

Catholicism and the Culture Wars

4. *Humanae vitae* and the sexual revolution

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *The Woman With Three Arms* (1860)

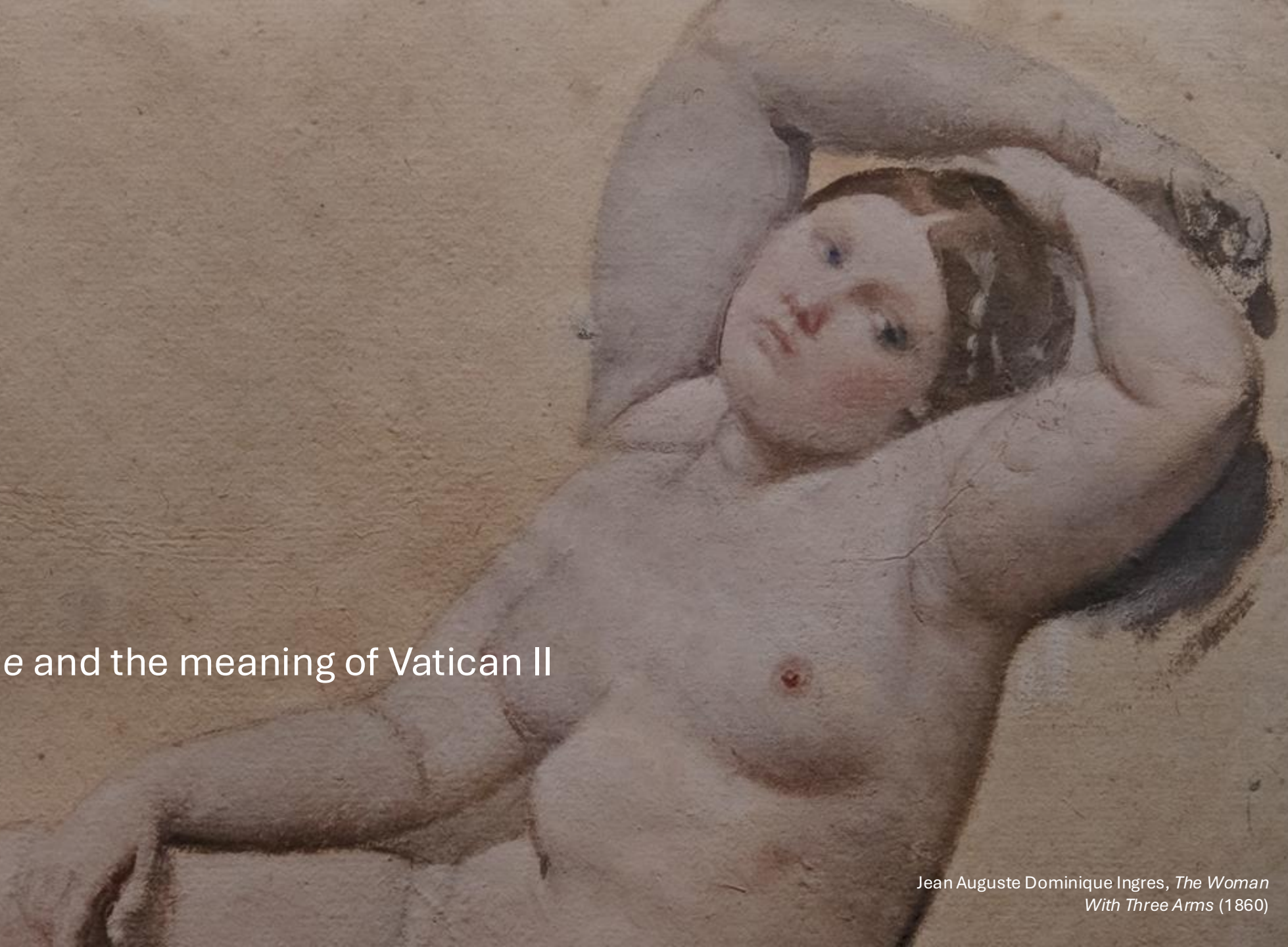
Previously...

- Reaction against secular liberalism – “license”; Marriage as battleground
- Extended to feminism, reproductive technologies
- Vatican II – sacramental ontology, move beyond voluntarism, authoritarianism, more positive stance (but ambivalences)
- Controversy: what is the meaning of the council?
- This week: key moment in controversy

Part 1

Humanae vitae and the meaning of Vatican II

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *The Woman With Three Arms* (1860)



A new challenge

- The pill – invented in the 1950s
- sex without reproduction *and* without mutilation
- i.e. different to *Casti Conubii*?
- Pius XII – rejects as temporary sterilisation (1958)
- But didn't settle debate



Peter McInture, *Pope Pius XII* (1981)

The Pontifical Commission on Birth Control

- Convened by John XXIII (1963), continued into Paul VI
- Quickly realised – basic positions in sexual ethics at stake including contraception
- Paul VI – prior teaching is authoritative, but defers resolution of issue until findings
- Uncertainty? – freedom of conscience
- More consultative model of leadership? – anti-authoritarianism post-Vatican II

The Commission is rejected

- Eventually found in favour of contraception within marriage by large majority
- Dissenting (minority) position paper leaked: walkback would challenge Church's claim to be guided by Spirit
- Findings rejected by Paul VI (after a lot of soul-searching)
- Seen as walk-back of consultative leadership, Vatican II more generally

Linked positions on

- Sexual revolution
- Authority in church (hierarchy, Spirit)
- Vision of council/stance re modern world
- Catholic culture wars today!

Part 2

License *Humanae vitae*



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *The Woman With Three Arms* (1860)

License in *Humanae vitae*

- Post Council emphasis on love as good in marriage, sexual ethics as response of faith
- But also falls back on license
- Church's authority and teachings to be founded in something beyond the purely human
- Suggests revisionist approach disregards this

Going beyond norms = license?

“...to experience the gift of married love while respecting the laws of conception is to acknowledge that one is not the master of the sources of life but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator. Just as man does not have unlimited dominion over his body in general, so also, and with more particular reason, he has no such dominion over his specifically sexual faculties, for these are concerned by their very nature with the generation of life, of which God is the source.”

(no. 13)

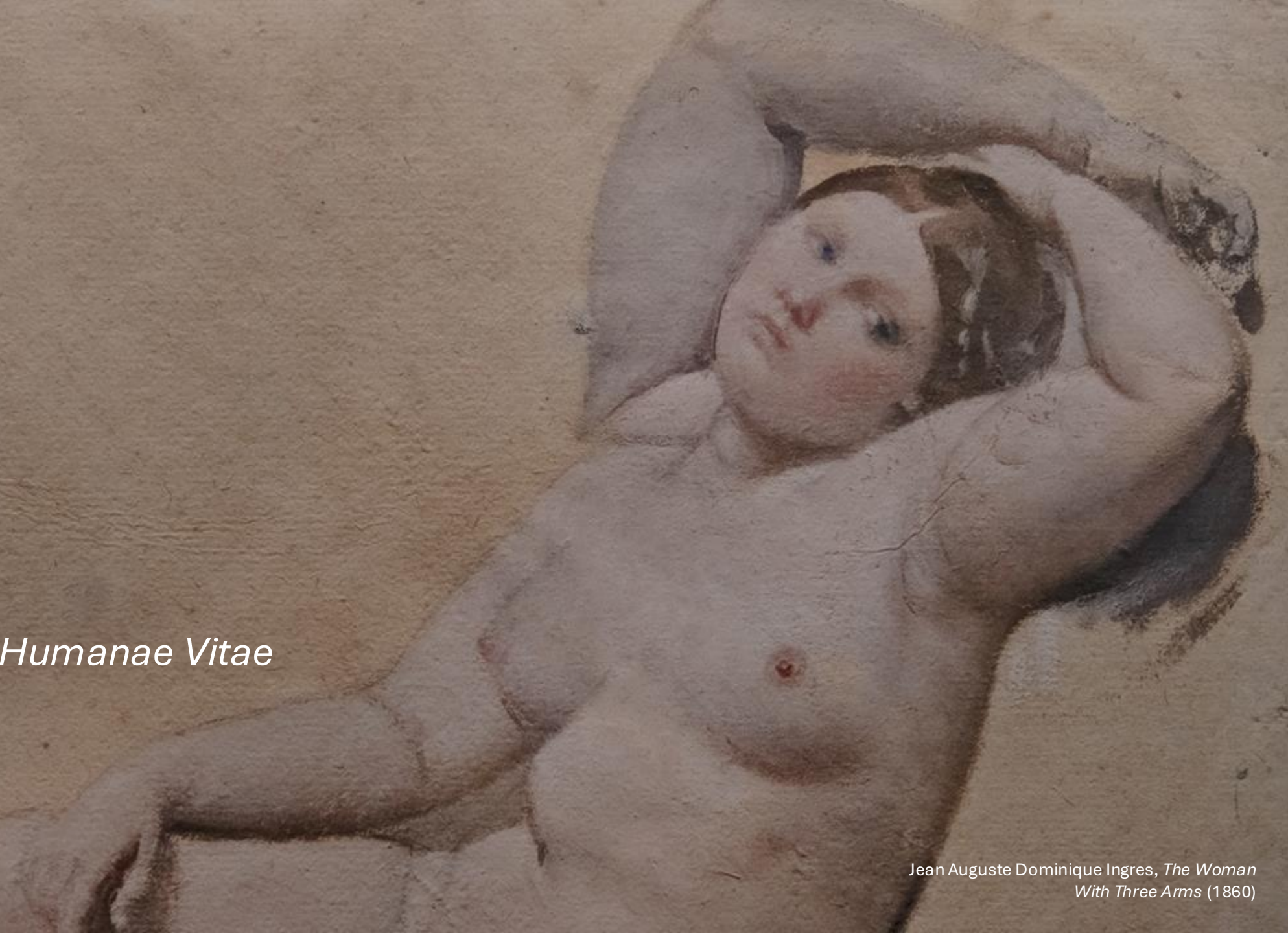
Defying authority = license?

“For it is your principal duty—We are speaking especially to you who teach moral theology—to spell out clearly and completely the Church's teaching on marriage. In the performance of your ministry you must be the first to give an example of that sincere obedience, inward as well as outward, which is due to the magisterium of the Church. For, as you know, the pastors of the Church enjoy a special light of the Holy Spirit in teaching the truth. And this, rather than the arguments they put forward, is why you are bound to such obedience.”

(no. 13)

Part 3

License after *Humanae Vitae*



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *The Woman With Three Arms* (1860)

License after *Humanae vitae*

- License remains key narrative for staking out opposition to world
- License narrative as organising principle for authoritarian, antifeminist Catholicism
- But! Doesn't mean total rejection of Vatican II
- New ways of articulating this narrative, influenced by Council
- Personalism – human subject as both objective and subjective components; individual and social; free and relational

John Paul II and feminism

- Resolving dispute about *Humanae vitae* is key feature of papacy
- Reiterating condemnations of contraception
- Also contesting feminism more generally
- *Mulieris Dignitatem* – ambivalent affirmation of feminism: dignity
- But dignity of complementarian nature, warns about masculinising women
- i.e. secular feminism vs human nature
- Personalism – more holistic view of complementarity (*pace* Vatican II)

“Human ecology”

- Centessimus annus (1991) – centenary of *Rerum Novarum*
- Develops critique of socialism (atheistic subordination of dignity of individual person to state); inhuman capitalism
- Need to protect human nature as part of nature
- Including norms, institutions that flow from this (family)
- anthropological error” in which “[m]an... discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are” (no. 37)

The Magisterium and the moral law

- *Veritatis splendor* (1993)
- Critiquing developments in moral theology, concern with *Humanae Vitae* controversy
- General theme: sundering freedom from the moral law
- Affirming rightful authority of Magisterium as interpreter of law
- Obedience to law (& Magisterium) as loving response to person of Christ
- Human freedom is created for/finds fulfilment in this

Questions

1. How different is this from pre-Vatican II? In what ways?
2. Is license a useful narrative for thinking about sexuality? How? How not?
3. What authority should the Church have over human sexuality?