

A Plea for Human Ecology: on the Prophetic Value of *Humanae Vitae* for today

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“The only way to discuss the social evil is to get at once to the social ideal,” writes G. K. Chesterton in his insightful book, *What’s Wrong with the World*. “[A]nd the upshot of the title can be easily and clearly stated,” the famous English author continues. “What is wrong is that we do not ask what is right.”¹ Missing in England in 1910—and the lack has arguably only aggravated throughout much of the western world in the interim—was, in other words, the notion of timeless anthropological, and thus also moral, norms governing the human species. In fact, today, as differing from Chesterton’s time,² it is considered “normal” to accord to individual consciences “the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly,”³ Pope John Paul II observed some twenty years ago. “Indeed, when all is said and done man would not even have a nature; he would be his own personal life project. Man would be nothing more than his own freedom!”⁴

Such, more specifically—as I have extensively explicated elsewhere⁵—is what the saintly pope presented as “a freedom which is self-designing,”⁶ or “self-defining,” a “phenomenon creative of itself and its values,”⁷ an autonomous power “whose only reference point” is, as Ratzinger observed during the same period, what the individual conceives as “his own [subjective] good.”⁸ As differing from what the Belgian theologian Servais Pinckaers calls “freedom for excellence”—that is to say, freedom “rooted in the soul’s spontaneous inclinations to the true and the good”⁹—this fundamentally subjective conception of freedom is, Ratzinger continues, “no longer seen positively as a striving for the good, which reason uncovers with help from the community and tradition.” Instead, it is “defined [...] as an emancipation from all conditions that prevent each one from following his own reason;”¹⁰

1 G. K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 17. The original was published by Dodd, Mead and Company, 1910.

2 “We agree about the evil,” Chesterton admitted of the men of his time; “it is about the good that we should tear each other’s eyes out” (ibid., 17).

3 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter “On the Splendor of Truth,” *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6, 1993), no. 32.

4 Ibid., no. 46.

5 See Michele M. Schumacher, “A Plea for the Traditional Family: Situating Marriage within John Paul II’s Realist, or Personalist, Perspective of Human Freedom,” *Linacre Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (2014), 314-342.

6 John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 48.

7 Ibid., no. 46.

8 Joseph Ratzinger, “The Problem of Threats to Human Life,” in John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (eds.), *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 381-392, at 382. No translator mentioned. Originally published in the *Aépril* 8, 1991 issue of *L’Osservatore Romano*.

9 Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble from the third edition (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 332. For the Catholic tradition following St. Thomas Aquinas, “the natural inclinations to goodness, happiness, being and truth were, Pinckaers explains, “the very source of freedom. They formed the will and intellect, whose union produced free will.” (ibid., 245).

10 Joseph Ratzinger, “The Problem of Threats to Human Life,” 382.

whence its designation, “freedom of indifference.”¹¹ Hence, as Cardinal Ratzinger diagnosed the situation in 1996, the “average opinion spontaneously understands freedom” as “the right and opportunity to do just what we wish and not to have to do anything we do not wish to do.”¹²

When, moreover, freedom is detached from objective truth, it is impossible, as John Paul II noted in *Evangelium Vitae*, to lay a rational basis for universal, personal rights, and society is given over to “the mercy of the unrestrained will of individuals or the oppressive totalitarianism of public authority.”¹³ The holy pope thus pointed to the astonishing contradiction between a world community acclaiming the idea of universal human rights—“rights inherent in every person and prior to any Constitution and State legislation”—and “a tragic repudiation of them in practice.”¹⁴ Replacing the criterion of personal dignity and the accompanying requirements of “respect, generosity and service” was thus “the criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness,” which meant that persons were no longer considered “for what they ‘are,’ but for what they ‘have, do and produce,’” whence “the supremacy of the strong over the weak.”¹⁵

Ours has become “a civilization of production and of use, a civilization of ‘things’ and not of ‘persons’, a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used,” Pope John Paul II observed in 1994. “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.”¹⁶ In contrast to the domination that the human being is called to exercise over the visible world in virtue of creation (cf. Gen 1:28)—a domination which ought to consist “in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter”—he or she becomes, as this same pope put it, “the slave of things, the slave of economic systems, the slave of production, the slave of his own products.”¹⁷ Or as Cardinal Ratzinger put it in still starker terms,

[M]an is becoming a technological object while vanishing to an ever-greater degree as a human subject, and he has only himself to blame. When human embryos are artificially “cultivated” so as to have “research material” and to obtain a supply of organs, which then are supposed to benefit other human beings, there is scarcely an outcry, because so few are horrified anymore. Progress demands all this, and they really are noble goals: improving the quality of life—at least for those who can afford to have recourse to such services. But if man, in his origin and at his very roots, is

11 Ibid. Cf. Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, especially 240-53; 327-53; and idem, *Morality: The Catholic View*, preface by Alasdair MacIntyre and trans. Michael Sherwin (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), 65-81.

12 Joseph Ratzinger, “Truth and Freedom,” trans. Adrian Walker, in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, 337-353, at 338. (Originally published in *Communio* 23, no. 1 [Spring 1996], 16-35).

13 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 96. In short, “all too often freedom is confused with the instinct for individual or collective interest or with the instinct for combat and domination, whatever be the ideological colors with which they are covered” (ibid., *Redemptoris Hominis*, no. 16). See also his extensive development of these ideas in *Veritatis Splendor*; idem, Encyclical letter on the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), no. 44; and Vatican Council II, Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis humanae*, no. 2.

14 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 18. See also ibid., no. 69; and Joseph Ratzinger, “The Problem of Threats to Human Life,” 382-383.

15 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 23.

16 Idem, “Letter to Families,” *Gratissimam sane* (February 2, 1994), no. 13. Cf. idem, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 5.

17 John Paul II, *Redemptoris hominis*, no. 16.

only an object to himself, if he is “produced” and comes off the production line with selected features and accessories, what on earth is man then supposed to think of man? How should he act toward him?¹⁸

As if to sum things up, John Paul II observed in 1993 that the human being is “no longer capable of posing the question of the truest meaning of his own existence, nor can he assimilate with genuine freedom these crucial moments of his own history.” Rather, he or she is preoccupied “with ‘doing,’ and using all kinds of technology,” of busying him- or herself “with programming, controlling and dominating birth and death.”¹⁹ This “great drama” of a culture that has arguably come to value productivity over life itself “can leave nobody indifferent,” John Paul II insisted in his first encyclical, for the human person, who has become obsessed with profit and efficiency, pays for this obsession with the currency of human life. Hence the ironic danger to the person by a culture that had sacrificed its theocentric option in favor of an anthropocentric one.²⁰ Not surprisingly, the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice presented “*the truth itself of the being who is man*” as “the first of the great challenges facing humanity today [in 2004].”²¹

This disturbing situation of a world that has lost its anthropological bearings was just on the horizon when Pope Paul VI penned what has rightfully been designated “the most controversial encyclical in history,”²² namely *Humanae Vitae*. His purpose, he tells us, was to respond to a “recent evolution of society” whereby mankind’s “stupendous progress in the domination and rational organization of the forces of nature” had been extended to a domination of “his own total being: to the body, to psychical life, to social life and even to the laws which regulate the transmission of life.”²³ Lost was the conviction, as Ratzinger would put it more than twenty years later, “that man’s Being contains an imperative; the conviction that he does not himself *invent* morality on the basis of calculations of expediency but rather *finds* it already present in the essence of things.”²⁴ Lost too was the idea that freedom is not simply autonomy and self-assertion, but that it is essentially receptive, being ordered at the outset to the objective good of the human person: a good that requires freedom’s surrender, namely the good of communion resulting from a mutual gift of self. “Self-*mastery*, not self-assertion, is the index of a truly human freedom,” explains John Paul II’s biographer with regard to his teaching.²⁵ In the specific climate of moral relativism, which the pope from Poland denounced as “so detrimental to man,”²⁶ he thus incited the faithful to exercise stewardship over creation and responsibility for their own and other human lives with respect

18 Joseph Ratzinger, “Introduction to Christianity: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” in John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (eds.), *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 1-13, at 5 (originally published in idem, *Introduction to Christianity*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).]

19 Idem, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 33.

20 For, as the council put it straightforwardly, “without a creator there can be no creature. [...] [O]nce God is forgotten, the creature is lost sight of as well.” (Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36).

21 The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 16; original emphasis.

22 George Weigel, *A Witness to Hope* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999), 206.

23 Pope Paul VI, encyclical letter on the regulation of births, *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968), nos. 1, 2.

24 Joseph Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World: Assessment and Forecast*, 2nd ed., trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 34. (Original: *Wendezeit für Europa? Diagnosen und Prognosen zur Lage von Kirche und Welt* [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1991]). Similarly, “Moral values have lost their evidential character, and thus also their compelling claim, in a society conditioned by technology” (ibid., 33). Hence, “Morality, just like religion, now belongs to the realm of the subjective,” so as to be “posited by man” (ibid., 37).

25 George Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999), 176.

26 John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 173.

for God's purpose and intentions, as revealed in the nature of each thing, including most especially *human* nature.

In question more specially in the turbulent years following the sexual revolution was, as we shall see in *part one*, the meaning of authentic marital love as “inseparable,” as Pope Paul VI had taught in his controversial encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, from its procreative meaning;²⁷ whence the incontestable and ever-widening gap between magisterial teaching and the actual practice of the lay faithful. This breach, furthermore, is not without consequences for our comprehension of the doctrine itself. On the contrary, I will point out in *part two* that the inductive reasoning whereby sexual intercourse was recognized throughout the history of mankind as the cause not only of marital unity, but also—even primarily—as the cause of procreation, is no longer operative in the minds of many of our contemporaries. Instead, there is reason to believe that the prevalent use of the pill and other contraceptive devices has not only hindered pregnancy; it has also—along with secularism and the epistemological presuppositions that accompany it²⁸—obscured our minds and hearts from recognizing an objective world order that is not of our making: an order wherein is rooted the moral order.

This obscurity is no minor matter, moreover, as far as Pope John Paul II was concerned, for it was precisely within the unity of the two meanings of the conjugal act that was safeguarded—he was convinced—the integrity of marital love; whence the sinful tendency to reduce one's spouse to the object of one's passion, rather than to acknowledge him or her (as well as oneself) as a responsible subject. Implicit to the “inseparable connection” of the unitive and procreative meanings of the conjugal act was, he thus taught—as I will exposit in *part three*—the inseparable connection between human freedom and a natural world order that is not of our making; whence also the inseparable connection between human freedom and love in accord with the Creator's intention for the human being.

Far from calling us to subdue our natural desires, as he is accused of doing,²⁹ John Paul II was thus inviting us, in the spirit of the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5: 27-28), to purify them—as we shall see in *part four*—in view of their “*full and mature spontaneity*,” namely, “in relationships that are born from the perennial attraction of masculinity and femininity.” Thus pointing to desires that are far more profound, noble and befitting of the human person than is the sexual urge, he invited the faithful to embrace authentic “*eros*”: a love characterized by “the upward impulse of the human spirit toward what is true, good, and beautiful.”³⁰ Hence, “‘eros’ and ‘ethos’ do not diverge,” John Paul II insisted in terms that would inspire his successor. They “are not opposed to each other, but *are called to meet in the human heart and to bear fruit in this meeting*.”³¹ In this way, we were being invited, more specifically, to “conform” in the words of *Humanae Vitae*, our “activity to the creative intention of God.”³² In so doing, we were to witness to the fact that human activity is necessarily preceded by receptivity—and thus by an affirmation of the gifts of creation that are not of our own making (in the case at hand, that of human nature)—so as in turn to witness to the giftedness of all of

²⁷ See Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 12.

²⁸ Such, more specifically I will argue, is the current tendency of granting to human knowledge and volition the task of establishing—rather than discovering and confirming—ontological truth.

²⁹ See for example Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 280-285 (original: *Eunuchen für das Himmelreich: Katholische Kirche und Sexualität* [Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1988]).

³⁰ John Paul II, General audience of November 12, 1980, in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 319.

³¹ Idem, General audience of November 5, 1980, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 318. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 5.

³² Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 10.

creation and most especially that of human life.³³ In this way we were also being called to testify to the fact that prior to the orientation given it by human persons, human freedom is ordered *by nature* to the end that is love. Hence love too is endowed with an objective meaning according to which human actions must be measured if they are to be true to the Christian meaning of the word (cf. John 15). As Pope John Paul II put it, “Love is true when *it creates the good of persons and of communities*; it creates that good and *gives it* to others. [...]. Love is demanding. It makes demands in all human situations; it is even more demanding in the case of those who are open to the Gospel.”³⁴

In short (and as I will conclude in *part five*), the plea that I make in these pages is straightforward and simple: *this is no time to sacrifice anthropological and moral norms in the name of freedom of conscience*. On the contrary, as John Paul II put it straightforwardly, “conscience [...] is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather there is profoundly imprinted upon it *a principle of obedience vis-à-vis the objective norm* which establishes and conditions the correspondence of its decisions with the commands and prohibitions which are at the basis of human behavior.”³⁵ Hence, the warning that Pope Francis recently offered with respect to mankind’s “dominion” over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28)—namely, that it does not entail the right to an “unbridled exploitation of nature” by “domineering and destructive”³⁶ force—is one that we need to take to heart with respect to our *own* human nature, as a body-spirit whole. For human nature—not unlike the rest of created nature—is ordered by the Creator to an objective good that cannot be sacrificed by the human will: unless, that is to say, the human being would thus compromise his own good and that of the human community of which he or she is part. As Francis himself pleaded, shortly before he made his entreaty for the “care of our common home”: we need to “foster a new human ecology” in response to “the crisis of the family.” “For social environments, like natural environments, need protection.”³⁷ Pointing in this way to the family as “an anthropological fact, and consequently a social, cultural fact, etc.,” Pope Francis likewise pointed to anthropological and social norms that cannot be “limited by ideological concepts.”³⁸

Such, I am suggesting, was also the earnest call of Paul VI to married couples to exercise “responsible parenthood”³⁹ not by way of an aggressive “domination and rational organization”⁴⁰ of our own sexual nature—namely by way of artificial contraception—but by way of “self-mastery”⁴¹: the control of our “innate drives and emotions”⁴² by our reasons and wills, rather than the control of human fertility by technological manipulation. “What we are concerned with here,” as Josef Pieper put it in his treatment of the virtue of chastity, “is the

³³ On the primacy of receptive affirmation in human love, see the outstanding work of Josef Pieper, *On Love*, in idem, *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 139-281.

³⁴ John Paul II, “Letter to Families,” *Gratissimam sane* (February 2, 1994), no. 14.

³⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (May 18, 1986), no. 43. Emphasis added.

³⁶ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter on Care for our Common Home, *Laudatio Si* (May 24, 2015), no. 67.

³⁷ See the address of Pope Francis to participants in the International Colloquium on the Complementarity between Man and Woman sponsored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Synod Hall (17 November 2014), no. 2: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141117_congregazione-dottrina-fede.html

³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

³⁹ Cf. Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, no. 21.

⁴² *Ibid.*, no. 10: “With regard to man's innate drives and emotions, responsible parenthood means that man's reason and will must exert control over them.”

purpose of sex as it was intended originally in the first creation, and ennobled by Christ in the New Creation; what we are concerned with is the existential structure of the moral person, as established in nature and in grace; what we are concerned with is order among men as guaranteed not merely by natural justice, but also by the higher justice of *caritas*, that is, supernatural love of God and man.”⁴³ In short, we are concerned with anthropological—and thus moral—norms governing our sexual practices for the good of the human species and of the human person.

I. The Church’s Commitment to Truth and the Problematic Gap between Doctrine and Practice

Of course, anthropological and moral norms are often confused with normative practice,⁴⁴ just as the “the consensus of the faithful” is often mistaken for the “supernatural sense of faith” (cf. LG 25).⁴⁵ It should thus come as no surprise that Creighton University professors Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler would raise the question in 2008: “How can anyone claim that the Church believes that artificial contraception is morally wrong when some 89 percent of the communion-Church does not believe that claim?”⁴⁶ In this way, they echoed the concern of sociologist Andrew Greeley in his observation, some thirty years earlier (in 1977), of the huge gap between magisterial teaching and actual practice. Pointing to an apostasy rate in the United States that had doubled in fifteen years, as well as a substantial decline in church attendance, a one-third decrease in financial contributions to the Church, and the departure of thousands of priests and nuns from ministry, he attributed “virtually all of this decline” to “a single problem—[the Church’s position on] birth control.”⁴⁷

In light of what he recognized as a church “in an organized shambles” at that time, it is not surprising that Greeley predicted a disaster was ahead. “The dynamics at work in American Catholicism at the present time are such,” he argued in 1977, “that it is relatively easy to imagine the ‘worst case’ eventuality and relatively difficult to imagine the quite modest ‘best case’ eventuality. The birth control encyclical not only canceled out the [positive] effects of the Vatican Council”⁴⁸—as measured by “mass attendance, communion reception, confession, daily prayer, accepting the church’s right to teach, Catholic activism and approval of one’s son becoming a priest”⁴⁹—“it also set into motion forces which have caused grave losses to the

⁴³ Josef Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues*, no translator mentioned (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1966), 158.

⁴⁴ Such is what Georges Cottier signals as the confusion between the “normal” with the “normative”. See Georges Cottier, *Défis éthiques* (Saint-Maurice, Switzerland: Editions Saint-Augustin, 1996), 90ff. As a case in point, Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler maintain that for “people with a permanent homosexual orientation who do not choose that orientation [...] a homosexual orientation *is* normative” (*The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* [Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008], 108). “Homosexual and heterosexual are further specifications of *sexual* orientation, and this further specification constitutes what is normative for homosexual or heterosexual persons” (ibid., 109).

⁴⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 5.

⁴⁶ Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person*, 263. For statistical reference, see George H. Gallup Jr., *Religion in America 1996* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Religion Research Center, 1996), 44. The authors point to a similar discord between doctrine and practice with regard to cohabitation before marriage.

⁴⁷ Andrew Greeley, *The American Catholic: A Social Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 149.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 131. Greeley goes on to argue that “if it had not been for the positive dynamic introduced by the Council, the deterioration analyzed in this chapter would have been even worse.” Or, to put it more positively, “if the Vatican Council had been the sole force at work from 1963 to 1974, the proportion above the mean on Catholic activism would have risen seven points (from 45 to 52 percent).” In contrast, if “the encyclical

Catholic church and which will be very difficult to reverse in the next fifteen years [1978-1992].”⁵⁰

In contrast to this devastating prediction, however, he happily reported five years ahead of schedule—in 1987—that American Catholics “have survived the turbulence of the years since the Second Vatican Council with their basic affiliation to the church relatively unchanged,” despite a still mounting rejection of Church doctrine. Although, to be more specific, nine out of ten American Catholics in 1987 rejected the Church’s teaching on birth control, divorce, and abortion, and four out of five disagreed that premarital sex was always wrong, this massive dissent had *not*—contrary to his own prediction ten years earlier—been accompanied by a massive exodus from the Church.⁵¹ They tend to “stay in the church, reject some sexual teachings, and protest with diminished financial support, a combination of responses which suggests a sophisticated (if not orthodox) response, hardly what one would expect from men and women who have been confused by false teachers.”⁵² Greeley concludes quite simply that the lay faithful are not looking to the teaching magisterium to “enlighten” them on matters of sexual morality.⁵³

“How can Catholics justify continued reception of the sacraments while at the same time rejecting certain doctrines which the teaching authority presently deems of paramount importance?,” he asks. “My research suggests,” the Chicago priest explained, “that they do so by an appeal from church leaders, who they think do not understand, to God, who they think does understand.”⁵⁴ Greeley concludes by recognizing “no reason to think that clear, forceful, and insistent repetition of teaching will change the mind of the American laity.”⁵⁵

Recent statistics reveal, moreover, that this trend has hardly declined. In response to the “notification” by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that many of the proposals in Margaret Farley’s book *Just Love*⁵⁶ are “in direct contradiction with Catholic teaching,” Boston University professor, Lisa Cahill argues that U.S. Catholics widely support these same proposals. Reporting in 2012, Cahill notes that 98 percent of Catholic women are currently using or have used artificial birth control, and that 64 percent of US Catholics favor the legal recognition of gay unions, more than the national average.⁵⁷ This current majority approval of

Humanae Vitae had been the sole force, that same proportion would have declined twenty-one points (from 45 to 24 percent). What actually happened was that the two forces operated simultaneously. The larger negative force of the encyclical masked the smaller positive force of the Council, but the Council had the effect of attenuating the larger negative influence of the encyclical by about one-third” (ibid., 139-141).

50 Ibid., 148.

51 See Andrew Greeley, “The Lay Reaction,” in Hans Küng and Leonard Swidler (eds.), *The Church in Anguish: Has the Vatican Betrayed Vatican II?* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 284-288, at 285. The original German edition was published one year earlier: *Katholische Kirche—Wohin? Wider den Verrat am Konzil* (Munich: R. Piper GmbH & Co. KG, 1986). Already in the late 1960s, Greeley reported, “37 percent of the pill users were receiving monthly communion, as opposed to 18 percent of the rhythm users and 15 percent of the no birth control group” (*The American Catholic*, 142).

52 Idem, “The Lay Reaction,” 285.

53 “But the point is that the continued, persistent, and vehement proclamations of the Vatican had no effect at all on the attitudes of American Catholics” (ibid. 287). Cf. Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, 297.

54 Ibid., 286.

55 Ibid., 287.

56 Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

57 Lisa Cahill, “Vatican Dogma v Margaret Farley’s Just Love,” *theguardian.com* (Monday 18 June 2012): <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/18/vatican-dogma-v-margaret-farley-just-love>. Similarly, Richard J. Fehring and Elizabeth McGraw report that Catholics constitute one of the largest groups of women who procure abortion, use contraception at a higher percentage than the general US population, and use sterilization as the number one method of contraception.” (“Spiritual Responses to the Regulation of Birth (A

gay unions represents, moreover, a significant increase since 1986, when Greeley reported that “two-thirds of American Catholics continue to accept the Church’s teaching” on this subsequently controversial subject.⁵⁸ Hence, while Farley’s book was written to ease the alleged suffering of Catholics and Christians of other denominations “due to teaching that may be observed in the breach, but is still part of the official self-definition of their faith traditions,” Cahill concludes that this goal may soon be obsolete. “Fear of nonacceptance by people in second marriages or gay relationships should decline quickly, if recent statistics tell the truth.”⁵⁹

While Cahill thus seemed to join Greeley in making light of the gap between orthodoxy and orthopraxy—after all, American Catholics apparently did⁶⁰—the German theologian Dietmar Mieth considered it in 1987 as nothing less than “a crisis”: “not [...] a crisis of morals in the sense that people really do not know what the right thing is and what they ought to do. Instead, we are dealing with a moral conflict within the church that, as it were, is not being carried on in an open, dialogical, and communicative manner because it thwarts practical, lived convictions within the church in certain areas.”⁶¹ By this—“thwarting practical lived convictions”—he obviously meant, in the context, allowing the laity to exercise their prophetic mission in the Church in such a way that they were “free” to thwart magisterial teaching, namely by “an appeal”—to return to Greeley’s provocative comment —“to God, who they think does understand [human weakness, presumably].”⁶² Or as Mieth puts it, when the pope substitutes his “personal conscience” for the “responsibility of conscience” (*Gewissensverantwortung*) of married couples, “the disrespected conscience [of the faithful] responds with its emancipation.”⁶³ Such is apparently what the Scottish Dominican Fergus Kerr dolefully identifies as “a silent schism.”⁶⁴

II. Epistemological Error and Moral Evil

As this “silent schism” exemplifies, in question is the conviction of Paul VI that “our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing that this teaching [namely, that of the ‘inseparable connection [...] between the unitive significance and the procreative significance

Historical Comparison),” *Life and Learning* 12 (2002), 265-286, at 281). See also Richard Fehring and Andrea Schlidt, “Trends in Contraceptive Use among Catholics in the United States: 1988-1995,” *Linacre Quarterly* 68 (May 2001), 170-185; and Stanley K. Henshaw and Kathryn Kost, “Abortion Patients in 1994-1995: Characteristics and Contraceptive Use,” *Family Planning Perspectives* 28, no. 4 (1996), 140-147 (<http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/2814096.pdf>).

⁵⁸ Andrew Greeley, “The Lay Reaction,” 286.

⁵⁹ Lisa Cahill, “Vatican Dogma v Margaret Farley’s Just Love.”

⁶⁰ Charles E. Curran puts it frankly, when he notes that “people can make the decision to disagree theory and in practice with church teaching and still consider themselves good, loyal Roman Catholics” (“Destructive Tensions in Moral Theology,” in Hans Küng and Leonard Swidler, eds., *The Church in Anguish: Has the Vatican Betrayed Vatican II?* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 273-278, at 277).

⁶¹ Dietmar Mieth, “Moral Doctrine at the Cost of Morality? The Roman Documents of Recent Decades and the Lived Convictions of Christians” in Hans Küng and Leonard Swidler (eds.), *The Church in Anguish: Has the Vatican Betrayed Vatican II?* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 125-143, here 125. See also Charles E. Curran, “Destructive Tensions in Moral Theology,” 277-278. To be sure, John Paul II was well aware of these criticisms. See his *Gratissiman Sane*, no. 12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 286.

⁶³ Mieth maintains more specifically that in his doctrinal decisions (*Lehrentscheidungen*), Paul VI chose to “substitute” his “personal conscience” for the “responsibility of conscience” (*Gewissensverantwortung*) of married people. See Dietmar Mieth, “Geburtenregelung—bis ‘Humanae vitae’ (1968). Elemente der Lehrtradition” in Peter Hünemann (ed.), *Lehramt und Sexualmoral* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1990), 27-47, here 46.

⁶⁴ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA / Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 219.

[...] inherent to the marriage act'] is in harmony with human reason.”⁶⁵ Whether or not that conviction was accurate in 1968 when the encyclical was first issued, “the majority of Catholics in the West now find the basic principle of the inseparability of the unitive and procreative dimensions of sexual activity simply unintelligible”⁶⁶—even “unbelievable”⁶⁷—Kerr observed in 2007; “and yet the teaching of the Catholic Church rests on that principle.”⁶⁸

Let us be honest with ourselves, however. We are not talking about some obscure principle of astrophysics. The so-called unintelligible principle of *Humanae Vitae* might be summed up quite simply as this: sex = strengthened conjugal unity + babies. Of course we all know—as did Paul VI⁶⁹—that not every “act of insemination (intercourse) is of itself procreative,” as Richard McCormick nonetheless deems necessary to point out in his accusation that the magisterium still ascribes to “Aristotelian biology.” Thanks to the discovery of the ovum in 1827, we now know by deduction what men and women throughout human history knew by induction: that, the American Jesuit continues, “the vast majority” of conjugal acts do not lead to conception.⁷⁰ It is, in fact, precisely this knowledge that has incited Catholic doctors and scientists to determine, with an amazing precision, a woman’s (relatively limited)⁷¹ period of fertility, and they have used this precision to help couples to both achieve and avoid pregnancy, without recourse to contraception.⁷² They have moreover done this—determined fertility with precision—in response to the Council’s mandate, which (contra McCormick) is taken up directly in *Humanae Vitae*.⁷³

Meanwhile, however, we are witnessing not only an outright denial—or what Mary Eberstadt calls the “will to disbelieve”⁷⁴—among many westerners of the obvious connection between the sexual revolution (and the extensive use of the pill) and the terrible loss of respect for human dignity and human life referred to in the first part of this article, but also an apparent blindness regarding the connection between the two meanings of the married act: and this despite (if not due to!) widely-pervasive (even mandatory) sexual education programs in most western nations. If not for a similar “will to disbelieve,” how—I can hardly help but ask—is it possible that the epistemological association between sex and procreation could

65 Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 12.

66 Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Theologians*, 214.

67 *Ibid.*, 216.

68 *Ibid.*, 214. In the words of Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*: “[T]he Church, calling men back to the observance of the norms of the natural law, as interpreted by its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marriage act (*quilibet matrimonii usus*) must remain open to the transmission of life. That teaching, often set forth by the magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning.” (Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, nos. 11-12). Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2366, 2369.

69 See, for example, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 11.

70 See Richard A. McCormick, “*Humanae Vitae*’ 25 Years Later,” *America* (July 17, 1993) (available at: <http://americamagazine.org/issue/100/humanae-vitae-25-years-later>).

71 Given the lifespan of sperm (five days) and the lifespan of the ovum (24 hours), pregnancy is only possible during the five days preceding ovulation (during which sperm might be kept alive in a woman’s very clear mucus) and the actual day of ovulation, and doctors and scientists have become very precise in determining those days based on signs from a woman’s body: her body temperature, the opening of her cervix, and the presence and character of her cervical mucus.

72 Notable is the Paul VI Institute in Omaha, NE, which has created the Creighton Model FertilityCare System and NaProTechnology. See their website at: <http://www.popepaulvi.com/>

73 See Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 24.

74 Such is the title she gives to the first chapter of her book, *Adam and Eve after the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012). See also <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/02/002-the-will-to-disbelieve>

practically disappear from the mental register of two generations of Catholics since *Humanae Vitae* was issued?

On the other hand, should we be surprised that a breach in practice with respect to the Church's moral doctrine—and an apparently very large one at that, if the statistics cited by both dissenters and assenters are accurate⁷⁵—might be linked to a breach in the most obvious epistemological conclusions? Might it not be the case, more specifically, that widespread contraceptive use has practically hindered the inductive reasoning that allows us to draw an obvious conclusion, namely that sexual intercourse leads to babies? Take the case of a certain Judith Schwartz, writing in a popular women's magazine in 1993, who identifies herself as belonging to the first generation “to define a good girl not as someone who abstains from sex but as someone who ‘takes precautions.’” Schwartz—one such “good girl” who “conscientiously” avoids “being in a state of potential motherhood”—attributes to this contraceptive “diligence” and “hygiene” her inability to draw the logical connection between sex and pregnancy. “That it takes egg and sperm to make a baby is among the more obvious facts that women live with,” she admits; “yet somehow we don't *live* with it. As daughters of the sexual revolution, we've been surrounded all our lives by the images and temptations of recreational sex. Consequently,” she observes, “basic, species-preserving, reproductive sex occupies a separate, wholly unexplored territory in our mind.”⁷⁶

Because, as this example serves to illustrate, we have effectively manipulated our own human nature by manipulating the human (especially female) body in accord with our own contorted intentions—those of, for example, reproductive “freedom”⁷⁷ or sexual liberation⁷⁸—it is not surprising that our conceptions of our nature's purposes, or ends, have also changed. When, however, human nature is altered by the human will and intelligence in a way that is arguably in conflict with its (nature's) purposes, it cannot be brought to the witness stand to testify against itself. To do so—to question nature's purpose according to the assumption that it must be “assumed into the human sphere and be regulated within it [presumably by way of technological and scientific domination, as differing from virtuous abstinence],”⁷⁹ as the “majority” of the famous papal birth control commission put it one year before *Humanae Vitae* was issued it in its rebuttal to the so-called minority report⁸⁰—is to divide the human

75 Richard Fehring and Andrea Schlidt, for example, report in their study: “On a percent basis, more Catholic women are using some form of contraception than woman as a whole [...] in all age and ethnic groups” (“Trends in Contraceptive Use among Catholics in the United States: 1988-1995,” 172).

76 Judith D. Schwartz, “How Birth Control Has Changed Women's Sexuality,” *Glamour* (March 1993), 236.

77 Angela Franks has good reason to argue that the popular notion of “free choice in reproduction extends only one way, namely, to the choice against children.” (“The Gift of Female Fertility: Church Teaching on Contraception,” in Erika Bachiochi (ed.), *Women, Sex, and the Church: A Case for Catholic Teaching* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2010), 97-119, at 101).

78 Angela Franks fittingly sums up the conviction of many sadly misled women when she writes, “I am imprisoned by my body, especially by my fertility, and I need to control it, bend it to my will, in order to be free” (*ibid.*, 105).

79 “The Birth Control Report, III. The Argument for Reform,” *The Tablet*, vol. 221, no. 6624 (May 6, 1967), 510-513, at 512 (Available online at: <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/6th-may-1967/22/the-birth-control-report>). Also published in Latin by Jean-Marie Paupert (ed.), *Contrôle des naissances et théologie* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), 156-162. This “report” is, in fact, a rebuttal to the so-called “minority” report cited below (under the title: “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case”).

80 The reports were, as Michael Waldstein reports, “intentionally leaked to the press.” See his “Introduction” to John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 100. For more information on the report and its context within the controversy surrounding *Humanae Vitae*, see George Wiegell, *Witness to Hope*, 206-210; Janet E. Smith, *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 11-35; and “Richard J. Fehring, and Elizabeth McGraw, “Spiritual Responses to the Regulation of Birth (A Historical Comparison),” *Life and Learning* 12 (2002), 265-286 (available online at: <http://uffl.org/vol12/fehring12.pdf>). The original “majority” report was printed under the title: “Birth Control

being into “parts, organs, functions” that are “conceived as contra-distinct from him [or her].”⁸¹ This division, in turn, serves the subordination of man’s “parts” to his or her spiritual nature “almost as are plants and animals” in reason of “cultural values,” as the minority papal commission report put it in that same year.⁸² Implied in this thinking is thus a radical spiritualization of human nature and a reduction of the human body “to raw material for human activity and for its power,” as Pope John Paul II observed nearly thirty years later. Hence, this “nature needs to be profoundly transformed, and indeed overcome by freedom, inasmuch as it represents a limitation and denial of freedom.”⁸³

Completely disregarded in this dualist anthropology is the mediating role of the passions, which, the Catechism instructs us, “form the passageway and ensure the connection between the life of the senses and the life of the mind.”⁸⁴ Consequently, the fundamental moral task of *moderating* the passions, in accord with reason and an upright conscience, and that of *ordering and directing* them to the specific human good of virtuous living are also neglected.⁸⁵ From the perspective of a holistic anthropology, on the other hand—one which understands moral perfection as consisting “in man’s being moved to the good not by his will alone, but also by his sensitive appetite”⁸⁶—Pope Paul VI insisted that the decision to space children and to limit the size of one’s family was to be made not only with respect to “physical, economic, psychological and social conditions.” Nor, however, was it enough to complement these principles of discernment with respect for “the biological processes”: with, that is to say, “an awareness of, and respect for, their proper functions.” Both of these factors needed to be further complemented, he taught, by a specific regard for “man’s innate drives and emotions.” Indeed, from the latter perspective, “responsible parenthood means,” he explained, “that man’s reason and will must exert control over them.”⁸⁷

In short, the challenge of exercising responsible parenthood is one that Paul VI exhorted couples to assume by way of “self-mastery”—that is to say, the virtuous ordering of the sexual urge, or what the council referred to as “the virtue of conjugal chastity” (GS 51)—rather than by way of technological mastery over the human body or the human act of procreation. This, in fact, is hardly a distinction to be taken for granted, as is apparent in John Noonan’s presumption—in his 1965 classic work on contraception—that “sexual continence

Report, I: The Majority View” by *The Tablet*, vol. 221, no. 6622 (April 22, 1967), 449-455, at 449 (available on line at: <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/22nd-april-1967/21/the-birth-control-report>). The report was also published (under the title, “Majority Papal Commission Report”) in Daniel Callahan (ed.), *The Catholic Case for Contraception* (London: The Macmillian Company / Collier-Macmillian Limited, 1969), 149-173 (credit is given there to the *National Catholic Reporter*, April 19, 1967); and in Latin by Jean-Marie Paupert (ed.), *Contrôle des naissance et théologie* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), 179-189. See also the so-called “final report to the pope” dated May 26, 1966: “The Papal Commission on Birth Control,” *The Tablet* vol. 222, no. 6696 (September 21, 1968), 947-951 (available at: <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/21st-september-1968/21/the-papal-commission-on-birth-control>).

81 “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case,” *The Tablet*, vol 222, no. 6623 (April 29, 1967), 478-485, at 482 (available on-line at: <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/29th-april-1967/22/the-birth-control-report-ii-the-conservative-case->). Also published, under the title “Minority Papal Commission Report,” in Daniel Callahan (ed.), *The Catholic Case for Contraception* (London: The Macmillian Company / Collier-Macmillian Limited, 1969), 174-211, here 194 (credit here is given to the *National Catholic Reporter*, April 19, 1967). The Latin text is available in Jean-Marie Paupert (ed.), *Contrôle des naissance et théologie* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), 163-178.

82 Ibid.

83 John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 46; cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 5.

84 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1764.

85 “It belongs to the perfection of the moral or human good that the passions be governed by reason” (*ibid.*, no. 1767). See also 1768.

86 Ibid., no. 1770; cf. 1775.

87 Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 10.

is contraceptive in effect.”⁸⁸ In this way, the U.S. federal judge did not simply invite couples to divert attention away from their own transgressions by highlighting those of others: like children who would avoid punishment by pointing to the disobedience of their siblings.⁸⁹ He also, and far more dangerously, encouraged them to ignore the moral distinction between controlling fertility by technical means and controlling passions by way of virtue, namely that of “marital chastity” (GS 51), or “periodic continence.”⁹⁰ Hence also the underlying assumption that natural law need not imply respect for the natural ends of the (presumably healthy, and therefore fertile) human body, but that these might be manipulated by the human will in accord with what Michel Labourdette refers to, within the context of responsible parenthood, as “human” ends.

Labourdette, who played an important role in drafting the so-called “majority report” of the papal birth control commission, accurately reasons that because the vast majority of conjugal acts—approximately one in two-hundred—are infertile, we “cannot conclude that the nature of each one is to be fertile, nor to be ordained directly [*prochainement*] to fertility. There is, *for nature itself*, an intermediary justifying end,”⁹¹ namely that of conjugal unity. “The problem, then,” as Labourdette saw it, “is that of the two-hundredth coitus. Should it be left entirely to chance?”⁹² By this statement, Labourdette—a moralist of the Thomist tradition—obviously does not mean to imply that couples might manipulate their bodies at will in order to avoid an “accidental” pregnancy. He clearly opposes sterilization, for example, and he furthermore joins Paul VI—and Noonan, for that matter—in recognizing that even natural family planning might be misused if it is employed for the wrong (presumably selfish) reasons.⁹³ It might furthermore be granted to the French Dominican—in as much as he holds to what the so-called majority report wrote in its rebuttal—that human persons are charged with “the responsibility [...] for humanizing the gifts of nature and using them to bring the life of man to greater perfection.”⁹⁴ What is questionable, however, is to cater—as this commission did, and as Labourdette seems to echo in the passage cited above—to “a certain change in the mind of contemporary man,” such that “He feels [...] more conformed to his rational nature, created by God with liberty and responsibility, when he uses his skill to intervene in the biological processes of nature [as differing from the exercise of virtuous abstinence on fertile days when children are not desired] [...] than if he would abandon himself to chance.”⁹⁵

88 He reasons to this conclusion from the premise that “sexual intercourse when an ovum will not be fertilized avoids procreation as much as intercourse where a physical barrier is used to prevent the meeting of spermatozoa and ovum” (John T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965, 1986, 2012], 1).

89 To be sure, the decision to avoid pregnancy can be “motivated by selfishness” even in the case of periodic continence, the catechism teaches (cf. no. 2368). But that does not render it a contraceptive act: one “which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means” (*Humanae Vitae*, no. 14).

90 *Ibid.*, no. 2368.

91 Michel Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale, II: Morale spéciale* (Bibliothèque de la revue thomiste) (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2012), 944.

92 *Ibid.*, 943.

93 See Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 10 ; and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2368.

94 “The Birth Control Report, III: The Argument for Reform,” 511. Cf. Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 16.

95 *Ibid.*, 512. Similarly, he feels himself free, as the Minority Papal Commission summarized the argument of its opponents, to “frustrate his own biological, sexual function, even, when voluntarily aroused, because it is subject to reason for the bettering of the human condition” (“The Birth Control Report. II: The Conservative Case,” 483) (“Minority Papal Commission Report,” 200).

The assumption is thus made that the exercise of responsible parenthood—in this case, the lawful decision to limit one’s family size in accord with a number of prudential decisions that belong to couples themselves “in the sight of God” and to “no one else” (cf. GS 50)—implies (contra magisterial teaching)⁹⁶ a license to obstruct the natural (in this case, *biological*) end of the fertility cycle or of the sexual act. Of course, it might be granted to the so-called “majority” position of the papal birth control commission that: “The order of creation does not require that all things be left untouched just as they are but that they reach the ends to which they have been ordered.”⁹⁷ Hence, for example, the use of therapeutic means in view of curing bodily diseases is deemed fully licit by Paul VI, “even if a foreseeable impediment to procreation should result there from.”⁹⁸ Similarly, this same pope granted, as it were, to the majority of the papal birth control commission that the natural “orientation [of sexual intercourse] toward fecundation must be rationally directed by man,”⁹⁹ namely, in accord with what he (Paul VI) recognizes as their “duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society.”¹⁰⁰ However, the pope who issued *Humanae Vitae* was not willing to infer from the naturally infertile days of a woman’s cycle that the act of rendering a fertile body and/or a fertilizing act infertile—even if it be done in the name of responsible parenting and/or marital unity—may be said to “correspond entirely to the divine decrees,” as the majority report put it.¹⁰¹ Nor would he be willing to conclude, with Labourdette, that it is “not the materiality of the [birth control] method that is important,” but that the morality of the conjugal act is determined instead by what the French Dominican calls the “*human finality*”¹⁰²: presumably the fostering of conjugal unity and responsible parenthood, without due respect for the procreative end of that same act.

Of course, “The Church is the first to praise and commend the application of human intelligence to an activity in which a rational creature such as man is so closely associated with his Creator,” Paul VI insisted. “But she affirms that this must be done within the limits of the order of reality established by God.” Pointing, more specifically, to the responsibility of respecting a woman’s natural cycle of fertility, he incited couples to take “advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile” when they wish to avoid pregnancy, while fostering marital unity. “Neither the Church nor her doctrine is inconsistent,” he explained, “when she considers it lawful for married people to take advantage of the infertile period but condemns as always unlawful the use of means which directly prevent conception”: even, he adds, when the decision to do so is motivated by “upright and serious” reasons.

In reality, these two cases are completely different. In the former the married couple rightly use a faculty provided them by nature. In the later they obstruct the natural development of the generative process. It cannot be denied that in each case the married couple, for acceptable reasons, are both perfectly clear in their intention to avoid children and wish to make sure that none will result. But it is equally true that it is exclusively in the former case that husband and wife are ready to abstain from intercourse during the fertile period as often as for reasonable motives the birth of

96 “[E]xcluded,” Pope Paul teaches, “is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means” (*Humanae Vitae*, no. 14).

97 “The Birth Control Report, III. The Argument for Reform,” 512.

98 Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 15.

99 “The Birth Control Report, III. The Argument for Reform,” 512. Cf. Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 16.

100 Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 10.

101 “Birth Control Report, I: The Majority View,” 449 (“Majority Papal Commission Report,” 150).

102 *Ibid.*, 944.

another child is not desirable. And when the infertile period recurs, they use their married intimacy to express their mutual love and safeguard their fidelity toward one another. In doing this they certainly give proof of a true and authentic love.¹⁰³

In short, as the arguments advanced by Labourdette and Noonan illustrate, much of the controversy surrounding the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* presupposes a confusion between the *objective* end of the moral act—what the catechism designates as the “good toward which the will deliberately directs itself,”¹⁰⁴ in this case the good of marital unity and procreation—and the *subjective* end, or intention, of that act, which “resides in the acting subject.”¹⁰⁵ The so-called “human finality,” to which Labourdette refers, is clearly to be understood in the second sense: the couple’s *intention* is to avoid (presumably for legitimate reasons) the procreative *end* of the conjugal act. Again, this is not to deny that the decision to avoid pregnancy is clearly one that belongs to the couple. Nonetheless, in acting upon their decision, they are called by both the Second Vatican Council and the catechism “to conform their behavior to the objective character of morality.” In the case at hand—that of seeking to harmonize “married love with the responsible transmission of life”—“the morality of the behavior does not depend on sincere intention and evaluation of motives alone,” the Catechism teaches; “but it must be determined by objective criteria, criteria drawn from the nature of the person and his acts, criteria that respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love.”¹⁰⁶ Objective moral criteria are, in other words—and Labourdette would certainly agree—founded in objective anthropological norms, which are to be discovered, in our own God-given nature and by way of our own acts.

In fact, in using the term “*significance*” to describe the procreative and unitive aspects of the conjugal act (*Humanae Vitae*, no. 12) rather than of speaking of *ends*, as the tradition had previously done, Paul VI wished to express, Cardinal Carlo Caffara argues, “a correlation between the conjugal act *which signifies*”—which, that is to say, has an intrinsic meaning that it communicates—and a subject to which *the significance*, the ‘significant message’, is made.”¹⁰⁷ From this perspective, acts are not simply meaningless until they are assigned meaning by the acting subject. On the contrary, they are chosen by the actor precisely because of the meaning that belongs to them as such. Hence, as John Paul II put it already in one of his pre-papal works,

The order of nature connected with using the sexual urge in accord with its nature and purpose has, in a sense, been turned over to human beings for conscious realization. This accounts for the possibility of regulating conception by taking advantage of the regularity of nature in the operation of the sexual urge—and human persons who do so (in appropriate circumstances, of course) somehow confirm themselves in their role as subjects conscious of the order of nature. On the other hand, by using a method of artificial contraception, they somehow compromise themselves in that role and degrade themselves as persons.¹⁰⁸

103 Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 16.

104 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1751.

105 *Ibid.*, no. 1752.

106 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2368; cf. GS 51.

107 Carlo Caffara, “Conscience, Truth, and Magisterium in Conjugal Morality,” in Pontifical Council for the Family, *Marriage and Family: Experiencing the Church’s Teaching in Married Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 21-36, at 33-34. Cf. John Paul II, General audience of July 18, 1984; in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 620.

108 Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics: Reflections and Postulates” in *idem, Person and Community: Selected Essays*, translated by Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 279-299, at 293.

In short, this correlation between the subject and the objective significance of his or her act points to a classic understanding of truth as the conformity of human knowledge (and thus also human volition) to the real: to the world that God has made.¹⁰⁹ Similarly—to return to Kerr’s comment regarding the “unbelievability” of the connection between the unitive and procreative significations of the conjugal act—we might ask whether such disbelief does not betray a confusion between what Caffara also refers to as “the *manifesting* function (of the truth), which belongs to the conscience, with the *constitutive* function of the truth, which [...] cannot *in any way* be attributed to man’s moral conscience.”¹¹⁰ In other words, the epistemological error of according to the human intellect the possibility of establishing—rather than that of discovering—what Caffara calls “*ontological truth*,”¹¹¹ might be perceived as a slippery slope for according to the human conscience the possibility of determining (rather than accepting or refusing) moral truth. Such is an effective example of what we noted in our introductory remarks as the rising of moral relativism out of the fertile soil of cultural secularism.

In question in much of the debate surrounding the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae* is thus, and in short, the relation between, on the one hand, our spiritual acts of knowledge and volition and, on the other hand, a created world order of which we are a part: an order that is not of our making. Hence, for example, we might ask ourselves whether our marital relations entail, as I put it in another context, “a manipulation of reality—a sort of bending” of the real: in this case, the objective meaning of the human body, with its fertility—“according to my field of interest,” my own subjective meaning of love, or even my best of intentions, or whether instead it entails “a conformity of my knowing [and consequently my volitional] powers to an objective reality”, which is given, both as a fact (*datum*) and as a gift (*donum*).¹¹² The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* challenges, in other words, the presumption that the human person is free to impose a meaning upon his or her own (corporal-spiritual) nature in a manner that is arguably at odds with the intrinsic (creational, or God-given) meaning of this same nature: a meaning which, as it refers to human sexuality, is at once unitive and procreative.

To argue against this presumption, meanwhile, does not automatically imply holding to a “superstitious reverence for biological integrity,”¹¹³ so as, in turn, to promote “an absolutely biological understanding of the natural law,” rather than one serving “the whole person,” as German theologian Bernard Häring accuses the magisterium of doing.¹¹⁴ On the contrary, the “inviolability” that has “always” been attributed “to the [sexual] act and to the [generative] process” by the Church is done so, as the so-called Minority Report of the Papal Commission report put it in 1967, “not inasmuch as they are biological, but inasmuch as they are human, namely inasmuch as they are the object of *human* [and thus virtuous] *acts* and are destined by their nature to the good of the human species,”¹¹⁵ and—we might add—to the good of the human person: a good which necessarily implies his or her moral perfection. Still more powerfully, in the words of Paul VI, “to experience the gift of married love while respecting

109 For a similar argument with regard to the objective meaning of marriage, see D. C. Schindler, “The Crisis of Marriage as a Crisis of Meaning: On the Sterility of the Modern Will,” *Communio* 41 (Summer 2014), 331-371.

110 *Ibid.*, 22.

111 Carlo Caffara, “Conscience, Truth, and Magisterium in Conjugal Morality,” 34.

112 Michele M. Schumacher, “A Woman in Stone or in the Heart of Man? Navigating between Naturalism and Idealism in the Spirit of *Veritatis Splendor*,” *Nova et Vetera* (English Edition) 11, no. 4 (Fall 2013), 1249-1286, at 1270.

113 “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case,” 482 (“Minority Papal Commission Report,” 194).

114 Bernard Häring, “The Encyclical Crisis” in Daniel Callahan (ed.), *The Catholic Case for Contraception*, 77-91, at 85.

115 “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case,” 480 (“Minority Papal Commission Report,” 184).

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.”¹¹⁶

In precisely this way, Paul VI was inviting us to distinguish mankind’s responsible *dominion* over nature (cf. Gen 1: 28-30)—namely, by the conformity of our actions to the Creator’s purpose for human nature: a purpose which arguably represents the good of human persons as such, because this nature is human in both its corporal and spiritual dimensions—from an aggressive *domination* of nature that actually changes nature’s ends according to subjective interests, or intentions (in keeping with the distinction above), and *even in accord with our prudential judgments* to limit one’s family size, according to the principle of responsible parenthood.

Such an alteration of the end of the conjugal act by contraception is, in fact, the reason for its designation by Paul VI and the catechism as “intrinsically evil.”¹¹⁷ In fact, contraception may be considered an evil in the most basic sense of the term: it represents the absence—indeed the willing removal—of a good that rightly belongs (i.e. in virtue of creation) to human nature and to the conjugal act.¹¹⁸ Hence, the irony of the popular reference to contraception as a form of reproductive health; for “Healthy reproductive systems are fertile,” as Boston theologian Angela Franks observes.¹¹⁹ To contracept, in contrast, is to deprive a natural organism of its inherent power: not just any power, moreover, but the natural and nonetheless “quasi-sacred”¹²⁰ power of procreation. This (procreative power) is arguably among the most distinguished of all human powers, because “human life and the duty of transmitting it are not limited by the horizons of this life only: their true evaluation and full significance can be understood only in reference to *man’s eternal destiny*” (GS 51).¹²¹ Whence the important warning of Paul VI: “unless” we are willing to leave “the responsibility of procreating life [...] to the arbitrary decision of men,” it is necessary to admit “certain limits, beyond which it is wrong to go.”¹²² In encouraging couples, on the other hand, “not to abdicate” from their “own responsibility in order to rely on technical means,” he sought to defend “conjugal morals in their integral wholeness” and thus also “the dignity of man and wife.”¹²³ In this way, he prepared the way for what was to be a foundational insight of Pope John Paul II’s famous theology of the body.

III. Defending *Humanae Vitae*: An Appeal to Personal Values

In his own extensive reflection upon “the questions raised by *Humanae Vitae*” and his attempt “to look for an answer to them,”¹²⁴ John Paul II pointed, once again,¹²⁵ to “a hidden

¹¹⁶ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 13.

¹¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2370; cf. Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 14. This was also the conclusion of the minority papal commission report. See “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case.”

¹¹⁸ See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2366.

¹¹⁹ Angela Franks, “The Gift of Female Fertility,” 101.

¹²⁰ “The Birth Control Report, II: The Conservative Case,” 480 (“The Minority Papal Commission Report,” 185).

¹²¹ Also cited by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2371. In fact, the “*union of man and woman in marriage*” was called to be “a way of imitating in the flesh,” as the Catechism puts it, “the Creator’s generosity and fecundity” (*ibid.*, no. 2335).

¹²² Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 17.

¹²³ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 18.

¹²⁴ General Audience of November 28, 1984, in *idem*, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 663.

¹²⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Gratissimam sane*, no. 13; *idem*, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 5.

and at the same time rather explicit tendency” in contemporary, especially Western, civilization to determine progress “with the measure of ‘things,’ that is, of material goods.” In contrast, he recognized *Humanae Vitae* as making “a resolute appeal to measure man’s progress with the measure of the ‘person,’ that is, of that which is a good of man as man,” of that “which corresponds to his essential dignity” (cf. GS 35).¹²⁶ Such, he explained more specifically, in the final of his 130 general audience addresses that compose his theology of the body, is a good that is measured “by ethics [or virtue] and not only of ‘technology.’”¹²⁷

The doctrine of *Humanae Vitae* was thus recognized by the successor of Paul VI as inscribed within the goal, proper to the council, of “recapturing the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values” in view of renewing western civilization. “Only an awareness of the primacy of these [ethical] values”—which John Paul II identified as “the values of the human person as such”—“enables man to use the immense possibilities given him by science in such a way as to bring about the true advancement of the human person in his or her whole truth, in his or her freedom and dignity. Science is called to ally itself with wisdom.”¹²⁸

From this perspective, “the problem” addressed by *Humanae Vitae* “lies in maintaining the adequate relationship between that which is defined as ‘domination of the forces of nature’ (HV 2) and ‘self-mastery’ (HV 21).” Whereas modern men and women tend, he observed more specifically, to transfer “the methods proper to the first sphere to those of the second”¹²⁹—to regulate, in other words, the properly human sphere by means of science and technology—the dominion that the human person is called to exercise over himself belongs more properly to the order of ethics: by, that is to say, a positive modification of one’s own actions. “[I]t is *not* merely a question of a certain ‘technique,’” John Paul II explained in his theology of the body, “but of *ethics* in the strict sense of the term as the *morality of a certain behavior*.”¹³⁰

In short, the point of contention that underlies much of the controversy surrounding *Humanae Vitae* from its inception until the present day is due, John Paul II recognized in his own day, to two fundamentally opposed anthropological and ethical perspectives: perspectives differentiated according to whether one seeks to control nature *to one’s own ends*—as in the Baconian project at the origin of modern science¹³¹—or whether instead one seeks, by the

126 John Paul II, General audience of November 28, 1984, in idem, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 662. Hence, the Church’s promotion of “responsible parenthood,” or “the morally right regulation of fertility,” was to be understood in light of the precise question, “*What is the true good of human persons and what corresponds to the true dignity of the person?*” (John Paul II, General audience of September 5, 1984, in idem, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 637; original emphasis).

127 John Paul II, General audience of November 28, 1984, in idem, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 662.

128 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 8; cf. GS 15.

129 John Paul II, General audience of August 22, 1984, in idem, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 630-31.

130 John Paul II, General audience of August 29, 1984, in idem, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 635; original emphasis. He explains more specifically, “Although the ‘periodic’ character of continence is [...] applied to the so-called ‘natural rhythms’ (HV 16), still, *continence* itself is a definite and permanent moral attitude, *it is a virtue*, and thus the whole mode of behavior guided by it becomes virtuous.” (ibid.)

131 “Among all the reasons,” given by the majority commission, “for the moral legitimacy of contraception, the *foremost* reason, the reason that is *most of all* (‘*maxime*’) a reason,” Michael Waldstein explains, “is not the population explosion, not a personalist understanding of sexual intercourse, but the duty of humanizing nature. Humanizing is achieved,” as the report put it, “through ‘tremendous progress in the control of matter by technical means’ (Michael Waldstein, “Introduction” to John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 101). See “The Birth Control Report III. The Argument for Reform,” 511. On the Baconian project of manipulating nature according to the human will, see Waldstein’s “Introduction,” 36-44; and Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 37-42. The central question of modernity, as Gillespie understands it, is more specifically the problematic relation between human freedom and natural necessity. See, for example, ibid., 262-263. Still more generally, see Louis Dupré, *Passage to*

exercise of virtue, to control one's own self—that is to say, one's impulses, dispositions, and behavior—to *God's end or purpose* for marriage, family and the human person as such.¹³²

In the second option, there could be no question—as is nonetheless the case in the first one—of opposing person and nature, and thus of human reason “impos[ing] its own categories on reality, as was ultimately the case in Kant's anthropological view” and likewise that of many dissenters of the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae*, as we have seen. Rather, the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae* implies, as Wojtyła put it eight years before his election to the papacy, “the attitude of reason discerning, grasping, defining, and affirming, in relation to an order that is objective and prior to human reason itself”: the order originating from “the divine source of law,” that is to say, “divine reason.”¹³³

In this subordination of reason to an objective world order, Wojtyła recognized “a certain subordination of the human person in relation to God, a subordination that is, after all, very honorable.”¹³⁴ This subordination meant admitting that although the human person is indeed responsible for him- or herself as a body-spirit whole—and thus also for his or her freedom—this responsibility is not to be understood as autonomy with respect to divine authority and the created order. On the contrary, personal responsibility means discerning this order so as to more effectively collaborate with God in governing the temporal domain. Hence, as John Paul II put it still more explicitly from Peter's chair, “What is at stake” in *Humanae Vitae* “is the *truth*, first in the *ontological dimension* (‘innermost structure’) and then—as a consequence—in the *subjective and psychological dimension* (‘meaning’).”¹³⁵ Two planes—nature and person—are thus organically joined in the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, because the person is presented as “a subject who is conscious of the order of nature [including his or her *own* nature as a physical-psychological-spiritual whole], and responsible for preserving it.”¹³⁶ The challenge launched by John Paul II's theology of the body, thus consisted, in his own words, of analyzing “the *personalistic aspects* contained in this document [*Humanae Vitae*]” in an effort to determine “what *true progress* consists in, that is, the development of *the human person*,”¹³⁷ namely, by the practice of virtue.

Of course, John Paul II was well aware that many claim to adopt a so-called “personalist” perspective *in opposition* to the doctrine set forth in *Humanae Vitae*. Hence, for example, the argument that nature cannot be determinative with respect to the human person, for human beings “do not have a given relationship with the world that is already, out, there, now, and

Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

132 As he put it in *Familiaris Consortio*, “The difference, both anthropological and moral between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle [...] involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality” (no. 32); cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2370.

133 Karol Wojtyła, “The Human Person and Natural Law,” 184.

134 *Ibid.*, 185.

135 John Paul II, General audience of July 11, 1984, in *idem*, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 617. Hence, “‘Meaning’ is born in consciousness with the rereading of the (ontological) truth of the object. Through this rereading, the (ontological) truth enters, so to speak, into the cognitive, that is, subjective and psychological dimension.” (General audience of July 18, 1984; in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 620). We are not far from the insight of Carlo Caffara, cited above, regarding the “correlation between the conjugal act which signifies and a subject to which the significance, the ‘significant message’, is made” (Carlo Caffara, “Conscience, Truth, and Magisterium in Conjugal Morality,” 33).

136 Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics: Reflections and Postulates” in *idem*, *Person and Community*, 279-299, at 293. The original Polish version of this essay was published in 1965. See also *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 48, where John Paul II expresses concern that the human body not be reduced to “a raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design.”

137 John Paul II, General Audience of November 28, 1984, in *idem*, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 662; original emphasis.

real; they must establish one. In the process of establishing this relationship, they simultaneously produce both a *human* world and themselves as social beings in this world.”¹³⁸ Or, as John Paul II himself summarized the argument of his opponents:

In their view, man, as a rational being, not only can but actually *must freely determine the meaning* of his behaviour. This process of “determining the meaning” would obviously have to take into account the many limitations of the human being, as existing in a body and in history. Furthermore, it would have to take into consideration the behavioural models and the meanings which the latter acquire in any given culture. Above all, it would have to respect the fundamental commandment of love of God and neighbour. Still, they continue, God made man as a rationally free being; he left him “in the power of his own counsel” and he expects him to shape his life in a personal and rational way. Love of neighbour would mean above all and even exclusively respect for his freedom to make his own decisions. The workings of typically human behaviour, as well as the so-called “natural inclinations”, would establish at the most—so they say—a general orientation towards correct behaviour, but they cannot determine the moral assessment of individual human acts, so complex from the viewpoint of situation.¹³⁹

In contrast, John Paul II insisted, once again, upon a *creational* account of the human person and thus also of human reason and human sexuality, according to which the person “discovers in the body,” by “the light of reason and the support of virtue,” [...] the anticipatory signs, the expression and the promise of the gift of self, in conformity with the wise plan of the Creator.”¹⁴⁰ Pointing to “*the difference, both anthropological and moral, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle [i.e. natural family planning],*” he simultaneously pointed to “two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality”: one in which sexuality is separated “from its essential reference to the person,” so as to be “‘used’ as an ‘object’,” and another in which “sexuality is respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension,” in, that is to say, “the personal unity of soul and body,”¹⁴¹ such that the rational nature of the human being might manipulate the bodily to its own purposes, without due regard for the body’s own natural dynamism. Or, as he subsequently reasoned in *Veritatis Splendor*, because the “whole person” is a unity of body and soul,¹⁴² whereby “reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties, [...] *it is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts.*”¹⁴³

138 Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person*, 51. See also Anthony Kosnik, et. al (eds.), *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*, A Study Commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 83-88, 114-116. For a thorough contextualization of the debate concerning the concepts of nature and person, as it existed already in 1989, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Catholic Sexual Ethics and the Dignity of the person: A Double Message,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 120-150; and for a concrete application, see Michele M. Schumacher, “Woman’s Self-Interest or Sacrificial Motherhood: Personal Desires, Natural Inclinations and the Meaning of Love,” *The Thomist* 77, no.1 (2013), 71-101.

139 John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 47.

140 *Ibid.*, no. 48.

141 *Idem*, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 32. Cf. *idem*, *Gratissimam Sane*, no. 19; and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2332.

142 The whole of the human person, he explains with reference to the constant teaching of the Church, is one in which the “rational soul is *per se et essentialiter* the form of his body [cf. DS 902; 1440]. The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole — *corpore et anima unus* [*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 14]— as a person” (John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 48).

143 *Ibid.*; original emphasis. See also *ibid.*, no. 49. Or as Pope Benedict XVI put it in his first encyclical, “it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature” (*Deus*

IV. Saving Love at Life's Origin: The Inseparability of the Unitive and Procreative Meanings of the Conjugal Act

In thus pointing to the unity of the human person and human sexuality, John Paul II sought to steer the faithful away from the various distortions and abuses of human life and human dignity that he so violently opposed, as we saw in the first part of this essay. Indeed, he consistently and variously pointed out that many, if not most, of these violations of human life and dignity follow from violations of the inseparability of the unitive and procreative meanings of the marital act prescribed in *Humanae Vitae*.¹⁴⁴ When, he noted for example, spouses unite in the marital act without openness to life, they become easy prey to the utilitarian mindset that he described in the terms cited above of woman becoming “an object for man” and “children a hindrance to parents.”¹⁴⁵

With regard to the first of these consequences, we are reminded of the powerful words of Pope Paul VI: “It is also to be feared that the man, growing used to the employment of anticonceptive practices, may finally lose respect for the woman and, no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.”¹⁴⁶ As for Pope John Paul II, he did not hesitate, in light of the Gospel injunction against “adultery of the heart” (cf. Mt 5: 27-28), to repudiate this act, which George Weigel qualifies as a “corruption of genuine self-giving,” *even within marriage*: “not,” Weigel explains, “because the object of man’s lust is not his wife, but because the lustful look turns a wife into an object and shatters the communion of persons.”¹⁴⁷ Recognizing a certain “parallelism” between this text concerning “adultery of the heart” (Mt 5: 27-28) and that of Genesis 3:16 (“Your desire shall be for your husband, but *he will dominate you*”),¹⁴⁸ he argued that “*the relationship of the gift*,” which is meant, by God’s intention, to most profoundly characterize marriage, “*changes*” in virtue of concupiscence “*into a relationship of appropriation*.”¹⁴⁹

In precisely this way, the pope from Kraków addressed a problem that feminists had, as Weigel rightfully observes, been preoccupied with “for years”: the reduction of woman to the object of man’s lustful desire.¹⁵⁰ Ironically catering, as it were, to what Dietmar Mieth recognizes as “the paradigm shift in the consciousness of believers, according to which the consequences of original sin are to be sought not so much in a disordered sexual desire as in signs of a violent misuse of other persons,”¹⁵¹ John Paul II dared to raise from the siege of St.

Caritas Est, no. 5).

144 See Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, nos. 11-12.

145 Idem, *Gratissimam sane*, no. 13. For examples of these phenomena, see Michele M. Schumacher, “Woman’s Self-Interest or Sacrificial Motherhood: Personal Desires, Natural Inclinations and the Meaning of Love”; and idem, “A Woman in Stone or in the Heart of Man?”

146 Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 17.

147 George Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 338-339. Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 225ff.

148 John Paul II, General Audience of July 30, 1980, in idem, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 261.

149 Idem, General Audience of July 23, 1980, in idem, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 260.

150 See George Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 339. For more insight into the parallels in the teaching of John Paul II and that of various feminists, see Michele M. Schumacher, “A Woman in Stone or in the Heart of Man” (op. cit.); idem, “John Paul II’s Theology of the Body on Trial: Responding to the Accusation of the Biological Reduction of Women,” *Nova et Vetera* (English Edition) 10: 2 (Spring 2012), 463-84; and “Feminism, Nature and *Humanae Vitae*: What’s Love Got to Do with It?” (op. cit).

151 Dietmar Mieth, “Moral Doctrine at the Cost of Morality,” 140. Again, Mieth in no way attributes this tendency to John Paul II. On the contrary, his purpose is to challenge him to adapt his teaching to the consciousness of the men and women of his time.

Peter the question that so many women no longer dared to ask: “Is it unreasonable to ask our husbands [...] to center relations around *female* sexuality”—that is to say, in accord with a woman’s monthly cycle, which naturally passes from fertility to infertility (as is the case for those who use natural family planning), “instead of the male sexual drive?,” as typifies those using contraception.¹⁵² For the man whose desire for a woman is motivated by the desire “*to satisfy only the body’s sexual urge*,” John Paul II taught, “the woman ceases to exist as a subject [...] and begins to be only an object of carnal concupiscence.”¹⁵³ She who had been designated by the Creator “as a subject of the call and of personal attraction or as a subject ‘of communion’” is thus rendered “an object for the possible satisfaction of sexual urge.”¹⁵⁴ Lust for another person—even the person of one’s own spouse, and of course women are also capable of this vice¹⁵⁵—is thus the “contrary” of the “‘welcoming’ or ‘acceptance’ of the other human being as a gift,”¹⁵⁶ as characterized God’s original intention for spousal communion wherein “giving and accepting gift interpenetrate.”¹⁵⁷

From this perspective, the struggle between man and woman resulting from original sin (cf. Genesis 3:16) points to a battle within each human heart: a struggle between—as George Weigel puts it—“love and lust, between self-mastery and self-assertion, between freedom as giving and freedom as taking, which is often at the expense of the woman.”¹⁵⁸ Indeed, Lisa Sowle Cahill has good reason to remark from a feminist standpoint that current “cultural norms and realities” of “permissiveness” and “hedonism” “are still gender-unequal.”¹⁵⁹

Beyond this, and still more regrettable, the professor of moral theology at Boston College admits that “defenders of official Catholic teaching are not wrong” in drawing the inference from the socially-prevalent attitude of “divorcing sex from procreation” to the subsequent “divorce” between sex and “commitment and responsibility.” In pointing, more specifically, to “continuing permissiveness toward men’s sexual behavior, combined with a greater social expectation that women will trade sex for relationship even without commitment, and the effective cultural dissociation of sex from responsibility for procreation,” she concludes that all of this “has contributed to widespread use of abortion as a means of birth control, and to the destabilization of families in industrialized nations.”¹⁶⁰

The struggle between women and men resulting from original sin does not only point, therefore, to the tension within the human heart between love and lust or between love and sentiment: the former being more characteristically a male tendency, the latter a female one, as Karol Wojtyła has pointed out.¹⁶¹ It also points to the tension within the social dimension

¹⁵² Ruth D. Lasseter, “Sensible Sex,” in Janet E. Smith (ed.), *Why Humanae Vitae was Right: A Reader* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993], 475-95, at 494. See also the Angela Franks, “The Gift of Female Fertility”; Mary Shivanandan, *Challenge to Love* (Bethesda, MD: KM Associates, 1984, 1988).

¹⁵³ John Paul II, General audience of September 17, 1980; *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 288, 289; original emphasis.

¹⁵⁴ John Paul II, General audience of September 24, 1980; *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 290. See also idem, *Mulieris dignitatem*, no. 14.

¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, John Paul II would join Lisa Sowle Cahill in the affirmation that women are more prone than men to “trade sex for relationship” (Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 206). Cf. Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, translated by J.T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 109-114. The Polish original was published in 1960.

¹⁵⁶ John Paul II, General Audience of February 6, 1980, in idem, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 195.

¹⁵⁷ Idem, General Audience of February 6, 1980, in idem, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 196. Hence, “the very act of giving becomes acceptance, and acceptance transforms itself into giving” (ibid.).

¹⁵⁸ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 338. Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, no. 14.

¹⁵⁹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 206.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ See Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 109-114.

of the man-woman relationship, as it gives rise to the human family: a dimension that Cahill rightly points to as fundamental to sexual ethics.¹⁶² Or, as John Paul II insists in his 1994 *Letter to Families*:

Both [man and woman] are responsible for their potential and later actual fatherhood and motherhood. The husband cannot fail to acknowledge and accept the result of a decision which has also been his own. He cannot hide behind expressions such as: “I don't know”, “I didn't want it”, or “you're the one who wanted it”. In every case conjugal union involves *the responsibility of the man and of the woman*, a potential responsibility which becomes actual when the circumstances dictate. This is true especially for the man. Although he too is involved in the beginning of the generative process, he is left biologically distant from it; it is within the woman that the process develops.¹⁶³

In short, we are thus confronted with two very different conceptions of human freedom: an individualistic and utilitarian meaning or a personalist and communal one. This, in turn, is the origin of the question, as I have noted elsewhere, of whether “the person is accorded value on the basis of his or her function, usefulness, or desirability, so as to be conceived as a means to the other's end”—and thus as “the object of the other's *freedom to dominate*”—or whether, instead, the person is “regarded in terms of his or her fundamental and intrinsic dignity or value and thus as [intrinsically] worthy of the other's [or one's own] self-gift.”¹⁶⁴ Such also requires that there be no confusion between personal and sexual values: the valuing of persons as “objects of potential enjoyment,” rather than as subjects of free action.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, only persons are capable, as John Paul II sought to demonstrate throughout his vast mountain of magisterial and pre-papal works, of receiving the self-gift of the other and of responding in a befitting manner, namely by the very gift of him- or herself.¹⁶⁶ “The human person has,” the newly canonized pope reasoned still more specifically, “an inherent social dimension which calls a person from the innermost depths of self to *communion* with others and to the *giving* of self to others.”¹⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, then, the essential ethical question that in some sense founds all the rest—insofar, that is to say, as it determines the most basic community of persons upon which all other communities are based, namely that of man and woman in marriage¹⁶⁸—is, as John Paul

162 A person-centered ethic must not, Cahill maintains, “neglect the social meanings of the body realized through parenthood and kinship.” Indeed, “it is the reproductive, economic, and kin-oriented contributions of sexual partnerships, as well as social control over them, which are the major practical dimensions of the human sexual experience cross-culturally and historically.” (Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 10).

163 John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, no. 12. Herein, John Paul II recognizes implicitly what he explicitly notes in his apostolic letter, *Mulieris dignitatem*, no. 18. See also *ibid.*, no. 14, where mention is made of a woman “pay[ing]” for the sin of adultery in a manner that is incomparable to that of man, who is equally guilty.

164 See Michele M. Schumacher, “A Plea for the Traditional Family” (*op. cit.*), 325. For an excellent historical overview of the development of these two different notions of human freedom as directly related to two different conceptions of the human person, see Kenneth L. Schmitz, “The Geography of the Human Person,” *Communio* 13, no. 1 (1986), 27-48; and *idem*, “Selves and Persons: A Difference in Loves?,” *Communio* 18, no. 2 (1991), 181-206.

165 Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 159.

166 See *ibid.*, 131; and *idem*, Apostolic letter on the dignity and vocation of women on the occasion of the Marian Year, *Mulieris dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), no. 29.

167 John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 40.

168 “God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning ‘male and female he created them’ (Gen. 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion” (GS 12). Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 40, and no. 52.

II teaches, “‘who’ she shall be for him and he for her.”¹⁶⁹ The answer that we give to this question does not, moreover, simply determine the value that we accord to the other. It also and especially determines the value that we grant to our own self-determining powers and thus to ourselves. For, as John Paul II put it already in a prepapal work, when “we do not love the person in another human being, we thereby also degrade the person in ourselves.”¹⁷⁰ By acting, more specifically, under the influence of instinct *in the absence of an affirmation of the spiritual value of the person*—an affirmation which Wojtyła recognizes as the “essence”¹⁷¹ of love—we not only reduce *other* persons to their corporal dimension, we also diminish the value of our *own* persons, by compromising our spiritual mode of operation.¹⁷²

This, moreover John Paul II argued, is the case—that the person thus degrades him- or herself—even when there is mutual consent to a relationship based upon the pleasure principle. Each of the consenting parties is then “mainly concerned with gratifying his or her own egoism, but at the same time consents to serve someone else’s egoism, because this can provide the opportunity for such gratification—and just as long as it does so.”¹⁷³ True reciprocity, on the other hand, as befits the spiritual nature of persons, “presupposes altruism in both persons.” It simply “cannot arise from two egoisms.”¹⁷⁴ In short, “instinct alone does not necessarily imply the ability to love,” Wojtyła taught long before he assumed Peter’s chair. As “bound up” with the “freedom of will,” it implies “a particular readiness to subordinate oneself to that good, which ‘humanity’, or more precisely, the value of the person represents, regardless of [...] sex.”¹⁷⁵ As such, it also implies the “willingness consciously to seek a good together with others and to subordinate” oneself “to that good for the sake of others, or to others for the sake of that good.”¹⁷⁶

The sexual instinct makes the will desire and long for a person because of the person’s sexual value. The will, however, does not stop at this. It is free, or in other words, capable of desiring everything relating to the unqualified good, the unlimited good, that is happiness. And it commits this capacity, its natural and noble potentiality, to the other person concerned. It desires the absolute good, the unlimited good, happiness for that person, and in this way compensates and atones for the desire to have that other person [...] for itself.¹⁷⁷

Authentic love, as Wojtyła understands it, is thus “conditioned by the common attitude of people towards the same good which they choose as their aim, and to which they subordinate themselves. *Marriage is one of the most important areas where this principle is put into practice.*”¹⁷⁸

169 John Paul II, General audience of October 8, 1980; *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 301.

170 Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics: Reflections and Postulates” in idem, *Person and Community*, 279-299, at 287. The original Polish version was published in 1965.

171 Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 42.

172 See *ibid.*, 159.

173 Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 39. Similarly, “A love which is not ‘fairest’, but reduced only to the satisfaction of concupiscence (cf. *1 Jn* 2:16), or to a man’s and a woman’s mutual ‘use’ of each other, makes persons *slaves to their weaknesses*” (John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, no. 13).

174 Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 88; original emphasis. If, in contrast, “reciprocity is created only by self-interest, utility (a utilitarian good) or pleasure, then it is superficial and impermanent” (*ibid.*, 86).

175 *Ibid.*, 31.

176 *Ibid.*, 29.

177 *Ibid.*, 137. When, on the other hand, “love” is reduced to a desire motivated by pleasure or gratification, a “superficial view of happiness” is also implied: one that is “identified with mere enjoyment” (*ibid.*, 172).

178 *Ibid.*, 30; original emphasis.

In this way, Wojtyła arrives at a conclusion strikingly similar to that—once again—of the well-respected Catholic feminist, Lisa Sowle Cahill. Arguing against a libertine ethic presenting “mutual consent as practically the sole behavior-guiding norm,” to the neglect of “ongoing responsibility either for one’s sexual partner, or for the procreative potentials of sex,” she holds: “Freedom from traditional repressions needs to be translated into an ethic of meaning, purpose, and even discipline which can meet cultural trivializations and distortions of sex” in our day.¹⁷⁹

V. Conclusion: A Plea for Chastity by an Appeal to the Transcendent Good

To be sure, Cahill can hardly be said to endorse “the high and narrow standard” of magisterial teaching regarding the inseparable union of *Humanae Vitae*. Citing Rosemary Radford Ruether, she holds that “while the celibate cultivates sexual self-control and asceticism, that ethic should not dominate the sexuality of wives and husbands.”¹⁸⁰ In this way, she apparently echoes Uta Ranke-Heinemann’s insistence that “the [magisterium’s opposition to the] pill is only a new occasion to make all of marriage more ascetical and sexless, to turn lay people into monks and celibates,”¹⁸¹ and to turn the conjugal act into “a kind of celibate act.”¹⁸²

Of course, the point is well made by Josef Pieper that “heresy and hyperasceticism are and always have been close neighbors.” In fact, “complete asensuality, unfeelingly advers[ity] to all sexual pleasure” is actually regarded by the Church’s common doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, as an “imperfection” and even “a moral defect (*vitium*),” Pieper explains.¹⁸³ As for the virtue of chastity, its purpose is hardly to “poison eros,” as Friedrich Nietzsche would have it. Nor are the Church’s “commandments and prohibitions” to be seen as a means of “turn[ing] to bitterness the most precious thing in life”: of “blow[ing] the whistle just when the joy, which is the Creator’s gift, offers us a happiness which is [... a] foretaste of the Divine,” as Pope Benedict might well have summarized a common objection to the Church’s moral teaching.¹⁸⁴ On the contrary, the prescriptions of *Humanae Vitae* hold firm to the conviction of St. Thomas that “nature has introduced pleasure into the operations that are necessary for man’s life”: whether that of the individual, or that of the species, and procreation is “a very great good (*bonum excellens*)” indeed.¹⁸⁵

It is presumably for this reason—namely, that “the exceeding pleasure” (*abundantia delectationis*) of the conjugal act is “not opposed to the mean of virtue” so long as it is in “conformity with right reason”¹⁸⁶—that the virtue of chastity ought “not only to ‘moderate’ [pleasure], but also seek at times to obtain it,” as Michel Labourdette explains. Hence, “Chastity should also incite desire.”¹⁸⁷ Similarly, Cahill has reason to affirm that, “the sexual union of spouses needs at least as much to be encouraged, occasioned, and sustained, as to be

¹⁷⁹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 10, 11.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁸¹ Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, 296. See also *ibid.*, chapter ten: “Lay People into Monks.”

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁸³ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 154; cf. *ST* II-II, q. 142, a. 1; q. 152, a. 2, ad. 2; q. 153, a. 3, ad. 3.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 3.

¹⁸⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 142, a. 1.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, q. 153, a. 2, ad. 2.

¹⁸⁷ Michel Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, II, 904.

mastered, limited, and scheduled.”¹⁸⁸ In short, “chastity is not *in se* a virtue of renouncement or of abstinence,” as Labourdette teaches; “it is primarily—like all the others—a *virtue of exercise*.” Just as the virtue of temperance with regard to food and drink, for example, is practiced “every time that one eats and drinks,” and not primarily when one is fasting, so too chastity is “not only practiced in celibacy.” On the contrary, it is exercised *primarily* within the context of marriage and the marital act, Labourdette continues; and it attains “its human and Christian perfection in keeping to its correct measure [*sa juste mesure*].”¹⁸⁹

Because, moreover, this “right measure” in matters of sexuality is determined by responsible parenthood, Labourdette reasons, it is justifiable “to intervene [namely, by artificial means] so that the fecundity of the act does not depend upon chance (*hasard*), nor simply upon biological rhythm, but that it be willed in a *responsible manner*, which takes into consideration the whole of human finality.” Still more specifically, this means regulating fecundity “according to ends which are no longer animal but human.”¹⁹⁰ In this way the French moralist repeats almost verbatim the proposition that he helped draft in the majority rebuttal of the papal birth commission in 1966: and this despite considerable scientific progress that had been made in the interim in determining the window of a couple’s fertility.¹⁹¹

If the proposition of Labourdette is to be faulted, however, it is not on account of an ignorance of science, and certainly not on account of his insistence upon “responsibility,” or even justice, towards one’s spouse and one’s (potential and/or actual) children. Rather, it is his reduction of the virtue of “chastity” (and thus also the corresponding, or governing, notions of “responsibility” and “justice”) to the meaning that has been assigned to them by our secular culture: namely that of taking (contraceptive) “precautions” against pregnancy when it is deemed imprudent or undesirable. In so doing, he considerably departs from his own Thomistic tradition, which regards the virtue of chastity as controlling one’s *passions*—and not one’s *fertility*, as Labourdette and many dissenters of *Humanae Vitae* would have it—in accord with reason: in this case, the “ratio” (or ordering principle) of responsible parenthood (and we might add the “ratio,” forgotten by Labourdette, of justice toward one’s spouse, whose personal dignity requires that he or she always be treated as a subject and never as simply an object of desire).¹⁹²

In the words of St. Thomas, “chastity takes its name from the fact that reason *chastises* concupiscence, which, like a child needs curbing”¹⁹³; *not*, it bears repeating, because “the free act of reason [...] is incompatible with the aforementioned pleasure,”¹⁹⁴ but because the ordering principles of responsible parenting and justice toward one’s spouse and even toward the human species might be diverted by self-indulging lust. In fact, lust—Pieper’s translator calls it “unchastity”—is said by the German Thomist (with reference to the master)¹⁹⁵ to actually “destroy the structure of the person” by corrupting the virtue of prudence, by blinding the spirit, and by splitting the power of decision. Lustful surrender and the soul’s willful

188 Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 204.

189 *Ibid.*, 905. Cf. *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 142, a. 1.

190 Michel Labourdette, *Cours de théologie morale*, II, 944; original emphasis.

191 See “The Birth Control Report, III: The Argument for Reform,” 512. It is perhaps important to note, as is mentioned in the foreword to his *Cours de théologie morale*, II, that he finished writing his course in the 1980s.

192 Josef Pieper numerates three implications of the “order of reason” in the sexual domain: “first, that the immanent purpose of sexual power be not perverted but fulfilled (in marriage, with its threefold ‘good’); second, that the inner structure of the moral person be kept intact; and, third, that justice between men be not infringed” (*Four Cardinal Virtues*, 158).

193 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 151, a. 1.

194 *Ibid.*, q. 153, a. 2, ad. 2.

195 See *ibid.*, q. 153, a. 5, ad. 1; q. 15, a. 3; q. 53, a. 6, ad. 2; q. 180, a. 2, ad. 3; q. 155, a. 1, ad. 2.

abandonment “to the world of sensuality”—not in the Manichaean manner, but by a will-to-pleasure that is contrary to the spirit of genuine *eros*,¹⁹⁶ which necessarily seeks the transcendent good—“paralyzes the primordial powers of the moral person: the ability to perceive, in silence, the call of reality, and to make, in the retreat of this silence, the decision appropriate to the concrete situation of concrete action.”¹⁹⁷ The virtue of chastity, in contrast, prepares the human person for contemplation of reality better than any other virtue, Pieper explains.¹⁹⁸

It follows that while it is the domain of justice “to establish the order of reason in all human affairs”—including, as Labourdette points out, the order in marital and familial relations—it belongs to the virtue of temperance, and in particular to its sub-category of chastity (the virtue ironically invoked by Labourdette in his argument against the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae*) “to safeguard this good, inasmuch as they *moderate* the passions, lest they lead man away from reason’s good.”¹⁹⁹ In fact, by disciplining the sexual urge, chastity is said by Pieper to actually “realize the order of reason.”²⁰⁰ Hence, without resorting to a sort of Manichaeism, which qualifies the pleasures of the flesh as intrinsically evil, St. Thomas argues that it is at times “praiseworthy, and even necessary for the sake of an end *to abstain* from such pleasures”²⁰¹ as result from the conjugal act: even when that means foregoing the “very great good” (*bonum excellens*)²⁰² of procreation or the accompanying good of promoting conjugal unity (which might obviously be fostered by other means). Similarly, in the words of Pope Benedict, “*eros* needs to be disciplined and purified if it is to provide not just fleeting pleasure, but a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude for which our whole being yearns.”²⁰³

In this way the successor of John Paul II joins St. Thomas in calling for a certain ascetical practice—as in the practice of periodic abstinence (NFP), for example—in favor of promoting what he qualifies as an *authentically* erotic love: one that is indeed “ecstasy,” but “not in the sense of a moment of intoxication.” What he has in mind, rather, is “a journey, an ongoing exodus [*ex-stasis*] out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God.”²⁰⁴ In the proposition drawn from Labourdette’s treatise on chastity, in contrast, we are confronted once again with the underlying question that has been emphasized throughout these pages: that of whether Christians are still capable, or even willing, to acknowledge “basic [moral] truths” that might be addressed to their consciences—as in the pastoral proposition of Dietmar Mieth—“in consideration of the facts and a morally correct argumentation.”²⁰⁵ Instead, there is good reason to believe that the current cultural climate of secularism and the prevalent practice of “love making” without regard for its two-fold meaning (of procreation and conjugal unity, which presupposes that one’s spouse not be reduced to a simple “object” of one’s desires) has clouded minds and hearts from recognizing an objective world order upon which a moral order might be based. Lost, along with the notion of God himself, is “the

¹⁹⁶ Hence it is “not contrary to virtue, if the act of reason be sometimes interrupted for something that is done in accordance with reason,” as in the case, Thomas reasons, of one seeking sleep (*ibid.*, q. 153, a. 2, ad. 2).

¹⁹⁷ Josef Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues*, 159-160.

¹⁹⁸ See *ibid.*, 160.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, q. 123, a. 12; emphasis added.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 158.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, q. 142, a. 1.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, q. 153, a. 2.

²⁰³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 4.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 6; cf. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 49.

²⁰⁵ Dietmar Mieth, “Moral Doctrine at the Cost of Morality?”, 127.

idea,” as Ratzinger put it, “that another will, the will of the Creator, calls us and that our being is right when our will is in harmony with his will.”²⁰⁶

Of course, the way out of this relativist quandary is hardly to revert to authoritative statements coming from the magisterium: statements which are sadly perceived as subjecting married love to “the voyeuristic sphere of a clerical bedroom police force,” as Uta Ranke-Heinemann would have it.²⁰⁷ Indeed, as Mieth correctly insists, “Arguments resting on authority, or the constancy of a doctrine, or on the establishing of historical rules of thumb as timeless precepts are not sufficient”²⁰⁸ to a modern mindset. Nor, he argued, can the Church hope to promote healthy moral lives among the faithful by simply preaching a “doctrine of obligation,” as he (wrongfully) claimed was the case when he wrote in 1986.²⁰⁹ On the other hand, this is no time to abandon moral norms and anthropological doctrine: to delegate to the consciences of Christians the task of independently determining good and evil.

What is needed instead, Mieth (rightfully) suggested, is an experiential approach to Christian morality. Recognizing that “the agreement” between the Catholic (dissenting) majority and magisterial teaching “is greater [...] on the level of human values and basic attitudes, or basic models of behavior [...] than at the level of normative application,” he pointed to the fact that “human beings discover their ‘nature’ precisely in dealing with this realm of responsibility and creativity.” In short, “Christians [...] would rather learn, for example, how faithful love can be positively lived than to hear what, when, where, how often, and with whom one may or may not do this or that.”²¹⁰

Ironically, we are not far from John Paul II’s own conviction that the most profound desires of the human heart actually reveal the nature of the human person to him- or herself, along with nature’s imperatives. “Does man not sense, together with concupiscence, a deep need to preserve the dignity of the reciprocal relations that find their expression in the body thanks to its masculinity and femininity?,” he rightly asked. “Does he not feel the need to impregnate them with everything that is noble and beautiful? Does he not feel the need to confer on them the supreme value, which is love?”²¹¹ Pointing in this way to the attractive—even compelling—nature of a conjugal love that is true both to the demands of the Gospel message (cf. Mt 5: 27-28; 10: 39; 16:25) and to human freedom itself, he simultaneously opted for the pastoral option that the young Ratzinger recognized as that of the Second Vatican Council. This, more specifically, was the option of replacing “authoritative imperatives with the proclamation of the Gospel—thus opening up the faith to the non-believer and abdicating all claim to authority other than the intrinsic authority of God’s truth, manifesting itself to the hearer of the message.”²¹²

It was indeed this intrinsic authority of God’s truth resounding in the human heart (rather than in his ears, as is Mieth’s concern), that one finds echoed in John Paul II’s invitation to the

206 Joseph Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe*, 34. In short, morality has lost, Ratzinger observes, “its evidential character” (ibid., 33).

207 Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, 297.

208 Ibid., 135.

209 Dietmar Mieth, “Moral Doctrine at the Cost of Morality?,” 142. The reason for my judgment of Mieth’s claim will become apparent in what follows.

210 Ibid., 142. Mieth admits that the magisterial teaching of John Paul II presented a “personal understanding of nature” (ibid., 132).

211 Idem, General audience of October 29, 1980, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 313.

212 Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, with introduction by Thomas P. Rausch, trans. Henry Traub, Gerard C. Thormann, and Werner Barzel [New York: Paulist Press, 2009], 225). The original German text was published by J. P. Bachem in Cologne in four parts: one after each of the four periods of the council.

faithful to pose, along with the rich young man of the Gospel, the fundamental question of “our time” and of “every time”: the question, “What good must I do to have eternal life?” (cf. Mt 19:16). This is a question, John Paul II observed, “not so much about rules to be followed,” but rather “*about the full meaning of life.*” As such, it is “*an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man,*” and not simply of an elect few. It is a question reflecting “the aspiration at the heart of every human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion.”²¹³ This, in other words, is a question that directs freedom to its natural goal: goodness and truth.

In precisely this way, John Paul II adopted what he designated in his first encyclical as a “*missionary attitude*”: an attitude which “always begins with a feeling of deep esteem for ‘what is in man,’ for what man has himself worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems.” As such it is an attitude respecting everything that is natural to the human person in virtue of his or her creation: an attitude of “deep esteem for man, for his intellect, his will, his conscience and his freedom.” Secondly, it is an attitude respecting “everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which ‘blows where it wills’”²¹⁴: an attitude of humble recognition of the divine order of redemption at work, at least potentially, in the heart of every man.

In adopting this attitude, John Paul II also adopts the attitude of Christ in his dialogue with the rich young man (cf. Mt 19: 16-26). The pontiff observes more specifically that far from constraining the young man’s freedom by way of obligation or constraint, Christ appeals instead “to the absolute good which attracts us and beckons us,” as the “echo of a call from God, who is the origin and goal of man’s life.”²¹⁵ Similarly—that is to say, in imitation of Christ—John Paul II sought to stir human hearts in an effort to reawaken within them the yearning for this perfect and eternal good: for, that is to say, God himself (cf. Mk 10:18; Lk 18:19).²¹⁶ After all, it is this yearning, he was convinced, which reveals a fundamental anthropological truth: a truth challenging the primacy that had been granted to human freedom in much secular thought about love. This truth concerns, more specifically, the meaning and thus also the purpose of human freedom; for, as he observed in his prepontifical work, *Love and Responsibility*, “freedom exists for the sake of love, because it is by way of love that human beings share most fully in the good.” Indeed, love itself was defined by Wojtyła as willfully “limit[ing] one’s freedom on behalf of another. [...] Love commits freedom and imbues it with that to which the will is naturally attracted – goodness.” That is why, he suggested, we can experience that the human being “longs for love more than for freedom.” In short, “freedom is the means and love the end.”²¹⁷

It is from this creational perspective that human nature could once again be recognized as purposefully organized in its “spiritual and biological inclinations” in view of its specific end:

213 John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 8. Despite in fact the common tendency of interpreting the call of this particular Gospel scene as destined for those who have been chosen for the evangelical councils (see, for example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 915-916, 918), this call is “*meant for everyone,*” John Paul II teaches (*Veritatis Splendor*, no. 18): not only because “every believer is called to be a follower of Christ (cf. *Acts* 6:1)” (ibid., no. 19), but also because it is “the new, specific form of the commandment of love of God” (no. 18). Similarly, the previous invitation to “go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor” is said to “bring out the full meaning of the commandment of love for neighbour” (ibid.).

214 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, no. 12.

215 Idem, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 7.

216 Cf. ibid., no. 9.

217 Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (cf. Servais Pinckaers, *L’Evangile et la morale* [Paris / Fribourg, Switz.: Cerf / Editions Universitaires Fribourg, 1990], 168). “This,” Wojtyła continues, “is what gives freedom its real entitlement to one of the highest places in the moral order, in the hierarchy of man’s wholesome longings and desires” (*Love and Responsibility*, 135-136).

as, that is to say, intended by the Creator and as willfully appropriated by the human person, who is called to “direct and regulate his [or her] life and actions and [...] make use of his [or her] own body,” in accord with those purposes.²¹⁸ Precisely because the human person is characterized by reason, God provides for him or her “differently from the way in which he provides for beings which are not persons,” John Paul II explained in light of the constant teaching of the tradition. “He cares for man not ‘from without,’ through the laws of physical nature, but ‘from within,’ through reason, which by its natural knowledge of God’s eternal law is consequently able to show man the right direction to take in his free actions.”²¹⁹ It is this law, in fact, that is at work when one recognizes “that the permanent commitment to solidarity, fidelity and fruitful love responds,” as Pope Francis put it, “to the deepest longings of the human heart.”²²⁰

Of course, this is not to deny the “frequent” opinion “which questions the intrinsic and unbreakable bond between faith and morality, as if membership in the church and her internal unit were to be decided on the basis of faith alone, while in the sphere of morality a pluralism of opinions and of kinds of behavior could be tolerated, these being left to the judgment of the individual subjective conscience or to the diversity of social and cultural contexts,”²²¹ John Paul II admitted. To those of such a mindset, he granted that being moral does *not* mean simply “disposing oneself to hear a teaching and obediently accepting a commandment.” Nor, however, does this fact lessen its demands. Because “*the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality*” is, as the saintly pope saw and taught it, the “*sequela Christi*,” this morality “more radically [...] involves holding fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father.”²²²

Or, as Pope Francis put it more recently,

Christian morality is not a form of stoicism, or self-denial, or merely a practical philosophy or a catalogue of sins and faults. Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others. Under no circumstance can this invitation be obscured! All of the virtues are at the service of this response of love. If this invitation does not radiate forcefully and attractively, the edifice of the Church’s moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards, and this is our greatest risk. It would mean that it is not the Gospel which is being preached, but certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological options. The message will run the risk of losing its freshness and will cease to have “the fragrance of the Gospel”.²²³

There “cannot,” in other words, “be two parallel lives”: “On the one hand, the so-called “spiritual” life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called “secular” life, that is life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture.” Indeed, every aspect of our lives “enters into the plan of God, who desires” Pope

218 John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 50. Hence, for example, “In order to perfect himself in his specific order, the person must do good and avoid evil, be concerned for the transmission and preservation of life, refine and develop the riches of the material world, cultivate social life, seek truth, practice good and contemplate beauty.” (ibid., no. 51).

219 Ibid., no. 43. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94.

220 Pope Francis to participants in the International Colloquium on the Complementarity between Man and Woman, no. 3: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141117_congregazione-dottrina-fede.html

221 John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 4.

222 Ibid., no. 19; original emphasis.

223 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 39.

John Paul II explained, “that these very areas be the ‘places in time’ where the love of Christ is revealed and realized.”²²⁴ As for us Christians in the married state, we are called to live the radical demands of Christian love *most especially* in that relationship which was willed by the Creator “from the ‘beginning’ [...] to be the prime community of persons, source of every other community [cf. GS 12],”²²⁵ “the first and basic expression of the social dimension of the person,”²²⁶ namely the “unity of the two” at the heart of the family,²²⁷ which in turn was acclaimed by John Paul II as “*the centre and the heart of the civilization of love.*”²²⁸

224 John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 59. Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 180.

225 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 52.

226 Idem, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 40; original emphasis.

227 Idem, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 52.

228 Idem, *Gratissimam Sane*, no. 13; original emphasis.