

Pro-Life Basics

What documents would you recommend that Catholics read to educate themselves on the Church's teachings concerning the sanctity of life?

Since the early 20th century, several Vatican documents have been written that are essential for a proper understanding of human dignity and every human being's right to life.

Pope Pius XI's encyclical on Christian marriage, *Casti Connubii* (1930), laid the groundwork for future encyclicals dealing with birth control and is one of the most beautiful documents I've ever read.

Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) explains and reaffirms the Church's constant prohibition of contraception, and promotes the use of natural methods of spacing births. His predictions about the consequences of contraception (in section 17) have come true in ways even worse than he could have imagined.

The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (1974) reiterates the Church's constant prohibition of abortion and condemns efforts to promote it.

In his apostolic exhortation on the Christian family, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), Pope John Paul II condemns the anti-life mentality leading to contraception, abortion, and coercive family planning programs.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's instruction *Donum Vitae* (1987) prohibits the use of procreation techniques that

replace the conjugal act, all forms of non-therapeutic manipulation of human embryos, freezing or destroying human embryos, prenatal diagnosis intended to encourage abortion, use of material obtained from aborted babies, and surrogate motherhood.

In his comprehensive encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), Pope John Paul II tied together all of the Church's teachings on human dignity and the right to life quite beautifully to address contraception, sterilization, artificial procreation, abortion, population control programs, the death penalty, euthanasia, and suicide.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's instruction *Dignitas Personae* (2008) reaffirmed *Donum Vitae*, and addressed a number of bioethical questions arising from biomedical technologies and deadly products introduced since *DV* was issued, including human embryonic stem cell research, "emergency contraception," the abortion pill, and human genetic engineering.

And by searching in its index or using an online search engine, the answer for almost any moral question can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994).

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