

Fifty Reasons Why the Winnipeg Statement Should be Recalled

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“But you, O Lord, are close;
Your commands are truth,
Long have I known that your will
established forever”
Psalm 119

This year is the 35th anniversary of the great charter of life and love called “*Humanae Vitae*.” It was signed by Pope Paul VI on July 25th, 1968. This year is also the 35th anniversary of a commentary on that encyclical given by the Canadian bishops. It was published on Friday September 27th, 1968, at the Fort Garry Hotel in Winnipeg and was entitled “Canadian Bishops’ Statement on the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.”

The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and the Winnipeg Statement do not say the same thing. The encyclical declares, invoking the authority of Christ, that contraception is to be “absolutely excluded as a licit means of regulating birth” (n. 14). The Winnipeg Statement, not on the authority of Christ, but on the authority of the Canadian bishops, says:

“Counsellors may meet others who, accepting the teaching of the Holy Father, find that, because of particular circumstances they are involved in, what seems to them a clear conflict of duties, e.g., the reconciling of conjugal love and responsible parenthood with the education of children already born or with the health of the mother. In accord with the accepted principles of moral theology, if these persons have tried sincerely but without success to pursue a line of conduct in keeping with the given directives, they may be safely assured that, whoever honestly chooses that course which seems right to him, does so in good conscience.” (n. 26).

While the Church teaches that the prohibition of contraception is a moral absolute, the Canadian bishops say it is not. It is the same as saying that there are circumstances in which fornication and adultery and sodomy are legitimate.

It is evident, both philosophically and empirically, that the Church cannot survive where the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae* is not taught and lived. In the Winnipeg Statement, through sophistry, are sown the seeds of the destruction of the Catholic Church in Canada. In truth, because of that Statement, the Church in Canada is now stricken and dying. There is no hope for a viable and evangelizing Church here until the teaching of that Statement is cancelled and replaced with the truth.

One other observation is in order. There is an ungodly similarity between the Winnipeg Statement and the statement that started the revolt against the truth about married love and contraception. Until 1930 all Christian communities considered contraception a grave moral evil. In 1908, at a Lambeth Conference, the Anglicans

reaffirmed constant Christian doctrine in saying it "earnestly calls upon all Christian people to discontinue the use of all artificial means (of contraception) as demoralizing to character and hostile to national welfare" (Resolution 41). The betrayal of truth came at the Lambeth Conference in 1930. Then it was declared that a couple could use contraceptives "where there is a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood" (Resolution 15). By 1958 the Anglican Church considered contraception "a right and an important factor in Christian family life." The Winnipeg Statement is a near clone of the Lambeth betrayal. Soon after it, countless Canadian Catholics claimed that the practice of contraception was a "right."

It is not difficult to marshal many reasons why the Winnipeg Statement should be recalled. I cite here fifty, but that is an arbitrary number. Many taken individually, and certainly all taken together, indict and convict the Winnipeg Statement of the crime of leading our beloved Church in Canada deep into the Valley of Death.

1. The Winnipeg Statement is tantamount to blasphemy. It is God who determines what is morally good and evil. The Church authentically interprets this natural moral law (cf. *Humanae Vitae*, n.4). "Contraception is to be judged objectively so profoundly unlawful, as never to be, for any reason justified. To think or say the contrary is equal to maintaining that in human life, situations may arise in which it is lawful not to recognize God as God" (Pope John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 10th, 1983). The Winnipeg Statement permits the negation of divine law. Is this not blasphemous?

2. It is contrary to the first commandment of God. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us, Jesus summed up man's duties to God in the words: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37). We serve God with all our mind when, enlightened by faith and grace, that mind is conformed to the mind of God through being conformed to the mind of His Church. In the Winnipeg Statement that conformity is tragically absent.

3. The Winnipeg Statement is against the second great commandment of God: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12: 31). In the spiritual order, that order which concerns itself with eternal salvation, contraception is an act of hate. It is a grave offence against one's marriage vows which consents to the eternal damnation of one's spouse.

4. It puts into doubt defined doctrine concerning the sufficiency of grace. The Council of Trent declares to be heretical that opinion which says it is impossible to keep God's commandments. *Humanae Vitae* points out the sufficiency of God's grace to keep the divine natural law prohibiting contraception (cf. nos. 20,21). The Winnipeg Statement says: "A certain number of Catholics find it either extremely difficult or even impossible to make their own all elements of this doctrine"(n. 17). Paragraph 26 implies that the law against contraception cannot be observed by some.

5. It substitutes the authority of man for the authority of Christ. The encyclical is given with the authority of Christ (n.6). Bishop Alexander Carter, President of the Canadian Bishops' Conference in 1968, said: "We faced the necessity of making a Statement which many felt could not be a simple Amen, a total and formal endorsement of the doctrine of the encyclical—We had to reckon with the fact of widespread dissent from some points of his (the Pope's) teaching among the Catholic faithful, priests,

theologians, and probably some of our own number" (America, October 19, 1968, p.349). So human authority was substituted for the divine.

6. It has increased tolerance for dissent. The eradication of the destructive evil of dissent in the Church was the prime purpose of the extraordinary synod of bishops in 1967. The bishops declared, concerning all dissent, whether in doctrinal matters, or in pastoral or liturgical questions: "Those who are rash or imprudent should be warned in all charity; those who are contumacious should be removed from office." (*Ratione habita*, October 28, 1967). The Winnipeg Statement undercut the directives of this synod and make its implementation in Canada practically impossible. So we have had dissent in Catholic seminaries, colleges and schools. It has given rise to a dissenting "Catholic" press, e.g. *Catholic New Times* and *The Island Catholic News*. It was a factor in the "legitimization" of selling dissenting literature in "Catholic" bookstores and parish pamphlet racks.

7. It is against Church unity by endorsing a national morality. Perhaps for the first time since the so-called Reformation, we see bishops passing judgment on the authoritative teaching of the Supreme Pontiff. In an editorial in the *Toronto Catholic Register* regarding the Winnipeg Statement we read: "It will take weeks, perhaps months, for Canadians to appreciate and really believe what happened at Winnipeg last week. It has not happened in the Church anywhere for centuries. And in Canada perhaps for the first time in our history we can become a truly Canadian Church in the deepest sense of the word." (October 5th, 1968).

8. Contrary to some, the Winnipeg Statement is not magisterial. In the book "*Married in the Lord*" (Liturgical Commission, Diocese of London, 1976, 1978) it is asserted that, concerning statements of national hierarchies, "their official declarations are official teachings of the magisterium of the Church" (p. 61). This is false. Bishops exercise their office of teaching only in so far as they are in communion with the head of the episcopal college, the Holy Father (cf. Canon 375 of the Code of canon law). Canadian Catholics have a right to magisterial teaching from their bishops on the vital issue of human life.

9. The Winnipeg Statement has clouded the meaning of collegiality. The claim has been made that the Statement is collegial. Collegiality exists only in union with the head of the College of bishops, the Holy Father (cf. Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, n. 21).

10. The Winnipeg Statement advocates relativism or what is called situation ethics. The phrase in paragraph 26 "Whoever honestly chooses that course which seems right to him does so in good conscience" is a cluster bomb attack on objective morality. What if the course which seems right to him does not seem right to her? What if his counsellor or confessor does not agree with her consoler or confessor? What if the course which seems right to him or her kills a human person? Surely this moral relativism cries out for redress.

11. It teaches an erroneous doctrine on conscience. The Winnipeg Statement says, in effect, that in some circumstances one may form one's conscience in opposition to God's law. Vatican II says that the spouses "must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the "divine law itself" (*Gaudium et spes*, n.50). The Winnipeg Statement, in rejecting this teaching, has deformed the consciences of countless Canadian Catholics.

12. The Winnipeg Statement was not corrected by the "Statement on the Formation of Conscience" of the Canadian Conference of Bishops of December 1st, 1973. While that was a good statement on conscience, it carefully avoided any mention of the Winnipeg Statement or the question of contraception or even *Humanae Vitae*. The result was that many texts and marriage preparation courses continued to quote the Winnipeg Statement as though the Statement on conscience had never been written.

13. The Winnipeg Statement was an act of disobedience to the Holy See. Just before the release of the encyclical on human life, bishops were asked through Cardinal Cicognani, Secretary of State, to stand firm with the Pope in the presentation of the Church's teaching and "to explain and justify the reason for it." This mandate of the Holy See was deliberately rejected. As Father Edward Sheridan, S.J., one of the dissenting "periti" (experts) at Winnipeg, wrote: "The Statement contained no general profession of assent to the whole teaching of Human Life; and nothing that could be interpreted as adding the local authority of the Canadian Hierarchy to that of the encyclical in general." (America, October 19th, 1968, p349).

14. It is not a right pastoral application of *Humanae vitae*. The Winnipeg Statement has been defended on the grounds that it is only a pastoral application of *Humanae vitae*. Bishops have said: " We tried at Winnipeg to make a pastoral application of the encyclical." But right pastoral application is always in accordance with the truth, and the Winnipeg Statement is in accordance with a lie: that contraception is not always a grave moral evil. In truth, the "pastoral application" of the Winnipeg Statement is a betrayal , a deceit and a fraud.

15. It is not enough to say: "The Winnipeg Statement needs only to be properly interpreted." There is no way, if words mean what they say, that Paragraph 26 can be interpreted in accordance with the Church's teaching on conscience.

16. Largely as a result of the Winnipeg permissiveness, Canadian theologians and others have felt free to dissent from the Church's teaching not only on contraception but on a wide spectrum of magisterial teachings, e.g. on homosexuality, the ordination of women, on the fundamental option, even on abortion. Witness the revolt of 63 Quebec "theologians" against the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* in 1993.

17. It has led to discord between bishops and bishops, bishops and priests, priests and priests, pastors and associates, priests and laity, husbands and wives.

18. The resulting confusion in Canada over life issues has been an impediment to evangelization. A Church divided against itself does not present an attractive model of Christian living.

19. The Winnipeg Statement has been a major factor in Canada's suicidal birthrate. The birth rate among Catholics is no higher than among the general population. Once Catholic Quebec has gone from having the highest birthrate in Canada to having the lowest, with now the highest rate of male and female sterilization in all of North America.

20. It has been a major factor in Canada in the crisis of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Such vocations are in general the fruit of parents living their Faith.

21. Directly or indirectly, it has destroyed or weakened the faith of many Canadian Catholics.

22. Whereas hope and joy should permeate any commentary on the charter of life and love called *Humanae vitae*, the Winnipeg Statement is sprinkled with expressions of doom and gloom. In paragraph 34 we read: "We conclude by asking all to pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide his Church through all darkness and suffering." Again, "We, the People of God, cannot escape this hour of crisis,"(ibid.). It concludes with a quotation from Cardinal Newman: "Lead kindly light amidst the encircling gloom." It has been the Winnipeg Statement that has brought to the Church in Canada an encircling gloom.

23. It has, in general, lowered the level of grace and love in the Church in Canada, leaving countless Catholics open to the seduction of secular relativism.

24. It resulted in the death of our Catholic hospitals. In 1970 a Medical Moral Guide was approved by the Canadian bishops for use in Catholic hospitals. While it condemned sterilization as a means of contraception (article 18) and contraception itself (article 19), it attached this addendum: "Reference should be made to the Canadian bishops' documents on the pastoral application of this general directive." That was the death-knell for our Catholic hospitals. Soon they went the Winnipeg way, and were allowing direct sterilization and the prescription of contraceptive and abortifacient pills and devices for "pastoral" reasons.

25. The Winnipeg Statement was the seed bed which gave birth to the new and disastrous sex-education courses like Fully Alive. In paragraph 33 the bishops said: "Everywhere the problem of sex education and family life is being studied. And this education is happily being deepened by scientific research and diffused through the creative use of mass media. We pledge ourselves to the pastoral priority of encouraging and promoting these programs whenever and wherever possible."

26. It is corrosive of the authority of Canadian bishops. Bishops maintain their divinely endowed authority through their union with the Holy Father. Deviation from this unity is disastrous to the bishops' right to be heard and obeyed. Early in the Winnipeg meeting a motion was passed forbidding a minority report. It was claimed that the Bishops' Statement would be merely a pastoral, not a doctrinal, one. This erroneous claim was an infringement on bishops' authority in their own dioceses. The effect of the Winnipeg Statement was to diminish respect for the Canadian bishops authority not only in Canada, but throughout the Catholic world.

27. The Winnipeg Statement was not corrected, as some have said, by the "Statement on Family Life and Related Matters", of the Plenary Assembly of Canadian bishops on April 18, 1969. In that Statement the bishops said: "Nothing could be gained and much lost by any attempt to rephrase our Winnipeg Statement. We stand squarely behind that position but we feel it our duty to insist on a proper interpretation of the same."

28. The Winnipeg Statement, in effect, put the Canadian bishops in thrall to their own bureaucracy and to dissenting theologians. Fifteen Directors of the Canadian Catholic Conference signed a petition calling for a "Vatican II approach." They said that a large number of priests were agonizing "in acute crises of conscience because of the apparent directives of *Humanae Vitae*. The "periti" or so-called experts at Winnipeg were dissenters Fathers Edward Sheridan, S.J., André Naud and Charles St. Onge. Surely the first requirement of those selected to advise the bishops should be their fidelity to the magisterium.

29. Because of their adherence to the Winnipeg Statement, all subsequent programs of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, e.g., the Working Paper: Responsible Procreation, 1983, have proven fruitless. They have ignored the fundamental cause of most family problems to-day: the contraceptive mentality

30. It has silenced many pulpits. Many priests have been hesitant to preach against contraception not only because of a backlash from parishioners but even from their bishops. At least one bishop told his priests not to preach on *Humanae vitae*.

31. Some priests were marginalized because they dared to dissent from the Winnipeg Statement. Assent to the dissent of the Winnipeg Statement was sometimes rewarded with promotion.

32. It has unfitted some priests for the hearing of confessions. It is well known that some priests do not refuse absolution from the grave sin of contraception even when there is no purpose of amendment. This invalidates the absolution.

33. It has led to erroneous confessional directives in some dioceses.

34. In a chain reaction, it has lowered the level of ethics among Catholic politicians, judges, lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, nurses, hospital staff, teachers and catechists.

35. It has facilitated anti-life and immoral government legislation, as predicted by Pope Paul VI ("*Humanae Vitae*", n. 17). It made it more difficult to discipline nominal Catholics like Mark McGuigan, Pierre Trudeau, John Turner, and Jean Chrétien., who have been principally responsible for the chasm between Church and State in the area of divine moral law.

36. It has led to an aging society with all the concomitant negative societal effects, including a disproportionate financial burden on the shoulders of the young.

37. It has often deprived spouses of married love. Married love never separates the unitive and procreative natures of the marital act. With true married love come the joy and the graces which God showers upon those who are living lives conformed to His will.

38. In a true sense, the Winnipeg Statement permits extra-marital sex. Marriage consent is an act of the will by which each party gives to the other, permanently and exclusively, the right to those acts which of their nature tend to procreation. It does not give the right to contraceptive acts. These are acts of marital unchastity and infidelity.

39. The Winnipeg Statement has often pitted spouses against one another. It has been used as a tool for the seduction of one's spouse into contraceptive conduct.

40. It has led to countless objective sacrileges. Countless contracepting couples receive Holy Communion with no purpose of giving up the practice of contraception.

41. Through its tolerance of contraception, the Winnipeg Statement has led to a lowered respect for women. In the words of *Humanae vitae*, through contraceptive practice husbands "come to the point of considering her(the wife) as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion" (no.17).

42. Many good couples who have been faithful to the Church's teaching, often at the expense of great personal sacrifice, have felt betrayed and unsupported by their shepherds.

43. The Winnipeg Statement has often made right teaching of Natural Family Planning more difficult. Natural Family Planning is often taught without moral evaluation or reference to the "grave" cause required for its practice.

44. The Winnipeg Statement has been responsible for many childless homes and deprived countless children of brothers and sisters.

45. The Winnipeg Statement has deprived countless children of proper role models. Contracepting parents cannot give their children a right example of chastity and self-giving.

46. It has been the cause of many marital breakups. Contraceptive practice is spiritually an act of mutual hate. The subconscious dynamisms of the contraceptive relationship erode mutual love and respect. A true coroner's report on the break-up of many marriages would read: "Cause of Death: the Winnipeg Statement."

47. It has been the cause of invalid marriages. To exclude the right to have children, whether for a time, indefinitely or forever, whether on the part of one or both parties, or by mutual agreement, invalidates the marriage. Numerous couples have invoked the Winnipeg Statement to assert a "right" to exclude children and have brought this intention into a defective marital consent.

48. The Winnipeg Statement has adversely affected married life not only in Canada but in many other countries. One example was the neo-modernist book "Christ Among Us", by ex-priest Anthony Wilhelm. It approvingly quoted the Winnipeg Statement. Before its Imprimatur was removed by order of the Holy See in 1984, 1,500,000 had been sold throughout the world. In 1968 there was an immense diaspora of the Winnipeg error by such periodicals as Time magazine, the Tablet, America, the National Catholic Reporter, Commonweal, and Catholic Mind. In Australia, it was promoted by a book called "Catholics Ask", by Father Bill O'Shea.

49. The Winnipeg Statement does not distinguish between abortifacient and non-abortifacient contraceptives. It has led to the killing of countless persons through abortifacient pills and devices.

50. Even the principal author of paragraph 26 of the Winnipeg Statement recognized its deceptive wording. In a private letter dated June 15, 1995, the late Cardinal Carter wrote: "I am not prepared to defend paragraph 26 (of the Winnipeg Statement) totally. In a sense, the phraseology was misleading and could give the impression that the bishops were saying that one was free to dissent at will from the Pope's teaching."

Fifty reasons have been given why the Winnipeg Statement should be revoked. There are many more. In truth their number is legion. There are as many reasons as there are persons who have been infected or may yet be infected with its deadly virus.

In the final analysis, the Winnipeg Statement is evil because it is a betrayal of the Truth—the Truth about Life and Love.

Christ said: "I am the Truth." He also said: "For this I came into the world, to give witness to the Truth." (John 18; 37). He entrusted the Truth to His Church, to be transmitted through Peter, the Apostles, and their successors. So St. Paul could say: "The Truth of Christ is in me" (2 Corinthians 11:16). So the Truth about Life is taught in the first century in the Didache. So in 1978, Pope Paul II would say three times, in confirming *Humanae Vitae* in his last sermon in St. Peter's: "I did not betray the Truth."

We are considering here the most fundamental of all Truths—that dealing with Life and Love. Pope John Paul VI expressed this verity in these words: "The promotion of the Culture of Life should be the highest priority of our societies.... If the right to life is not defended decisively as a condition for all other rights of the person, all other references to human rights remain deceitful and illusory" (February 14, 2001).

Put flesh on the Winnipeg Lie, make it operative, and it turns into a Frankenstein's monster capable of destroying the family, society, and the Church. That is now a work in progress. We have seen how civil society is corrupted by contraception. In Canada first came the law allowing the sale of contraceptives, then abortion (1969), then the licensing of widespread pornography, and now the betrayal of homosexuals by the blasphemy of homosexual "marriage." All of this came about with the complicity of nominal Catholic politicians.

We ought to pray for our bishops, by divine providence successors to the Apostles and guardians and transmitters of the Truth of Christ. The great majority of living Canadian bishops had nothing to do with the Winnipeg Statement. May God strengthen them to reject it. Catholics justly beg that the Truth of *Humanae Vitae* be taught in Canada, because it must be taught and known and loved before it is lived.