative and progressive Church scholars, which is in itself evidence for the period's focus on dialogue and discussion. Even then, other scholars, when discussing issues of abortion, view it in this similar vein.

As one of the most discussed issues in the secular world, the Catholic Church has long held its unyielding views regarding what it considers to be the murder of children. However, there have been instances where scholars have discussed when it is moral to have an abortion, giving for example cases of rape and incest.²⁹⁵ However, other scholars and activists, such as Sidney Callahan, have argued that the dignity of human life extends

²⁹¹ Jordan, *Ethics of Sex*, 133-138.

²⁹² Farley, "Feminist Version of Respect for Persons," 164-168.

²⁹³ Cahill, "Feminist Ethics," 190-194.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. See Lauritzen, "Whose Bodies? Which Selves?," 402-408.

²⁹⁵ Callahan, "Abortion and the Sexual Agenda," 422-424.

even towards such individuals as the unborn because they are innocent, regardless of the action.²⁹⁶ Abortion, like issues related to contraception and what the Church calls the dignity of marriage, in this context have been discussed and developed over decades' worth of dialogue since the closing of Vatican II.

In the same way, as a scholar and a Catholic, I believe that this discussion on sexual ethics has allowed the Church to become more embracive, and least of all, reactive to the rising concerns over matters related to sexuality and sexual ethics. However, unlike with women's ordination, the Church's response on sexual ethics is more complex. The modern Church has come a long way since Vatican II, and under Francis, it is still changing. However, the reigns of previous pontiffs, mainly John Paul II and Benedict XVI, have effected how lay Catholics and onlookers view the Church's relationship with sexuality and other related issues. There are several items that the Church will not change, such as its beliefs on human dignity, abortion, and marriage. When it comes down to it, I would have to agree. If the Church is going to state that all people are made in the image and likeness of God, then that denotes a special sense of worth to every human individual. In the same way, if the Church is going to teach that life begins at conception, and that the forceful ending of human life is wrong, then aborting an unborn fetus is also wrong. It is a matter of semantics. Similarly, if the Church believes that marriage is a theological and spiritual union between one man and one woman that is established for the propagation of human life, then marriage can only be that, nothing else. Again, it is semantics. The theological language that the Church uses supports these

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

beliefs as truth, which in the confessional sense, cannot be changed and should not be changed based on these reasons.

However, when dealing with such issues as contraception or reproductive technology, the issues become less complex and more subjective. For example, when Benedict XVI allowed the use of condoms to protect against HIV, AIDS, and other STI's (Chapter 2), the moral prerogative was that it would hopefully be a force of moral good to help prostitutes and other sinful people the chance to recognize their sins and come back to the Church. Others would look at that and say that Benedict was changing, becoming more progressive. However, in actuality, he was not. He saw it as the only moral good in the situation at hand. Similarly, some view the use of reproductive technology as a moral good that allows infertile women or couples to have children. Yet, currently that is not the case. As a scholar, I would argue that the church must actively look at these discussions, and come up with definitive answers. The Church cannot ignore medical concepts and continue to call them immoral. Medicine and science as a whole are just going to continue to develop. Therefore, the Church must look at these issues, like they are currently discussing women deacons. As a faithful Catholic, I would argue that the Church must uphold its duty to care for its flock. In doing so, it may have to make choices, like Benedict's, that are designed around a higher moral purpose. There is no sense of "lesser of two evils" in these cases, only correct responses to what could be considered as moral imperatives. Therefore, I believe that the modern Church must take a stand, and regardless of its decisions, must address these issues cohesively and succinctly.

Ultimately, these voices that I have analyzed within this larger work are only examples of the cacophony of voices that make-up the larger discussion involving the changing conception of the role of women in Church life and the developing concern regarding Catholic sexual ethics. Before Vatican II, the discussion of these issues within the Church itself was largely stagnant, primarily due to the overwhelming influence the Church hierarchy had over their congregations and the discussions held amongst them. However, after Vatican II, with the opening of the Church to a more embracive relationship with the outer world, the discussion regarding these issues has exponentially expanded. The succeeding decades after Vatican II's close saw a transformation in how individuals, scholars, and lay activists engaged in discussion and discourse regarding myriad of issues, though two of the most hotly contested among them were the roles of women and sexual ethics, among others. Yet, what is evidenced here is how influential the role Vatican II played in this burgeoning dialogue. Without it, the Church would still exist; but with it, the Church has embraced the outer world, opening its doors to a more inclusive connection with its lay followers and secular neighbors. The expanding dialogue is a reaction to this openness, and regardless of what direction the official Church takes in these issues, the fact that this dialogue exists is enough to see how the Church has changed, perhaps for the better, with this openness of discussion.

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