

The 90th Anniversary of Lambeth 1930: one Catholic's thoughts.

1.

Conservatives often wonder where Western civilization went wrong. Many worry that the past was a morally, artistically and intellectually higher place, whose basic decency we shall never recreate; and that our rapid decline is due to forces over which we have no control. Feeling this, some resort to purely political explanations of Western decline, and so direct their resentment to individuals or even to races. Yet political action—even that which is most hidden from the public view—is basically prosaic, and cannot explain deep-seated decline.

Today, then, I want to suggest a moral explanation of our decline. I want to argue that it began at the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops in 1930, which published its final reports 90 years ago this summer, and thereby effected a major change in the morals of the Christian West. As we shall see, this moral change looks comparatively minor today. Yet it chipped away at the West's moral inheritance, and so facilitated all our subsequent moral changes.

But first, some background. By the summer of 1930, Christendom had shared a common moral code for at least 1,000 years, and 50 generations—that is, ever since it had received the faith. Included in this moral code was the belief that artificial contraception was immoral. On this view, artificial contraception is degrading, because it turns sex from an act of *self-giving*, and so of love, into an act of *taking*, and so of lust. In contraceptive sexual relations, each person reserves part of his/her essential sexual nature—his/her actual or notional fertility—and so treats the other as an instrument of gratification, rather than as a fully human person.

According to this view, sexual acts have the natural secondary end of unification, but their primary natural end is reproduction. (A Martian ethnographer would find it obvious that the primary end of sex is reproduction; only humans get muddled about this). Therefore, it is morally licit for couples to have non-contraceptive sexual relations in infertile periods, or after menopause, in pursuit of the end of unification; but it is always immoral to have contraceptive relations, because one thereby withholds part of oneself, and so frustrates both the primary and the secondary ends of sex. In 1930, most people still assumed that, deep down in the conscience, everyone intuited the essential grubbiness and coldness of contraceptive acts.

In the language of the Catholic Church's distinctive and enduring philosophy, which had first established Christendom's hitherto-stable moral code, the wrongness of artificial contraception is encoded in the *natural law*: the law written within our very minds and bodies, obedience to which is a necessary condition of our full natural flourishing as rational animals. The natural law forbids things like murder, theft, and adultery. Catholics think that this law has an actual writer, God, and so regard it as inherently meaningful and purposive.

However, agnostics who respect human nature can accept much of the natural law too. This is because the natural law is at once both moral and bodily. For example, 'casual' sexual relationships are *morally* wrong; but, as neurochemistry has now shown us, they also disrupt natural human functioning in a *bodily* way: sexual acts cause the release of bonding hormones that are less effective the more often released, and so 'casual' relationships make it harder for the

participants later to form stable family bonds with others. Similarly, it is generally accepted that one cannot be a *happy* practicing murderer or thief: one will develop neuroses or other traits that will impinge upon one's functioning, and which will lead to depression or the like. In other words, acts contrary to the natural law disrupt our natural functioning as rational animals; their moral wrongness is inextricable from this fact.¹

The use of artificial contraception, too, is both morally wrong and bodily disruptive: it inappropriately separates sexual bonding processes from parenthood. Moreover, we now know that use of the contraceptive pill makes a woman more attracted to men who are genetically more similar to her, and that this may be leading to the birth of more children with weak immune systems and other health problems. Furthermore, women subject to this effect may come to dislike their partners/husbands when they stop using the contraceptive pill, and this may lead to higher rates of family breakdown². There is also strong evidence that women who have ever used contraception are at a greater risk of violent death than those who have never done so, and that this risk increases the longer they have used contraception³. It has been suggested that this is because they are typically less sexually compatible with their partners/spouses⁴ (because of the distorting effect of the contraceptive pill), therefore have less happy relationships, and are therefore at greater risk of 'intimate partner violence'⁵. In other words, the pill is at once biologically and morally disastrous.

However, most of the Anglican bishops of Lambeth 1930, unlike their instinctively conservative flocks, had little time for natural-law reasoning, which perhaps sits most easily with Catholic theology. (I do not argue this point here, however: my argument draws on Catholic thought, but is intended for a general audience). And so, amidst much controversy, the bishops decreed that the use of artificial contraception was, under certain loosely-defined conditions, morally acceptable. This was an astonishing U-turn: a break with the clear statements of the Lambeth Conference of 1920, and with the moral consensus shared by every major Christian denomination, East and West, for the entire history of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, virtually every other Protestant community soon followed them, and the hazy reservations of the Anglican decree were almost instantly forgotten. Suddenly, artificial contraception was moral.

¹ But note that natural facts never *force* one to conclude that there is a binding natural law; that is why one will only accept its bindingness if one respects nature.

² Roberts, SC, Gosling LM, Carter V & Petrie M. MHC-correlated odour preferences in humans and the use of oral contraceptives.' *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*. 2008;275(1652):2715-22.
cf Alvergne A, Lummaa V. Does the contraceptive pill alter mate choice in humans? *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 2010;25:171-179.

On the health of children born to such women: Havlicek J, Roberts SC, The MHC and human mate choice: a review. *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 2009;34:497-512.

³ Hannaford PC, Iversen L, Macfarlane TV, Elliott AM, Angus V, Lee AJ. Mortality among contraceptive pill users: cohort evidence from Royal College of General Practitioners' Oral Contraception Study. *British Medical Journal* 2010;340:c927.

⁴ Garver-Apgar CE, Gangestad SW, Thornhill R, Miller RD & Olp JJ. Major histocompatibility complex alleles, sexual responsivity, and unfaithfulness in romantic couples. *Psychological Science* 2006;17: 830-835.

⁵ Roberts, SC. Rapid response: contraceptive pill and violent death. *British Medical Journal* 2010. Available at <https://www.bmj.com/rapid-response/2011/11/02/contraceptive-pill-use-and-violent-death> as of 31st July 2020

However, human nature and the natural law do not change. Happily, neither have the Catholic Church's fundamental moral teachings. On the 31st December 1930, Pope Pius XI wrote an excoriating response to the Anglicans, *Casti Connubii*, asserting that those who wanted to dilute the natural law (i.e. those in favour of artificial contraception) were, 'more or less wittingly', 'emissaries of the great enemy who is ever seeking to sow cockle among the wheat'. Pius warned that this new compromised, middle-road morality would ultimately lead to barbarism and moral disaster.⁶ In this, he drew on Pope Leo XIII's encyclical of 1880, *Arcanum*, which had 'bullishly' asserted the Church's defence of the family, and of genuine, marital sexual relationships, against all civil powers that would have redefined marriage and family life; and which had railed against the exploitation of workers, which always disrupts working-class family life.

2.

So then, in December 1930, the Pope predicted moral disaster. Then the moral disaster began. One generation of Westerners accepted artificial contraception; the next generation accepted sexual acts outside of marriage; the following generation accepted homosexual quasi-sexual acts and abortion; the subsequent generation accepted casual sexual relationships; the following generation—today's young adults—are accepting transgenderism. Within ninety years, a millennium of civilized morals was all but obliterated.

But at this point in my argument, some readers will probably say that they agree with contraception, but not with those other things. And certainly the pro-contraception generation often did not agree with its children's acceptance of non-marital sex; those children often did not agree with their children's acceptance of abortion, and so on. I do not deny this. But it is beside my point. My point is that the acceptance of artificial contraception was Christendom's first revolt against the natural law; it degraded society's moral instincts, and sowed the seeds of future generations' even more radical rejections of the natural law.

You see, the moral health of society is analogous to the moral health of individuals. We know from experience that individuals cannot remain on an even keel of sin: if a person steals a small thing, he will be tempted to steal bigger and bigger things; if a person looks at one kind of pornography, he will be tempted to look at worse and worse kinds. Analogously, society itself cannot remain on an even keel of sin over the generations. One generation may inherit Christendom's moral code, and reject only part of it; but the children that it brings up in this partial rejection, will most likely reject still more of it. For sure, any one person may certainly attempt to rationalize and defend a partial Christian moral code—one that is, say, in favour of contraception but against abortion. But such partial Christian codes are simply not *historically stable*. Only the Christian tradition before 1930 offers an historically stable moral code; if one espouses only part of it, one merely serves as a link in the West's 90-year long chain of moral decline.

⁶ *Casti Connubii* Chapters 45-47, available at http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html as of 31st July 2020

3.

As I hope that I have made clear, the path from contraception to today's transgenderism is not so much a *deductive* path as a *moral-instinctive* one. Nevertheless, we can also see the logical seeds of later corruptions within the practice of contraception itself. For as I have said, contraception involves a refusal to give the whole of oneself to another. To the extent that he/she understands that he/she is breaking the natural law, the user of contraception therefore lacks *humility*—the humility to acknowledge, and offer, all of his/her own nature to another. He/she instead tries to control and surpass his/her bodily nature, presuming that he can exist as pure spirit and will, unbound by any bodily limitations, even where those limitations are very clearly intertwined with his psyche and his mental balance—as in the area of reproduction. But notice something here. 'Trans advocates', and those unhappy people who 'transition', make the same presumption. Benedict XVI's much-quoted account of the logic of progressive gender theory must here be quoted again:

The words of the creation account: 'male and female he created them' (Gen 1:27) no longer apply. No, what applies now is this: it was not God who created them male and female – hitherto society did this, now we decide for ourselves. Man and woman as created realities, as the nature of the human being, no longer exist. Man calls his nature into question. From now on he is merely spirit and will. The manipulation of nature, which we deplore today where our environment is concerned, now becomes man's fundamental choice where he himself is concerned. From now on there is only the abstract human being, who chooses for himself what his nature is to be.⁷

Meanwhile, as Western society was slipping into this logical and instinctual mire, the Church was reconfirming its historically stable moral teaching. As Paul VI warned in his famous *Humanae Vitae* of 1968,

Responsible men can become more deeply convinced of the truth of the doctrine laid down by the Church on this issue [contraception] if they reflect on the consequences of methods and plans for artificial birth control. Let them first consider how easily this course of action could open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards. Not much experience is needed to be fully aware of human weakness and to understand that human beings—and especially the young, who are so exposed to temptation—need incentives to keep the moral law, and it is an evil thing to make it easy for them to break that law. Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.⁸

⁷ Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia at the Clementine Hall, Friday 21 December 2012, available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121221_auguri-curia.html as of 4th July 2020

⁸ *Humanae Vitae* chapter 17
http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html

As Francis said in 2014, ‘[Paul’s] genius was prophetic’.⁹ The Catholic Church continues to regard contraceptive acts as intrinsically immoral. She does not even accept that a contraceptive act can consummate a marriage¹⁰: it is not genuine sex. As this understanding of consummation should remind us, Lambeth 1930 begins that abuse of language by which we now speak of ‘oral sex’, ‘gay sex’, and other things, whereas these should really be termed acts of quasi-sexual mutual gratification—as should contraceptive acts. The *ends* of sex—reproduction, and the bonding that comes from unreserved self-giving—must remain part of the *definition* of sex; otherwise ‘sex’ can mean anything.

4.

It is often said by the ignorant that the Church is ‘obsessed with sex’, which it views with suspicion—and here I am, asserting that the collapse of our civilization has its roots in a comparatively minor break with the natural law. Am I simply evincing this obsession and this suspicion? Well, I think it’s more accurate to say that it is modern society, not the Church, that is obsessed with sex. As C.S. Lewis once wrote, one prominent modern religion is a ‘serious sex worship—quite different from the cheery lechery endemic in our species’¹¹. As he says elsewhere:

You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?’.¹²

Lewis goes on to say ‘Contraceptives have made sexual indulgence far less costly within marriage and far safer outside it than ever before, and public opinion is less hostile to illicit unions and even to perversion than it has been since Pagan times’.¹³

Now, if one explores Lewis’ food-analogy a little further, one can see that the Church is certainly not suspicious of genuine sex in its truly human, i.e. marital context, any more than she is suspicious of the healthy natural enjoyment of nourishing food. On the contrary, her concern is to protect the social and personal moral environment in which genuinely self-giving marriages can be formed, and in which the great natural good of legitimate sexual activity can be realized; to protect it from perversions of, and misconceptions about, sex.

This claim requires some explanation. As Lewis’ analogy suggests, all bodily enjoyments exist to serve some legitimate end: for example, the enjoyment of eating serves the end of nutrition. Bodily enjoyments are therefore *Second things*—things that are good because they serve an end

⁹ Sandro Magister, ‘Francis, the Pope of “Humanae Vitae”’, *L’Espresso*, 1st May 2014, available at <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1350783bdc4.html?eng=y> as of 31st July 2020

¹⁰ See *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1061, Section 1, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P3V.HTM as of 31st July 2020

¹¹ C.S. Lewis (1970), ‘Revival or Decay’, in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p.253

¹² C.S. Lewis (2002, first published 1942), *Mere Christianity*, Harper Collins, p.96

¹³ (ibid) p.97.

that is good. But all humans have a tendency to pursue these *Second things* as *First things*, i.e. legitimate ends in themselves. Theologians say that this tendency is due to the Fall of man, which weakened our reason's government of our bodies.

Now, this tendency of ours to put *Second things* first is very dangerous. For *Second things* obey an important general rule: if one pursues them as *First things*, they become harmful, and less and less fulfilling. For example, if a man regularly eats for enjoyment when he is not hungry, or at times when nutrition is not a morally appropriate end to pursue (e.g. when attending someone's death-bed), he will inevitably become miserable, compulsive, sickly—and ultimately, he will cease to enjoy his food. It is morally and neurologically impossible to pursue gustatory enjoyment as an end in itself: the enjoyment pales when divorced from its legitimate ends. The same is true of sex. The promiscuous man, like the glutton, soon finds less and less enjoyment in his obsession. Treating the natural enjoyment of sexual activity as a *First thing* destroys that natural enjoyment itself.

Now, in today's West, most people still understand the dangers of gluttony; in particular, they understand that children need to be taught self-discipline about eating. What most people have forgotten, however, is that sex is also a *Second thing*, and that we need to learn self-discipline about it, too. Recent generations' failure to do so has been disastrous for their health, happiness, and moral freedom. Yet how can one understand that sex is a *Second thing* if one accepts artificial contraception? Society's acceptance of artificial contraception implies that bodily enjoyments may be pursued even when they serve no primary or secondary end; this acceptance therefore alienates man from his own body, and from the meaning and purpose written therein.

Perhaps for this reason, the wicked idea persists that we will somehow realize our 'authentic' 'nature', and our true 'happiness', if we shun all self-discipline about sex, and behave ferally. In this 'happiness', man's mind uses his body as an instrument of gratification; he behaves in a socially destructive, bodily distorting, and therefore irrational way. When he does so, he has no integrated self, because, though he is rational, social, and an animal, he tries to deny all three descriptions.

It is this self-defeating, irrational perversion which the Church opposes: not sex itself. She wants to preserve the self-giving affection of sexual relationships within marriage. This unitive affection is rapidly disappearing today, because people pursue the glow of it as an end in itself. Contraception encourages and facilitates their doing so. This is why the Church—and the natural law—forbids it.

5.

Of course, many today would say that it is too difficult, mentally and physically, for couples to obey all of the natural law: they would have an unhealthy number of children if they did. However, this objection ignores the essential natural complement to the natural law's prohibition of artificial contraception: namely breastfeeding. Since one can hardly understand the natural law on contraception without understanding this badly-neglected topic, I want to discuss it briefly in this my penultimate section.

First of all: breastfeeding can generally provide a good natural spacing of births. Studies suggest that mothers in primitive tribes, who follow age-old breastfeeding practices but use no contraception, have children at an average interval of about 44 months.¹⁴ Although Western standards of health and nutrition perhaps make this effect less reliable, there is growing evidence that exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months, and 'ecological' breastfeeding in the first year or two—whereby the mother always takes her baby with her, and doesn't set strict feeding schedules—can produce a long contraceptive effect even under Western conditions.¹⁵

Breastfeeding of this kind is, emotionally and physically, a major undertaking. However, it benefits society in remarkable ways. Firstly, breastfed babies are physically healthier: on average they have fewer instances of ear infections, colds and throat infections, gastrointestinal tract infections, coeliac disease, clinical asthma, eczema, atopic dermatitis, inflammatory bowel disease, obesity, diabetes (both types), childhood leukaemia and lymphomas, pneumonia, sudden infant death syndrome¹⁶, diarrhoea¹⁷, urinary-tract infections¹⁸, bacterial meningitis¹⁹, Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis²⁰, and tooth decay²¹, and they have better average cardiovascular health²² and lower average blood pressure²³. They score higher on cognitive and IQ tests in

¹⁴ See Sheila Kippley (2008) *The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding: The Frequency Factor*, chapter 6

¹⁵ Sheila Kippley (2005) *Breastfeeding and Catholic Motherhood: God's Plan for You and Your Baby*, Sophia Institute Press: Manchester NH, chapter 6.

¹⁶ All items mentioned up to here are from the major review, American Academy of Pediatrics, Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk *Pediatrics*, 2012;129 (3) e827-e841.

¹⁷ Newburg D.S., Walker W.A. Protection of the neonate by the innate immune system of developing gut and of human milk. *Pediatr Res.* 2007;61(January (1)):2–8. and Morrow A.L., Ruiz-Palacios G.M., Altaye M., Jiang X., Guerrero M.L., Meinen-Derr J.K. Human milk oligosaccharide blood group epitopes and innate immune protection against campylobacter and calicivirus diarrhea in breastfed infants. *Adv Exp Med Biol.* 2004;554:443–446.

¹⁸ Mårild S, Hansson S, Jodal U, Odén A, Svedberg K. Protective effect of breastfeeding against urinary tract infection. *Acta Paediatr.* 2004;93(2):164-168.

¹⁹ Nicholas J Andreas et al, Role of human milk oligosaccharides in Group B Streptococcus colonization, *Clinical and Translational Immunology*. August 2016.

²⁰ Xu L, Lochhead P, Ko Y, Claggett B, Leong RW, Ananthakrishnan AN. Systematic review with meta-analysis: breastfeeding and the risk of Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. *Aliment Pharmacol Ther.* 2017;46(9):780-789. doi:10.1111/apt.14291

²¹ Public Health England, Guidance: Breastfeeding and Dental Health, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/breastfeeding-and-dental-health/breastfeeding-and-dental-health#breastfeeding-and-dental-health> as of 11th August 2020

²² C. Owen, P. Whincup, K. Odoki, J. Gilig, and D Cook, (September 2002) 'Infant Feeding and Blood Cholesterol: A Study in Adolescents and a Systematic Review', *Pediatrics* 110:3, pp597-608.

²³ American Academy of Family Physicians, Position paper 'Breastfeeding', available at <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/breastfeeding-support.html> as of 11th August 2020

school²⁴ (amongst premature babies, breastfeeding gives an average IQ advantage of 8.3%²⁵), leading to a detectable academic advantage up to twelfth grade²⁶, and higher adult intelligence²⁷; they score higher on visual acuity tests²⁸, have better responses to vaccinations²⁹, and a lower incidence of ‘paediatric overweight’.³⁰ Breast-fed infants born pre-term have lower rates of long-term growth failure and neurodevelopmental disabilities, of necrotizing enterocolitis, and of hospital readmissions in the year after discharge from their ICU³¹. Many of these effects are substantially greater in children who have been exclusively breast-fed for at least six months than in those who have not, and many seem to be greater the longer and more often children are breastfed even past that point. Breast-milk itself has remarkable properties: if a mother is exposed to pathogens such as cholera bacteria or influenza, her milk will contain specific antibodies against those diseases within hours.³²

Secondly, mothers who have breastfed a child are themselves physically healthier: they are at lower risk of ovarian cancer, breast cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidaemia, cardiovascular disease³³, thyroid cancer³⁴, endometrial cancer³⁵, post-partum depression³⁶, post-partum relapses into multiple sclerosis³⁷, and (probably) post-menopausal hip fractures.³⁸ Thirdly, it is strongly suspected that the close bond that such breastfeeding requires is extremely important for the emotional development of the child, that it reduces the risk of juvenile delinquency and criminal insanity, and that it is good for the mother’s mental health too.³⁹ For such reasons, the World Health organization and UNICEF recommend ‘exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life; and introduction of nutritionally-adequate and safe

²⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics, op. cit.

²⁵ A Lucas et al. Breast Milk and Subsequent Intelligence Quotient in Children Born Preterm, *Lancet* 1992;339 pp.261-264

²⁶ L.Horwood and D. Fergusson. Breastfeeding and Later Cognitive and Academic Outcomes, *Pediatrics* 1998;101:1

²⁷ E. Mortensen, K. Michaelsen, S. Sanders and J. Reinisch, The Association Between Duration of Breastfeeding and Adult Intelligence. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 2002;287:18 pp.2365-2371

²⁸ Birch E, Birch D, Hoffman D, Hale L, Everett M, Uauy R. Breast-feeding and optimal visual development. *J Pediatr Ophthalmol Strabismus*. 1993;30(1):33-38.

²⁹ Dorea JG. Breastfeeding is an essential complement to vaccination. *Acta Paediatr*. 2009;98(8):1244-1250.

³⁰ Laurence Grummer-Strawn and Zuguo Mei, Does Breastfeeding Protect Against Pediatric Overweight? Analysis of Longitudinal Data from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System’, *Pediatrics* 2004;113:2 pp.81-86

³¹ American Academy of Pediatrics op. cit.

³² Kippley (2005) p.72

³³ American Academy of Pediatrics op. cit.

³⁴ Yi X, Zhu J, Zhu X, Liu GJ, Wu L. Breastfeeding and thyroid cancer risk in women: A dose-response meta-analysis of epidemiological studies. *Clin Nutr*. 2016;35(5):1039-1046.

³⁵ Jordan SJ, Na R, Johnatty SE, et al. Breastfeeding and Endometrial Cancer Risk: An Analysis From the Epidemiology of Endometrial Cancer Consortium. *Obstet Gynecol*. 2017;129(6):1059-1067

³⁶ Figueiredo, B., C. Canario, and T. Field, Breastfeeding is negatively affected by prenatal depression and reduces postpartum depression. *Psychol Med*, 2014;44(5): 927-936.

³⁷ Krysko KM, Rutatangwa A, Graves J, Lazar A, Waubant E. Association Between Breastfeeding and Postpartum Multiple Sclerosis Relapses: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Neurol*. 2020;77(3):327–338. doi:10.1001/jamaneurol.2019.4173

³⁸ Bjørnerem A, Ahmed LA, Jørgensen L, Størmer J, Joakimsen RM. Breastfeeding protects against hip fracture in postmenopausal women: the Tromsø study. *J Bone Miner Res*. 2011;26(12):2843-2850

³⁹ Kippley (2005) chapter 2 citing various sources.

complementary (solid) foods at 6 months together with continued breastfeeding up to 2 years of age or beyond.⁴⁰

For similar reasons, Pope John Paul II talks of the ‘daily heroism’ of dedicated mothers⁴¹. Indeed, research conducted in the Pontifical University of St Thomas by Fr William Virtue concluded that the Church has consistently taught that mothers have a *serious obligation* to breastfeed—i.e. an obligation that cannot be neglected except for very good reasons⁴². This obligation is of the natural law.

Both contraception and breastfeeding, then, pose us the same question: do we want to accept the limitations of our human nature, and work within them—or do we want to fight our natures? For the simple truth is that nature isn’t woke. Nature indicates that artificial contraception plays havoc with our minds, our bodies, our choices, and, ultimately, our society’s fundamental moral outlook. Nature also indicates that a mother of an infant—whether she’s a trained brain surgeon, nuclear engineer, or philosopher—can contribute to the health and well-being of society in no better way than by using her powerful natural capacity to ensure that her infant is far healthier, well-adjusted and brighter than he or she would otherwise be; and that the mother can do this best by being readily available to the infant at all times. A mother and infant are effectively one biological system, as before birth.

Now, in both cases, we can of course try to conquer nature—and so try to conquer the author of nature, God. A sex-addict can go to the doctor complaining that he is getting no pleasure from sexual acts, and the doctor will give him drugs to help. Parents can get medicines and psychotherapy for a sad and sickly child, and can get a psychiatrist to tell them to feel no guilt about their choices. But these attempts to subvert the natural law never seem to work. Pleasure-drugs have terrible knock-on effects, and often induce early death (consider the life expectancy of the rock stars). Medicines and psychotherapy induce health less reliably than do healthy practices, and they kill off civilization by their cost. As the poet Horace once said

Drive Nature out with pitchfork well you might,
But ever she’ll return to win the fight,
Bursting your haughty culture in the night.⁴³

As we’re finding out today, however many times society drives out nature with drugs, devices, psychotherapy, and the distortion of language, she always comes back to slap society in the face.

⁴⁰ World Health Organization, ‘Infant and young child feeding’, available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/infant-and-young-child-feeding> as of 10th August 2020

⁴¹ *Evangelium Vitae* n.86

⁴² Kippley (2005) p.31 citing Fr William Virtue (1995) *Mother and Infant: The Moral Theology of Embodied Self-Giving in Motherhood in Light of the Exemplar Couplet Mary and Jesus Christ*, dissertation, Pontifical University of St Thomas, Rome

⁴³ My translation. The original is ‘Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret, | et mala perumpet furtim fastidia victrix.’ Horace *Epistles* 1.10.24f. ‘Fastidia’ is hardly translatable: it is the plural of the abstract noun ‘fastidium’, which contains the ideas of *fussiness*, *delicacy*, *squeamishness*, *distaste*, *pampered-ness*, *contempt* and *pride*. Making an abstract noun plural in Latin often has a concretizing effect—e.g. it makes the singular ‘fussiness’ into ‘acts of fussiness’.

6.

Where does this all leave us? Well, I would suggest that those of us alive today in the West now face a moral dilemma that is clearer than ever before. The horns of this dilemma have finally ruptured the fabric of society, and appear now in all their stark simplicity. Do we go on fighting nature, until we're all too sad and sickly—or dead or never-born—to maintain civilization? Or do we accept that there is meaning and purpose in our nature, and so return to a radical obedience to the natural law? There really are no middle roads left: *either* one obeys all the natural law, including its prohibition on contraception; *or* one abets our moribund modern madness. As Pope Benedict said in the quotation above, the younger generation are very interested in ecology: in making sure that humans live in harmony with, rather than fight, nature. It's time for us to live in harmony with our *own* natures, too.