

Roadmap to Building the Culture of Life: Reflections on the Culture Wars and John Paul II's Thomistic Personalism*

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ABSTRACT: History can serve as a test of various philosophical notions. In the twenty-five years since John Paul II published *Evangelium vitae*, his analysis of the individual and cultural factors responsible for the killing of embryos via abortifacients, fetuses via abortion, and the dying via euthanasia has proven prescient. It is thus time to consider his remedies for countering the culture of death and promoting the culture of life. These remedies revolve around the person, the family, and socio-political activism. For John Paul II, the hub around which the culture of life and the culture of death both revolve is the human person, but the culture of life promotes more rewarding personal fulfillment. The key aspect of this fulfillment comes through exercising spousal love in families constituted either through marriage or through a relationship to God and the human family. The indispensability of families for personal fulfillment requires social and political activism in order to defend the person and build the culture of life.

Threats to Life and the Culture of Death

In *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II analyzes various threats to human life. Those that are central to the mission of University Faculty for Life destroy

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life at its beginning and end through such means as abortifacients,¹ abortion,² infanticide,³ and euthanasia.⁴ John Paul II takes care to note that these attacks on human life are not random but are rather “scientifically and systematically programmed threats...involving even international institutions engaged in encouraging and carrying out actual campaigns to make contraception, sterilization and abortion widely available.”⁵ In this anti-life campaign the mass media plays an important role.⁶ These systematic attacks on life are so dire as to constitute a culture of death representing “a direct threat to the entire culture of human rights...capable in the end of jeopardizing the very meaning of democratic coexistence.”⁷ This is because there is “the tendency, ever more widely shared, to interpret the above crimes against life as legitimate expressions of individual freedom, to be acknowledged and protected as actual rights.”⁸ He explains that when rights are no longer “founded on the inviolable dignity of the person, but is made subject to the will of the stronger part..., democracy, contradicting its own principles, effectively moves towards a form of totalitarianism.”⁹ Rejection of objective standards of good and evil confuses conscience, facilitates the successful manipulations of mass media and favors acquiescing to the will of the majority.¹⁰ This acquiescence is intolerant of those who challenge the emergent consensus.

That this analysis by John Paul II is insightful can be seen by the reluctance of states to write the right of conscientious objection into the laws by which they permit contraception, abortion, and euthanasia. Without the legal right to act according to one’s conscience, one is not only legally subordinated to the immoral desires of others but also denied the legal right to be a person who is free to act according to conscience by avoiding participating in another’s evil.¹¹ Restrictions on one’s right to be good violate the right to live as a human person as voiced in the Declaration of Independence and as guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S.

¹ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* §14.

² EV §13, §57-§62.

³ EV §14.

⁴ EV §15, §65.

⁵ EV §17.2.

⁶ EV §17.2.

⁷ EV §18.5.

⁸ EV §18.2.

⁹ EV §20.

¹⁰ See EV §24.1, §70.1.

¹¹ See EV §74, §89.

Constitution. John Paul II is thus correct to warn that when one person's rights involve trampling the rights of another – whether the embryo, fetus, infant, or someone suffering from severe injury or terminal illness – the moral underpinning of law is destroyed, ethical relativism is established, the culture of death is legalized, and democracy is transformed into a tyranny.¹²

Countering the culture of death requires not only establishing laws protective of human life and conscience protection but also uprooting its causes. One of these causes is a practical materialism that causes the loss of the sense of God.¹³ This loss weakens the commitment to an objective moral code, as shown by a 2020 report by the Pew Research Center. That study indicated that 45% of respondents in thirty-four countries across the world say that “it is necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values” and 44% of respondents in the United States agreed.¹⁴ Without a strong belief in God, the ego tends to swell without restraint until one deems oneself the rightful master of all who can be controlled and dominated. Domination is thereby taken as a legitimate expression of one's power and autonomy on account of the understanding of liberty as the freedom to satisfy desires rather than as the ability to achieve what is truly good for oneself and for others.

Understanding liberty as license inculcates a habit of viewing others as tools that can be dominated for the sake of satiating one's desires. “Life itself,” writes John Paul II, “becomes a mere ‘thing,’ which man claims as his exclusive property, completely subject to his control and manipulation.”¹⁵ Suffering is thereby deemed not only to lack meaning but also to be escaped by any means, even those that include killing another human being, whether by abortion, assisted suicide, or euthanasia.¹⁶ The result is that life's meaning becomes artificial, a product of economic success and superficial pleasures, while the body itself ceases to be an embodiment of one's very self. Sexuality thereby becomes depersonalized and a trifling pleasure best unburdened by the generation of children.¹⁷ Abortion is thereby seen as indispensable for removing an impediment to flourishing, especially in the wake of the sexual

¹² EV §20.2–21.1; §70.1

¹³ EV §21.1.

¹⁴ Christine Tamir, Aidan Connaughton, and Ariana Monique Salazar, “The Global God Divide,” Pew Research Center (July 20, 2020), accessed July 28, 2020 at <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/07/20/the-global-god-divide/>.

¹⁵ EV §22.1.

¹⁶ See EV §97 §23.1-4.

¹⁷ EV §97.2: “The trivialization of sexuality is among the principal factors which have led to contempt for new life.”

revolution. A recent Gallup poll shows that American beliefs about abortion's acceptability have been relatively stable for decades. Fifty-four percent of Americans in 1976 and fifty percent in 2020 said that abortion is acceptable in *most* cases. In 1976 twenty-two percent believe abortion ought to be legal in *all* cases, and twenty-nine percent said the same in 2020. Only twenty-one percent in 1976 (twenty percent in 2020) said that it should *never* be legal.¹⁸ With this degree of acceptability, it is not surprising that in 2017 “approximately eighteen percent of U.S. pregnancies (excluding spontaneous miscarriages) ended in abortion.”¹⁹ Not all of these abortions were by first-time mothers. In 2013, forty-five percent of women having abortions had a prior abortion. Nearly sixty percent had a prior live birth. Nearly fifteen percent were married.²⁰ I share these statistics not to prove that a perfect cultural storm of anti-life forces will drown the cause of life but rather to show that, in America, there is a sizable minority of twenty percent that understand the inviolability of fetal life. These proliferers, like lighthouses in a storm, offer those who heed their light a better way to find fulfillment and joy.

In his 1994 *Letter to Families (Gratissimam sane)*, John Paul II discusses how utilitarianism reduces people to things to be used and inculcates a civilization of use with disastrous impact on the family: “In the context of a civilization of use, woman can become an object for man, children a hindrance to parents, the family an institution obstructing the freedom of its members.”²¹ Statistics show that John Paul II's warning went unheeded, with most Americans now considering marriage, children, and family as things that hinder flourishing. For instance, a 2019 Pew Research report shows that when asked whether being married is essential for a fulfilling life, sixteen percent of the men agreed but only seventeen percent of the women agreed.²² Marriage rates have declined: seventy-two percent of adults age 18 and older were

¹⁸ “Abortion,” Gallup Poll, accessed July 25, 2020 at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1576/abortion.aspx>.

¹⁹ “U.S. Abortion Statistics: Facts and Figures relating to the frequency of abortion in the United States,” accessed 8/1/2020 at https://abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_statistics/.

²⁰ Tara C. Jatlaoui et al., “Abortion Surveillance: United States, 2013,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 65/12 (2016): 1-44, 35-37, accessed 7/25/2020 at cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/ss6512a1.htm.

²¹ *Letter to Families* §13.

²² Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Nikki Graf, and Gretchen Livingston, “Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center (November 2019); accessed 7/25/2020 at <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/11/06/marriage-and-cohabitation-in-the-u-s/>.

married in 1960; only fifty percent were married in 2014.²³ Another Pew report shows that the numbers of those over twenty-five who have never-married are increasing: in 1960, ten percent of men and eight percent of women had never been married, while in 2012 it was twenty-three percent of the men and seventeen percent of the women.²⁴ No doubt contributing to this declining number of marriages is the common belief that having children is not crucial for happiness. This belief is so widespread that few believe in the importance of having children. From 2006 to 2013, roughly only six and half percent of women and roughly only nine and half percent of men agreed that “people cannot be really happy unless they have children.”²⁵ Yet, in 2019, when Pew changed its question to whether having children is essential for living a fulfilling life, merely sixteen percent of men and twenty-two percent of women agreed.²⁶

Statistical analysis coupled with John Paul II’s analysis thus show that the current attacks on human life are supported by a majoritarian culture disdainful of God and family as well as by the conviction that life’s meaning and joyful fulfillment are found in things other than marriages with children. These attitudes fuel the culture of death and the widespread acceptability of abortion and euthanasia.

Three Steps to Building the Culture of Life

While noting the plethora of factors that contribute to the culture of death, John Paul II argues that the hub around which the culture of death revolves is the failure to grasp the truth about being a person, the failure to realize that nothing is more important than loving and being loved. Mother

²³ Kim Parker and Renee Stepler, “As U.S. marriage rate hovers at 50%, education gap in marital status widens,” Pew Research (September 14, 2017), accessed 7/26/2020 at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/14/as-u-s-marriage-rate-hovers-at-50-education-gap-in-marital-status-widens/>.

²⁴ Wendy Wang and Kim Parker, “Record Share of Americans Have Never Married,” Pew Research (September 2014), accessed 7/26/2020 at <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/09/24/record-share-of-americans-have-never-married/>.

²⁵ Jill Daugherty and Casey Copen, “Trends in Attitudes About Marriage, Childbearing, and Sexual Behavior: United States, 2002, 2006-2010, and 2011-2013,” *National Health Statistics Reports* #92 (March 17, 2016), 1-11 at pp. 3, 7. Accessed 8/1/2020 at <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr092.pdf>.

²⁶ Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Nikki Graf, and Gretchen Livingston, “Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center (November 2019), accessed 7/25/2020 at <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/11/06/marriage-and-cohabitation-in-the-u-s/>.

Teresa of Calcutta explains: “We have been created to love and be loved.”²⁷ She adds that “Jesus came to bring the good news...to give the peace of heart that comes from loving, from doing good to others.”²⁸ In his speech awarding Mother Teresa the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, John Sanness identifies love with self-giving and self-giving with joy: “Giving – giving something of oneself – is what confers real joy, and the person who is allowed to give is the one who received the most precious gift...mutual understanding and respect, and a warm human and enriching contact.”²⁹

This contact embodies the mutual affirmation of being a self that Aristotle identifies as constitutive of friendship, “for the friend is another self.”³⁰ This kind of friendship, he argues, is necessary for happiness and includes goodwill and the mutual affirmation of goodness of the other’s existence and the goodness of one’s own that arises from “living together and sharing in discussion and thought.”³¹ Despite Aristotle’s arguments, these friendships may be only necessary and not sufficient for happiness insofar as they lack any kind of commitment and condition the affirmation of each other’s existence on dialogue.

In any case, the communal living and mutual affirmation of each other’s existence characteristic of Aristotle’s fulfilling friendships seems to be most characteristic of spousal love. This means that spousal love is essential for a fulfilling life either as a necessary or sufficient condition.

Most Americans do not believe that spousal love is crucial for a fulfilling life, as confirmed by a 2019 Pew Research poll of U.S. adults showing that while fifty-seven percent of the men and forty-six percent of the women report that having a job or a career that they enjoy is essential to a fulfilling life, merely sixteen percent of the men and seventeen percent of the

²⁷ Mother Teresa, *Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech* for the 1979 Nobel Prize, on-line video accessed 2015, <http://www.nobelprize.org/mediaplayer/index.php?id=1852>; transcript at “Mother Teresa: Nobel Lecture, *Nobelprize.org*, Nobel Media AB 2014. Web. 1 Jan 2016, accessed 2015, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1979/teresa-lecture.html.

²⁸ Mother Teresa, *The Joy in Loving: A Guide to Daily Loving*, compiled by Jaya Chalila and Edward L. Joly (New York NY: Penguin Putnam, 1997), p. 399.

²⁹ John Sanness, “Presentation Speech of the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize to Mother Teresa,” *Nobel Lectures, Peace 1971-1980*, ed. Irwin Abrams (Singapore: World Scientific Publ. Co., 1997), accessed 2016, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1979/presentation-speech.html.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.4.1166a30-31.

³¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.9.1170b7-19.

women report that being married is essential.³² This inversion of values arises either from being unaware that humans find themselves only “through a disinterested gift of himself or herself”³³ or being afraid that such a gift harms the self by surrendering one’s autonomy. Such harm, John Paul II, notes particularly weighs against women since they are more likely to be dominated and exploited in marriage.³⁴ The culture of life cannot then be built without a proper understanding of love, persons, and proper respect for women. These requirements identify rediscovering the truth about persons as the first step of building the culture of life.

First Step: Rediscover Subjectivity, Personhood, and Liberty

John Paul II argues that the culture of death feeds on materialism and utilitarianism by prioritizing having things over loving relationships. Countering this devaluation of the person begins by reflecting on one’s own desire for things. Within that desire is a thirst for the desirable thing to be truly good and not an illusion. One wants, for instance, a car that works, but that desire cannot make a car run insofar as it exists as an object independently of one’s desires. The desire to be loved respectfully and not exploited likewise cannot guarantee that the other will respectfully love. Within a desire for something is also a desire to know the truth about the object desired. This desire for the truth about objects reveals that one’s desires are not the totality of who one is. One has the ability to distinguish between wanting and getting, between desires and the object desired. How is it possible to make these distinctions? The most intense desires are psychosomatic, but not the object desired and not its truth. The ability to evaluate, to judge, and to find truth requires more than being a body. It requires an ability to transcend psychosomatic desires and to choose the pursuit of truth. The awareness of being a person who is free to choose one’s own action includes the awareness of auto-teleology and being able to act for one’s own sake.³⁵ Becoming aware

³² Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Nikki Graf, and Gretchen Livingston, “Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center (November 2019), accessed 7/25/2020 at <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/11/06/marriage-and-cohabitation-in-the-u-s/>.

³³ See *Gaudium et Spes* §24.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* §10.

³⁵ Karol Wojtyła, “The Family as a Community of Persons,” *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M. (New York NY: Peter Lang, 1993 [1974]), pp. 315-27, 321: “I call the finality that is proper to the person “auto-teleology: self-fulfillment, like self-possession and self-governance, is proper to the person.”

that one's desires cannot be satisfied any object but only by an objectively good object thus brings the awareness of truth's objectivity as well as one's own ability to know that truth and the freedom to abide by it or not to do so. Truth thus awakens oneself to one's own subjectivity and personhood³⁶ and thereby to the falsity of ideologies that would deny the possibility of free choice (materialism) or would deny one's auto-teleology and the right to choose one's own ends (utilitarianism).

2nd Step: Identify Spousal Love Exercised in Families as Life's Fulfillment

The experience of desire also brings the awareness that one is not self-sufficient.³⁷ Satiating desire requires one to reach out beyond the self to what is truly good. This means that fulfillment is in and through action in accord with truth. This experience of truth, Wojtyła thus argues, is also an experience of moral duty.³⁸ This is because in being aware that one is free to accord with truth or reject it, one is also aware that one ought to heed what is true. Truth is good and, as Thomas Aquinas explains, "good is to be done and pursued."³⁹ Rejecting what is known as true thus betrays and frustrates one's capacities for knowing truth and choosing the good. Wojtyła accordingly characterizes the failure to seek good and avoid evil to be a "failure to be myself."⁴⁰

Being true to oneself requires not only avoiding evil but also pursuing and doing good insofar as it is only through pursuing and doing good that the contrary evil is avoided. For instance, the prohibition against killing the innocent requires homeowners to build fences around their swimming pools to prevent children from falling in and drowning. John Paul II accordingly states: "The commandment *You shall not kill*, even in its more positive aspects of respecting, loving, safeguarding, and promoting human life, is binding on every individual human being."⁴¹

³⁶ In "The Person, Subject, and Community" in *Person and Community*, pp. 221-30, Wojtyła makes the case that subjectivity can be known from efficacy. This argument from efficacy seems to me to presuppose both that one experiences one's actions as self-chosen and that one acknowledges one's responsibility for those actions. The truthfulness of presuppositions has become obscured in the twenty-first century because so many live by their feelings and use their feelings to exonerate their actions. For this reason, I focus on the argument from truth.

³⁷ Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," p. 233.

³⁸ Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," p. 234.

³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 94, a. 2 c.

⁴⁰ Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," p. 234.

⁴¹ EV §77.

Committing oneself to finding ways of promoting life brings the awareness that one is committing oneself to moral actions and becoming someone who is fulfilled in and through moral action. Becoming a good person brings a fulfillment that suffices for peace and happiness, despite its partiality.⁴² By characterizing the fulfillment of moral action as partial, Wojtyła is arguing that all fulfillment occurs in and through action that accords with truth, while enabling the degree of fulfillment to vary by the object of the moral act: for instance, returning a lost wallet is not as fulfilling as marrying or having a child.

When one encounters human beings and affirms that each is “another self” or a person like oneself, a oneness is shared whereby one has gifted the others with the acknowledgment of their dignity as persons, created for their own sake. This sharing of oneself with others affirms the personhood and auto-teleology of each one. A smile, Mother Teresa teaches, is the best way to bridge otherness and establish the rapport of being two kindred selves, since the smile is the beginning of love and initiates the desire to act for another’s good.⁴³ Jacques Maritain also identified the smile as a personalistic encounter: “deep beneath the anonymous American smile there is a feeling that is evangelical in origin – compassion for man, a desire to make life tolerable” that symbolizes “the general, elementary, deep-seated sense of common human pilgrimage and brotherhood.”⁴⁴ The key element in affirmation, according to John Paul II, is its “gratuitous” in being freely given for the other’s sake without being tainted by some interest or a subordination of the other to oneself.⁴⁵ The resulting love is disinterested in self-gratification and affirms, first, that the very existence of the other is per se most precious; second, that the other is a deeply appreciated gift of God to oneself; and third, that one is also able to be such a gift to the other. This deep existential and affirming love, moreover, not only gratefully blesses the Creator but also affirms the other without conditioning that affirmation on health, financial status, accomplishments, or any other characteristic. This affirmation of personhood pertains

⁴² Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” pp. 235-36.

⁴³ Mother Teresa, “Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech.” For exegesis of Mother Teresa’s analysis of smiling as opening love’s door in my *Woman as Prophet in the Home and the World: Interdisciplinary Investigations* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. 235-36.

⁴⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Reflections on America* (New York NY: Gordian Press, 1975), p. 92.

⁴⁵ Wojtyła, “The Family,” p. 322.

to the person's first act of existing and thereby to a person's ontological dignity. Appreciating a person's first act of being a person is the gist of the feminine genius, according to Susan Selner-Wright.⁴⁶ This affirming, person-centered love moves one "to become a gift for others and to discover joy in giving himself."⁴⁷

The fulfillment and joy found in experiencing oneself as acting lovingly confirms the essential insight of *Gaudium et spes* upon which John Paul II centered his life's work – namely, that the human being is both "the only creature on earth that God willed for itself" and a being who "cannot fully find himself or herself except through a disinterested gift of himself or herself."⁴⁸ Finding oneself requires acting for another's good in gifting that person with one's attention and consideration. That other-centered action brings the self-awareness of being a person who seeks what is good and finds fulfillment in doing so. If the recipient of one's benevolence responds, opportunities for additional good deeds and greater fulfillment becomes possible. The recipro-cation of the total gift of self that occurs between spouses thus brings one fully alive.⁴⁹ Such reciprocation occurs in marriage when spouses "mutually confirm and affirm one another as persons."⁵⁰ This is because human beings are primarily social beings who need more from life than rewarding work, generous friends, supportive siblings, and awesome possessions – as loneliness proves.

Mutually affirming spousal love is the love without which man cannot fully live, as John Paul II explains: "Man cannot live without love. He remains

⁴⁶ Susan C. Selner-Wright, "St. John Paul II on the Genius of Woman," *Woman as Prophet in the Home and the World: Interdisciplinary Investigation*, ed. R. Mary Hayden Lemmons, (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. 10-12.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Letter to Families [Gratissimam sane]* §14.

⁴⁸ Cf. Wojtyła, "The Family," p. 321, citing *Gaudium et spes* §24.

⁴⁹ *Letter to Families* §14.

⁵⁰ Wojtyła, "The Family," p. 321. An argument for the necessity of loving relationships for fulfillment can be made on the basis of the second chapter of Genesis. That chapter describes how the exhilarating work of naming animals was profoundly unfulfilling and plunged man into a deep loneliness because he was the only human being and because despite being given the awesome gift of the entire world, he turned away from seeking a relationship with God. In his General Audience of October 24, 1979, John Paul II points out that the aloneness of the first human identifies him to be a "partner of the Absolute" existing in "a unique, exclusive, and unrepeatable relationship with God himself." *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), p. 151.

a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him. If he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This...is why Christ the Redeemer ‘fully reveals man to himself.’”⁵¹

This appeal to Christian revelation is significant for three reasons. First, by identifying the total self-giving of spousal love as characteristic of how Christ loves,⁵² John Paul II identifies the vocation to religious life as a way to reciprocate Christ’s spousal love and achieve fulfillment. Second, John Paul II’s appeal to revelation reminds Christians that they ought to likewise love, as stated in John 15:12: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Third, the appeal to revelation the importance of religious belief for bestowing confidence that exercising spousal love in the formation of human families is indeed the gist of human fulfillment for those not pursuing a religious vocation. Without this confidence, the culture of life cannot be built. Robust legal protection for religious free exercise is thus indispensable.

In 2020 the U.S. Supreme Court made a significant step towards providing that legal protection by deciding that courts could not adjudicate disputes about employment within religious institutions without infringing the First Amendment.⁵³ However, other decisions important for the free exercise of religion have been made so narrowly as to invite reversal from future justices.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Redemptor Hominis* [The Redeemer of Man] §10.

⁵² John Paul II’s characterization of Christ’s love as spousal is grounded in Eph. 5:32, where St. Paul characterizes the love of Christ and Church as spousal. See, for instance, John Paul II’s treatment in his theology of the body, General Audience of July 4, 1984, in John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), pp. 613-15. Also see his *Mulieris Dignitatem* §23.

⁵³ See *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*; accessed 8/1/2020 at https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/19-267_1an2.pdf.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, the 2018 decision in *Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd., et al. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission et al.*, accessed 8/1/2020 at https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/17pdf/16-111_j4el.pdf; and the 2020 case concerning the Affordable Care Act’s contraceptive mandate and the Little Sisters of the Poor, accessed 8/1/2020 at https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/19-431_5i36.pdf. The reason why such cases are not settled law is that, for decades, the Court has been prioritizing its non-establishment jurisprudence over its free exercise jurisprudence. By so doing, the Court failed to realize that the point of the disestablishing a church is to

Before becoming pope, Wojtyła made the case for marriage by characterizing it as a community wherein each spouse is personally fulfilled in and through relationships of mutually affirming love.⁵⁵ Such a community constitutes the best of this life's joys when it is not transient but expressive of an enduring, irrevocable, and unreserved relationship embodying one's form of life or lifestyle.⁵⁶ A marriage thus constituted is both a *communio*⁵⁷ and a community insofar as it is organized around the marital common goods of spousal unity and the procreative conjugal love expressing reciprocal total self-giving. Consequently, parenthood is a fulfillment of spousal love when consciously accepted and when the child is welcomed and the spouse's procreative role is gratefully affirmed.⁵⁸ The family is thus likewise both a *communio* and a community insofar as it is organized around the familial common good of each other's well-being inasmuch as "man is a common good of the family."⁵⁹ These affirmations within the *communio* marriage and family enable everyone to experience being both an end in oneself and a gift to another.⁶⁰ The family accordingly embodies the "radical acceptance of the

promote the free exercise of religion. For discussion, see my "The Affordable Care Act and Religious Liberty: Principles of Adjudication" in *The Affordable Care Act Decision: Philosophical and Legal Implications*, ed. Fritz Allhoff and Mark Hall (New York NY: Routledge, 2014), pp. 179-92; and my "Tolerance, Society and the First Amendment: Reconsiderations," *Univ. of St. Thomas Law Journal* 3/1 (2005): 75-91.

⁵⁵ Wojtyła, "The Family," p. 321: "*Communio* in the primary sense refers to community as a mode of being and acting (in common, of course) through which the persons involved mutually confirm and affirm one another, a mode of being acting that promotes the personal fulfillment of each of them by virtue of their mutual relationship."

⁵⁶ See John Paul II, *Letter to Families* §11. As Karol Wojtyła, John Paul II justifies his emphasis on marriage and the family for personal fulfillment by noting that God did not create human beings to be solitary and, in support, he cites *Gaudium et spes* §12, which states: "But God did not create the human being as a solitaire, for from the beginning 'male and female God created them' (Gen. 1:27), and their union is the primary form of a community of persons. For by their innermost nature human beings are social beings, and unless they relate to others, they can neither live nor develop their potential" ("The Family," p. 320).

⁵⁷ Wojtyła, "The Family," p. 323.

⁵⁸ Wojtyła, "Parenthood as a Community of Persons," *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M. (New York NY: Peter Lang, 1993 [1975]), pp. 329-42 at pp. 330-31.

⁵⁹ *Letter to Families* §11.

⁶⁰ *Letter to Families* §11.

understanding of man as a person who ‘finds himself’ by making a sincere gift of self.”⁶¹ Families thereby enable members to experience joyful, meaningful, and fulfilling lives, for these affirmations are given and received in accord with truth and objective morality. For it is only those actions that accord with the intellect’s knowledge of what is true and the will’s love of the good that bring one into the fullness of one’s own humanity. In his *Letter to Families*, John Paul II writes, to be human is everyone’s “fundamental vocation.”⁶²

Joy is best found within one’s own family, whether that family be biological or adopted.⁶³ The possibility of being adopted into the Christian family enables everyone to have a family: “No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone,” says John Paul II.⁶⁴ This Church-family flows from the total self-giving of Christ to his Church and vice versa. A Christ-centered relationship enables one to reciprocate Christ’s love by seeing the face of Jesus in others. Mother Teresa explains: “We have been created to love and be loved, and then he [God] becomes man to make it possible for us to love as He loved us. He makes himself the hungry one, the naked one, the homeless one, the sick one, the one in prison, the lonely one, the unwanted one.”⁶⁵ To see Christ in others both requires and enables one to act for that other’s good and be fulfilled in that act of a familial love.

Spousal love exercised through families belies the assumption that

⁶¹ *Letter to Families* §14.

⁶² *Letter to Families* §9.

⁶³ Karol Wojtyła justifies his emphasis on the family for personal fulfillment by noting that God did not create human beings to be solitary and he cites *Gaudium et spes* §12: “But God did not create the human being as a solitaire, for from the beginning ‘male and female God created them’ (Gen. 1:27), and their union is the primary form of a community of persons. For by their innermost nature human beings are social beings, and unless they relate to others they can neither live nor develop their potential” (“The Family,” p. 320).

⁶⁴ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* [*The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*] §85, accessed 8/1/2020 at http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html. Also see Gal 4:6: “As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out ‘Abba, Father.’” For explication see my “Modes of Re-enchantment: John Paul II and Familial Love,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 39/1-2 (2017): 91-114 at pp. 106-08.

⁶⁵ Mother Teresa, “Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech,” accessed 8/1/2020 at <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1979/teresa/26200-mother-teresa-acceptance-speech-1979/>.

life's meaning, joy, and fulfillment cannot be through self-giving love. Robust, self-giving, familial love thus deflates the culture of death because the family is where one can exist for himself through a sincere gift of self that is reciprocated by other family members.⁶⁶ Consequently, the importance of joyful, loving families cannot be underestimated. In *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul exclaims that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family.”⁶⁷

Third Step: Social and Political Pro-family Activism

Besides being true to the communions of self-giving love constitutive of families, families are communities formed by identifying their members as its common good to which they are dedicated. Accordingly each family member not only is “accepted, respected, and honored precisely because he or she is a person”⁶⁸ but is also celebrated as gift from God.⁶⁹ This deep appreciation and respectful affirmation of family members counters the valuing of individuals according to their ability to gratify one's desires. Consider, for instance, how many babies are aborted because they are the wrong sex or suffering from a disability or disease. Loving families prioritize care for the most vulnerable and inculcate the virtues of generosity, consideration, respect, solidarity, kindness, reconciliation, and forbearance. To educate by living out these values requires developing new lifestyles that value persons over things and extends the helping hand to those in need.⁷⁰ John Paul II accordingly calls families “the first and fundamental school of social living.”⁷¹ To be such a school is the essential activism required of families.

John Paul II also argues that familial love charges families with the responsibility of serving life.⁷² Families serve life by begetting and rearing children, by caring for the elderly without practicing euthanasia or assisted suicide and by regulating birth through natural family planning and not through contraceptives designed to frustrate the procreative element of conjugal love. For John Paul II, contraceptive use betrays the total self-giving constitutive of the *communio* of marriage: “The logic of a total gift of self involves a potential

⁶⁶ *Letter to Families* §11.

⁶⁷ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* §86.

⁶⁸ EV §92.

⁶⁹ EV §83.

⁷⁰ EV §98.

⁷¹ *Familiaris Consortio* §37.

⁷² *Familiaris Consortio* §17.

openness to procreation.”⁷³ Although openness to conception requires forgoing the use of contraceptives, it does not preclude using natural family planning. Richard J. Fehring and Michael D. Manhart report that among women who were ever married, those who have ever used natural family planning have a 58 percent lower odds of divorce than among women who have never used NFP.⁷⁴ Rejecting the possibility of new life through using contraceptives disposes one towards abortion. Indeed, almost fifty-one percent of those having an abortion in 2014 were using a contraceptive in the month that pregnancy began.⁷⁵ Avoiding contraceptives inculcates a respect for life and the natural moral law that is protective of life at its beginning and its end. The family’s love of life and deep respect for the right to life makes an invaluable contribute to society and the state insofar as a humane state must respect that right.⁷⁶ John Paul II argues: “There can be no true democracy without a recognition of every person's dignity and without respect for his or her rights.”⁷⁷

Families, moreover, have the responsibility of developing society so that it is thoroughly and unconditionally prolife and profamily.⁷⁸ States need to repeal unjust laws permitting abortion and euthanasia while passing laws supportive of families,⁷⁹ such as laws requiring flexible work hours for family emergencies or laws permitting zoning exceptions that would allow converting garages into apartments for elderly grandparents or disabled siblings. Restructuring society to support families involves rethinking work schedules to allow family time, especially for the young and the elderly.⁸⁰ Society should recognize the family’s sovereignty and rights,⁸¹ especially as the educator of its children.⁸² Education that includes the truth about life, sexuality, and love

⁷³ *Letter to Families* §12.

⁷⁴ Richard J. Fehring and Michael D. Manhart, “Natural Family Planning and Marital Chastity: The Effects of Periodic Abstinence on Marital Relationships,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 20/10 (2020): 1-14 at p. 1.

⁷⁵ R.K. Jones, “Reported Contraceptive Use in the Month of Becoming Pregnant among U.S. Abortion Patients in 2000 and 2014,” *Contraception* 97 (2018): 309–12 at p. 311.

⁷⁶ EV §101.

⁷⁷ EV §101.

⁷⁸ *Familiaris consortio* §17; *Evangelium vitae* §77, §81.

⁷⁹ EV §90.

⁸⁰ EV §90.

⁸¹ *Letter to Families* §17.

⁸² *Familiaris Consortio* §44, §60-§62.

“helps individuals to be ever more human.”⁸³ Other rights of families to be recognized include the right to work, to property, to participate in culture, and to relate to the state via the principle of subsidiarity.⁸⁴

Furthermore, states need to promote and support marriage because no state can flourish without robust families able to care for children and the elderly. For instance, statistics show that fifty-six percent of single women with children occupy America’s the lowest income group.⁸⁵ Statistics also show that, in 2018, thirty-nine percent of all births were to unmarried women⁸⁶ and that, during 2010 to 2018, twenty-three percent “of U.S. children under the age of 18 lived with one parent and no other adult.”⁸⁷ The disadvantages facing these children unmask the societal harm done by the majority’s disdain for marriage and family.

Over all, the family’s ability to enable members to find fulfillment through mutual self-gifting underpins its “mission to ‘guard and communicate love.’”⁸⁸ For, as John Paul II writes, “only a true love is able to protect life.”⁸⁹ Familial love’s ability to counter the culture of death establishes a decisive responsibility to protect and celebrate life from conception to natural death. Therefore, John Paul II concludes that “the role of the family in building a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable.”⁹⁰

Conclusion

Analysis of all the factors contributing to the current acceptability of abortion, euthanasia, and other threats to human life led John Paul II to identify the central problem to be a culture of death in which the truth about the human

⁸³ EV §97.

⁸⁴ *Letter to Families* §17.

⁸⁵ Steve Crabtree and Sofia Kluch, “How Many Women Worldwide Are Single Moms?” Gallup World Poll: 2014-2018 (March 5, 2020); accessed 8/1/2020 at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/286433/women-worldwide-single-moms.aspx>.

⁸⁶ Joyce A. Martin et al., “Births: Final Data for 2018,” *National Vital Statistics Reports* 68/14 (November 27, 2019): 1-46 at p. 5, accessed 8/1/2020 at https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_13-508.pdf.

⁸⁷ Stephanie Kramer, “U.S. has world’s highest rate of children living in single-parent households,” Pew Research Center (December 12, 2019), accessed 8/1/2020 at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/12/u-s-children-more-likely-than-children-in-other-countries-to-live-with-just-one-parent/>.

⁸⁸ EV §92.

⁸⁹ EV §97.

⁹⁰ EV §92.

person is obscured and familial love is not recognized as the key to human fulfillment and joy. I have accordingly argued that the roadmap building the culture of life begins by understanding personal fulfillment, proceeds by understanding familial love, and triumphs when families successfully reform society and government to be prolife and profamily.

The tasks confronting proliferers are daunting, so daunting as to tempt one to despair, if it were not for two simple facts. The first fact, John Paul II reminds us, is that “the common good of the whole of society is man.”⁹¹ The second is that “man is first of all the ‘glory of God.’”⁹² The first fact means that focusing on promoting and saving human lives is to pursue the common good upon which human civilization depends. This political philosophy grounded in John Paul II’s Thomistic personalism clarifies that the goal of civilization and the ultimate common good of the state is advancing the fulfillment of the human person so that everybody is fully alive and united in familial love, kindness, and joy. The second confirms the first while proclaiming that we are not alone and that the fate of the good person is “not a matter of indifference to the gods,” as Socrates proclaimed at his trial⁹³ and as believers in the Incarnation of the one God can testify. I believe that this is a key reason why John Paul II took pains to connect his arguments about human love, joy and fulfillment to his religious beliefs: he was not only making the case that God is prolife but also making the case that God helps all who take on His holy cause and lovingly seek to defend the helpless and the vulnerable. Indeed, John Paul writes: “To the family is entrusted the task of striving, first and foremost, to unleash the forces of good, the source of which is found in Christ the Redeemer of man. Every family unit needs to make these forces their own so that...the family will be ‘strong with the strength of God.’”⁹⁴

⁹¹ *Letter to Families* §11.

⁹² *Letter to Families* §11.

⁹³ Plato, *Apology* 43d in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 3-26 at p. 25.

⁹⁴ *Letter to Families* §23.