This essay is a discussion of the "Vatican's Declaration on Some Questions of Sexual Ethics." This article can be found in *The Pope Speaks* (vol. 21, no. 1, 1976). While this essay is interesting and very clearly written, after one has analyzed the Vatican declaration, it becomes clear that the arguments presented are weak.

The Vatican's Declaration was issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and approved by Pope Paul VI. In the Vatican declaration, traditional Roman Catholic teachings concerning sexual ethics are explicitly affirmed. Arguments that appeal to revealed truth (that is, religious arguments) and philosophical arguments are put forward. According to the Declaration, the moral order is objective and unchanging. The Declaration asserts that our sexuality is a very important factor which shapes our lives. The Vatican believes that moral corruption is increasing and thinks that sexual matters have invaded entertainment and education. This has led people to become confused about what is right and wrong when it comes to sex. The Declaration goes on to claim that the origin of moral principles can be found in human nature itself. These moral principles may be known through reason alone, via natural reflection of human nature, or through divine revelation. The declaration proceeds to assert that sexual relations are only appropriate within the confines of marriage. Furthermore, according to the Declaration, all sexual relations should be designed to produce children. Finally, the document
proceeds to argue that premarital sex, homosexual behavior, and masturbation are immoral.

As I stated at the beginning of this essay, there are weak arguments in the Vatican's declaration. An example can be found in the second paragraph on page 199. In this paragraph, the Vatican argues that premarital sexual relations are wrong because premarital relations do not usually result in children and all sexual relations should be designed to produce children. Here is a standardization of this argument.

1. Premarital sexual relations do not usually result in children.
2. All sexual relations should be designed to produce children.

Therefore,

3. Premarital sexual relations are wrong.

The first premise does not pass the true premises test because, as everyone in this class should know, many premarital relationships result in childbirth nowadays. According to a recent Gallup poll published on page 29 of the September 1995 edition of *Emerge* magazine, 53% of African-American children are born to single parents. This definitely proves that many premarital relations result in children. But the Vatican's argument could be changed a bit and made much stronger. The Vatican claimed that premarital relations do not usually result in children. They could have claimed that producing children is not the intention of most people who have premarital sex. This would be a much strong claim. While, as I just said, many premarital relations do produce children, I believe that most people who have premarital relations do not wish to have children--at least not at that time. If the Vatican's second claim, that all sexual relations should be designed to produce children, were true, and if it is true that most people do not seek children when they have premarital sex, then it would be wrong to have
premarital sex.

This brings us to The Declaration's second premise, that all sexual relations should be designed to produce children. I do not believe that this premise is true. If all sexual relationships were designed to produce children, then a couple that decides to have two children should stop having sex after they have those two children. In other words, the Vatican asserts that contraception is wrong. Many people think that it is very important to use contraception. Many people have sex with no intention of having children. In fact, some married couples are infertile. They cannot have children. If a couple knows that they are infertile, then their sexual relations cannot be designed to produce children. So the Vatican's view seems to show that infertile married couples should not have sexual relations. This shows us that the Vatican's second premise is not true. The Vatican’s argument fails the true premises test.

However, the Vatican’s argument passes the good form test. If it were true that premarital sexual relations do not usually result in children and it if were true that all sexual relations should be designed to produce children, then it would follow that premarital sexual relations are wrong. If all sexual relations should be designed to produce children, then it would follow that all sexual relations that were not designed to produce children are wrong. If it were also true that premarital sexual relations do not usually produce children, that would show that they were not designed to produce children and so would be wrong. So the Vatican’s argument fails the true premises test and passes the good form test. Overall, I do not think it is a very good argument.

The Declaration goes on to argue that homosexuality is wrong. The main reason that the Declaration cites in support of this claim is that the Bible condemns it. This argument assumes
that whatever the Bible condemns is wrong. I am not sure that this is true. Between the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Bible condemns the eating of pork and a host of other things but that does not mean that they are all wrong. Many people in this class, for instance, probably do not think that eating of pork is wrong. So we cannot conclude that whatever the Bible condemns is wrong. Besides, not everyone believes that the Bible is the word of God. Some people are Muslims, Buddhists, or members of other religions. These people will not be convinced that something is wrong just because the Bible says it is. If the Vatican hopes to provide arguments that will convince everyone, they cannot rely on the Bible.

Finally, The Declaration argues that masturbation is wrong. The main reason given for this view is that masturbation is not part of a mutual relationship of giving. In other words, unlike sexual intercourse, masturbation is something a person does alone. On the other hand, masturbation does not have to be done alone and I think that some couples engage in mutual masturbation. Also, it is not clear to me why sexual relations must be part of a mutual relationship of giving. On page 158 of Principles of Psychology, a leading psychology textbook, Dr. Henry Tasker claims that masturbation is a normal human activity that almost all people engage in. He asserts that it is not only normal but contributes to a healthy sexual identity. So it seems that there may be nothing wrong with masturbation even if it is usually done without anyone else being around.

In summary, it is clear that the Vatican declaration, has some weak arguments in it. This does not mean that all the arguments are weak, but on the contrary, some of them are weak. The Vatican's arguments would be better if they analyzed them properly before putting them out for publication, and public consumption.