

The Foundations of the Church's Doctrine Concerning the Principles of Conjugal Life:

*A memorandum composed by a group
of moral theologians from Kraków**

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I. The Natural Law as Foundation for the Condemnation of Contraception by the Magisterium of the Church

A. Current Views

1. Three Preliminary Questions

THE MAGISTERIUM is opposed to contraception, on the basis of natural morality. The reports of the papal commission mention the declarations of the Magisterium while proposing for discussion a set of more general problems related to these declarations. The questions to be discussed are as follows:

1. Does the Church have the right to make authoritative pronouncements on matters of morality and natural law?

[Note to the English version: The document has been translated from the French by Thérèse Scarpelli Cory, with the collaboration of Janet E. Smith; the latter's commentary on the document is the essay that immediately follows this translation.]

* In 1966, at the initiative of Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Kraków, a group of Krakovian moral theologians—Rev. Stanislas Smolenski, Rev. Thadeus Slipko, S.J., and Rev. Jules Turowicz, professors of theology in the Great Seminary of Kraków; Rev. Georges Bajda, professor at the Seminary of Tarnów, and Rev. Charles Meissner, O.S.B., physician—took up the task of examining the problem of the theological grounds for the Christian ethical norms of conjugal life. Cardinal Wojtyła himself directed the research, taking active part in the discussions and suggesting numerous ideas. Research continued until February 1968. The present redaction, prepared for publication by Adam Kubiś, presents their definitive conclusions.

2. Is her teaching on this subject infallible or not?
3. Can this teaching change?

The response to these questions provides a doctrinal context that allows us to explain the precise place of natural law in the Church's teaching.

2. Moral Theologians Who Defend Contraception

In the report released to the public, the supporters of contraception do not articulate a clear answer to the first of these questions. On the other hand, it is evident from the statement submitted by their opponents that at least some of those who endorse contraception challenge the Church's right to define the norms of natural law. In fact, they argue that the Church is competent solely in the realm of revealed law; alternatively, they limit the Church's authority to "the relation of men to God and each other,"¹ taken in the broadest possible way. This amounts to denying the Church the right to propose detailed norms in the domain of natural law.

The supporters of contraception respond to the second question in the negative. In defense of their position, they point out that although the Church and the popes have unanimously taught throughout the centuries that the use of marriage is only licit for the sake of procreation, or that it is at least permissible as a remedy for concupiscence, the Church and theologians distance themselves from these positions today.² The same historical fact also provides them with a justification for giving a positive answer to the third question.

Regarding the moral judgment concerning contraception, the supporters of the liceity of contraception say that the present-day notions

¹ *Status*, II.B.I (p. 174). The documents presented to Pope Paul VI by the members of the Pontifical Commission regarding the problems of population, family, and birthrate are the following: (1) *Documentum syntheticum de moralitate regulationis natiuitatum*; (2) *Status quaestionis*; (3) *Schema documenti de responsabili paternitate*. They are here cited according to the Latin text published in *Contrôle des naissance et théologie. Le dossier de Rome*, trans. Jean-Marie Paupert, with notes (Paris, 1967). The pagination refers to this edition.

[Editor's note: These reports were published in *The Birth Control Debate*, ed. Robert G. Hoyt (Kansas City, MO: National Catholic Reporter, 1968). The "*Status Questionis*" was a statement of the minority, those who supported the Church's teaching; the "*Documentum syntheticum*" was the reply to the "*Status Questionis*" by members of the majority, who argued the Church should change its teaching on contraception; the "*Schema*" was a portion of the final report of the Commission, a report that argued the Church should change its teaching. Many of these documents are now available online at www.twotlj.org/BCCCommission.html.]

² *Documentum*, I.5 (p. 158).

of nature and of the natural law have changed in meaning. The teaching of the Church recognizes this fact and therefore changes.³

3. Moral Theologians Who Uphold the Traditional Position

In their statement, the opponents of contraception examine all these arguments and critique them. Providing substantial documentation, they argue that the Church's doctrine on contraception has never varied throughout its entire history, and that it remains negative.⁴ The texts to which they appeal in support of their position, especially the declarations of the Magisterium, emphasize the fact that in the realm of conjugal and familial life, as in the realm of contraceptives and their use, the Church relies primarily on natural law, from which she also draws her ethical norms.

With respect to the problem of the Church's right to interpret natural law and establish specific norms that are binding in conscience, the opponents of contraception do not analyze this right in detail, apparently considering the matter to be clear enough already. Instead they simply appeal to the declarations on this point by Pius XII, John XIII, and the Second Vatican Council,⁵ in which this right was clearly affirmed.⁶

The opponents of contraception vigorously defend the Church's infallibility in moral matters, particularly regarding the present question. They repeatedly emphasize that, on this point, a change in the future teaching of the Magisterium would amount to a self-repudiation, with disastrous consequences for the Church.⁷

The same authors also address the question of evolution in the Church's teaching, though solely with respect to conjugal morality. While recognizing that the doctrine in this area has been increasingly enriched, they note that this is not the case with respect to contraception: on this subject, the teaching is of surprising immutability and continuity, despite differences of vocabulary and varying explanations of the doctrine.⁸

Finally, the opponents of contraception note certain naturalistic or evolutionary overtones in the way in which the proponents of contraception understand natural law and human nature. Against this naturalism, they emphasize that the immutability of human nature provides an objective foundation [to natural law].⁹

³ *Ibid.*, I.3 (p. 157).

⁴ *Status*, I.B (pp. 163–66).

⁵ *Ibid.*, I.E.2 (p. 170).

⁶ *Ibid.*, II.B.1 (p. 174) and II.B.4.a and c (pp. 174–76).

⁷ *Ibid.*, III (pp. 176–78).

⁸ *Ibid.*, I.B.3 (p. 165).

⁹ *Ibid.*, II.B.2 and 3 (p. 174).

4. *Some Conclusions*

This brief exposition, to the degree that it is accurate, shows that the moral theologians who oppose contraception have provided a rather in-depth treatment of the question of natural law as the foundation for the Church's condemnation of contraception in her official teaching. Our present essay does not, therefore, introduce the notion of natural law as a new element in the argument against contraception, as though moral theologians had been previously unaware of it. We simply wish to reexamine the matter in greater depth and to suggest some additional considerations that we believe could lend more weight to the argument.

From section I.E.3 of their statement,¹⁰ it seems that for those moral theologians who uphold the traditional position, the whole problem of the competence and infallibility of the Church's Magisterium in matters of natural law is a topic for academic debate that only serves as a distraction from the main controversy. In our opinion, this view is entirely inaccurate. If one abstracts from the points of dispute, the issue may well appear to be clear and decided. But taking into consideration the mindset of the opposite side, this issue proves to be of considerable weight in the conflict between these two opposing parties and consequently must be properly explicated. Its significance is most evident in the fact that the proponents of the traditional view were in fact obliged to appeal to these foundational notions and to point out once more the corresponding principles.

Moreover, it seems that the Church's right to teach infallibly in matters of natural law (including conjugal morality) ought to be granted the same role in arguments for the rejection of contraception that it retains in arguments for the objective hierarchy of norms: namely, the role of a fundamental premise. This premise indicates a direction for our present inquiry, namely to lend the support of solid theological reasoning to the solution of this problem. In their statement, the proponents of the traditional position seem to relegate this viewpoint to the background; in any case, they treat it only as a side issue, mentioned only in polemics against the proponents of contraception.

Our work here is aimed at providing a more comprehensive line of argumentation for the traditional position. The Church's teaching concerning natural law inasmuch as it is the foundation of the condemnation of contraception—a theme currently dispersed across various parts of the report—will here be assembled into a coherent, logical, and clearly presented whole. In this way, natural law will be clearly revealed as not only a philosophical but also a theological category, since, in addition to

¹⁰ *Ibid.* (p. 169).

its philosophical and even prephilosophical content, it includes formally theological elements, namely, the authority of the Magisterium. We believe that in this way we will bring to light an accurate understanding of natural law and of human nature, on which this law rests. For, in fact, the proponents of contraception understand these notions in a way that significantly departs from their authentic and traditional meaning in philosophy and theology.

*B. Principles Governing the Development of a Theological Thesis
on the Question of Contraception*

The condemnation of contraception in Church teaching constitutes the application, in this particular case, of certain more general principles. Since these principles are an integral part of the Church's doctrine, they must be addressed here.

1. The Church has the right and the duty to pronounce on the subject of morality and natural law, to define corresponding norms, to interpret them, and to apply them to the conditions of human life. Indeed, the observation of the precepts of natural law, which constitutes an integral part of the moral law, is one of the elements of "the life of faith," by which man strives towards his ultimate end. Scripture, the unchanging doctrinal tradition, and the practice of the Church in the last century, beginning with Pius IX, provide particularly abundant proof of this point.¹¹

¹¹ Pius IX, *Qui pluribus*, in *Pii IX Pontificis Acta* (Rome, 1854), pars prima, I, 4–24; *Quanto conficiamur moerore*, in *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta* (Rome, 1865), pars prima, III, 609–21. Leo XIII, *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, in *Leonis XIII Pontificis Maximi Acta* (Rome, 1882), II, 10–40; *Diuturnum illud*, *ASS* 14 (1881/82): 3–14; *Immortale Dei*, *ASS* 18 (1885/86): 161–80; *Libertas praestantissimum*, *ASS* 20 (1887/88): 593–613; *Pastoralis officii*, *ASS* 24 (1891/92): 203–7; *Quod apostolici muneris*, *ASS* 11 (1877/78): 369–76; *Rerum novarum*, *ASS* 23 (1890/91): 641–70. Pius X, *Singulari quadam*, *AAS* 4 (1912): 657–62. Pius XI, *Casti connubii*, *AAS* 22 (1930): 539–92; *Divini illius Magistria*, *AAS* 22 (1930): 49–86; *Divini Redemptoris*, *AAS* 29 (1937): 65–106; *Mit brennender Sorge*, *AAS* 29 (1937): 145–67; *Quadragesimo anno*, *AAS* 23 (1931) 177–228. Pius XII, *Allocution to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota*, 3 October 1941, *AAS* 33 (1941): 421–26; *Allocution to the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives*, 29 October 1951, *AAS* 43 (1951): 835–54; *Allocution to the Fourth International Congress of Catholic Doctors*, 29 September 1949, *AAS*, 41 (1949): 557–61; *Allocution aux Seventh Hematological Congress*, 12 September 1958, *AAS* 50 (1958): 732–40; *Allocution to the Second World Congress on Fertility and Human Sterility*, 19 May 1956, *AAS* 48 (1956): 467–74. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, *AAS* 53 (1961): 401–64; *Pacem in terris*, *AAS* 55 (1963): 257–304. Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, *AAS* 59 (1967): 257–99. Cf. Favara Fidelis, *De iure naturali in doctrina Pii Papae XII* (Rome, 1966).

2. The Church's doctrine on natural law, outlined in these documents, sees in the natural law an objective moral order, inscribed in the rational nature of man. Consequently, this order is independent of positive law, decreed by the State. It is stable and immutable; it is binding for all human beings, since all share the same human nature and are called to attain ethical ends. It contains not only the most general notions and ethical principles, but also a whole set of detailed moral norms. In its fullest meaning, natural law therefore constitutes the moral law, which must be carefully distinguished from "law of nature" in the sense used by the natural sciences today.
3. With a few exceptions, the Church's doctrine concerning natural law and its particular norms has not taken the form of solemn pronouncements by the extraordinary Magisterium. Rather, it is found in the ordinary Magisterium of the Church, and in its teaching— primarily in the teaching of the Sovereign Pontiffs, as well as in the teaching of the bishops in union with the See of Rome. This doctrine, then, has an authoritative character and is consequently owed obedience and respect.
4. Similarly, the ordinary Magisterium of the Church is infallible also with respect to natural morality. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the doctrinal statements of an individual pope do not constitute the ordinary Magisterium. These are merely acts distinct from the ordinary Magisterium, to which the faithful owe obedience in view of the supreme authority of the teaching Church, even though some acts, lacking infallibility in and of themselves, may include errors and may be only provisional. All this applies likewise to the principles of morality.
The ordinary Magisterium, however, is infallible only when it is continued over an extended period of time, stretching through an entire line of Sovereign Pontiffs, and when it concerns a sufficiently grounded doctrinal tradition regarding a specific point of doctrine—in the present case, a principle of morality.
5. The evolution of the ordinary Magisterium, in the realm of morality and natural law, consists in developing certain moral norms and becoming more profoundly conscious of, or extending its doctrine to, related elements of morality. A change in the teaching of the ordinary Magisterium can occur only with respect to objects that are changeable (for example, in the case of charging interest on a loan), and not with respect to objects that are fixed by their very natures, conditioned by the fundamental relations of human nature.

6. Concluding remarks. It is in light of the principles outlined above that one must examine the theological aspects of the moral judgment regarding contraception. In the first place we must consider the official declarations of the Church. These are: Pius XI's encyclical *Casti connubii*,¹² Pius XII's allocution to midwives,¹³ and a whole series of other related documents, including John XXIII's encyclical *Mater et Magistra*¹⁴ and the declarations of numerous bishops.¹⁵

The following conclusions may be drawn from these documents:

1. First, the Church, in her official teaching, condemns contraception as being morally evil and impermissible.
2. Second, the teaching on this subject is consistent from Pius XI to Paul VI, the latter having neither revoked nor questioned it.
3. Third, the condemnation of contraception, from the point of view of morality, is considered by the Church as a norm of natural law, and therefore an objective norm flowing from nature, immutable and obligatory for all, and not only for Catholics.

Should this teaching of the Church on contraception thus be taken as the expression of the ordinary Magisterium in the sense outlined above?

It seems that, up until now, this has not been the case, especially if one considers the fact that Paul VI has named a special commission to study the problem again. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that the constant doctrine of the Church in this area, confirmed by well-known declarations of Paul VI on this subject, is close to reaching the point of full development and maturity when it will be able to be recognized as part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Church. A future doctrinal declaration on the part of Paul VI, promulgated to the whole Church and bearing an obligatory character, would be of incomparable importance in this respect.

But independently of this fact, the Church's present teaching on contraception already constitutes a doctrinal norm, binding on the moral theologian in research and all the more on pastors in the confessional and in ministry. From a theological point of view, this teaching is objectively certain on account of the authority of the teaching Church, despite the opposition of certain moral theologians, and notwithstanding certain practices in various Catholic (and especially non-Catholic) environments.

¹² See note 11 above.

¹³ See note 11.

¹⁴ See note 11.

¹⁵ See *Status*, I.B.2 (p. 165).

On the other hand, the reasoning that underlies the doctrine, taking into consideration the axiological aspects of contraception, is an entirely different problem. From this point of view, a set of factors, some philosophical, ought to be mentioned: we will examine them below. We merely note here that from the point of view of Christian philosophy, all theories must be rejected that conceal the seeds of relativism and of situation ethics, because they undermine the objective and immutable foundations of morality and ultimately lead to subjectivism and anarchy in the understanding of principles and in behavior. In place of an authentic morality, then, we would have the destruction of the moral sense in human action and of the moral dignity of man.

II. Justification of the Church's Condemnation of Contraception

1. *The Human Person, His Dignity, and His Flourishing*

- a. The human person, his value, and the laws of his development provide the foundation for the principles of morality. In order to discuss the person, it is first necessary to have a clear notion of what a person is. But the notion of the person as understood by psychology—i.e., the purely subjective notion, in which the person is conceived as subject or even as a substratum of experience—provides an insufficient foundation for an objective moral norm, and leads to the danger of situation ethics.

It is necessary, therefore, to begin with the ontological concept of the person, understood as substantial subject of conscious and free actions. In order to answer the question 'what is man?' the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*¹⁶ refers to the book of Genesis (1:26), where it is said that man is created in the image of God. This is why the ontological definition of the person must take into consideration his relation to God and to the world. Man is not an absolute nor a supreme value, but he is a creature of God. Thus, his relation to God includes not only a creaturely dependence on God, but also the human faculty of consciously recognizing this dependence and of collaborating responsibly with God.

This structure of the person also includes his relation to the world. Man belongs to the world, but he is distinguished from other creatures by the ability to follow with full consciousness the truth and goodness

¹⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* 12. See AAS 58 (1966): 1025–1115. English citations are taken from *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984).

that he knows—the ability to have a moral life.¹⁷ Man can read in the world the order of nature and its finality with respect to himself and his good. Set amidst this order of things, man can recognize the normative force based on this order.¹⁸ Moreover, the world is ordered to the man, because he is, in the words of *Gaudium et Spes*, “set by [God] over all earthly creatures that he might rule them, and make use of them, while glorifying God.”¹⁹ With his intelligence and in full responsibility, he must collaborate in the creative and salvific plan of God. This consists, among other things, in recognizing and guarding the limits of his dominion over the world, limits that are fixed by the very nature of the faculties that he has received from the hands of his Creator.

- b. The power of transmitting life is a gift of God, and it forms part of the totality of the human person. It is precisely in terms of this nature, taken as a whole, that man must reckon with this power and its specific structure.

Therein his intellect discovers a biological law, which, although biological, is related to the human person as a unity of body and soul. This law cannot be conceived as deriving solely from nature understood in the broadest sense. It follows that it is one thing to act on the surrounding environment to transform it (including the animal world), and another thing to intervene in the biological laws of the human person.²⁰

The use of contraceptives constitutes an active intervention into the structure of the sexual act, and therefore of the action of the person; in

¹⁷ *Gaudium et Spes* 14.

¹⁸ Cf. *Status*, I.B.2 (pp. 165–66)

¹⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* 12.

²⁰ It seems that some theologians commit the fundamental error of viewing the human body as belonging to ‘nature’—by which they mean the realm of sub-human beings that humans can manipulate as they please, as though the body were an entity inferior to and dependent on the person. But soul and body together form the unity of the person. To treat the body is to treat oneself, to direct oneself. The human body participates in the dignity and rights of the person. In our opinion, the *Documentum*, in certain passages—I.1 (p. 156); 1.4 (p. 157); II.1 (pp. 158–59); II.2 (p. 159)—exemplifies a lack of comprehension of the relation between the human body and the person, even though the same document says, “Processus biologicus . . . personalitatem hominis” (II.3 [p. 153]) [Editor’s note: The passage in question reads: “The biological process in man is not some separated part (animality) but is integrated into the total personality of man” (Hoyt, *The Birth Control Debate*, 70)]; a text from which the authors fail to draw the necessary conclusions. The same lack of comprehension of this relation is also evident in *Schema*, I.II 2 (p. 182); I.III (pp. 183 and 184).

this way, it is a violation of the person as a being gifted by sexuality, and of his biological laws. This is therefore not a case of employing a means that is in itself indifferent (such as a weapon, for instance) and that can be used well or badly, depending on the intention of the acting subject.

- c. Moreover, the structure of the person includes his relations to others: namely, relations between persons and relations between the individual and society.²¹ In all these relations there is a binding obligation to respect the rights and dignity of the person.²²

When discussing the dignity of the human person, we must distinguish carefully the empirical or psychological use of the term “dignity” from its philosophical meaning and even more from that meaning based on Revelation. The philosophical sense, which takes into consideration the specific properties of the person—reason and freedom—alone can have a normative character. In other words, only this dignity, taken in the philosophical sense, can serve as the foundation and justification for the demands and obligations of which the person is the object. This is especially relevant when one benefits at the expense of one or more persons. A person should never be treated as an object used for one’s own ends; rather, we are obliged to manifest to others a benevolent love that protects the person’s true good (including moral good) and the fulfillment of his vocation.

The dignity of the person also includes certain obligations towards oneself, particularly the obligations to act rationally, freely, and responsibly. “Man’s dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint.”²³

- d. The person is called to develop and perfect himself. This development consists, among other things, in perfecting one’s acts, which ought to become ever more conformed to reason and free. All one’s tendencies must be progressively and wisely integrated into the responsible fulfillment of one’s vocation. This is why a person’s flourishing and perfection does not consist in totally satisfying his or her instincts, but consists in ruling them with full awareness and integrating them into the totality of his or her moral life. In this way, the Christian, aided by grace, restores and strengthens the harmony of his interior being, disturbed by sin.²⁴ The progressive recovering of this

²¹ *Gaudium et Spes* 12.

²² Cf. note 31.

²³ *Gaudium et Spes* 17.

²⁴ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 13.

balance makes it possible to effectively overcome selfish tendencies and to grow strong in true love.

2. *Conjugal Love and the Good of the Family*

The virtues of justice and love govern relations among persons, and, what is more, the New Covenant places emphasis on love. It is the new commandment; it is a participation in divine life, in the love with which the Persons of the Trinity love each other.²⁵ But if love rules all interpersonal relations, it clearly must also be normative in the life of the couple, which enjoys such unity and communion. Similarly, it is just as clear that only love as virtue, love as charity, can be the moral norm. The human person's love is an incarnate love. It is manifested in goodwill, thoughtfulness, dialogue, and the common sharing of goals, as well as in mutual affection and likewise in the sexual act, as long as the latter is accomplished in a way that corresponds to the true dignity of the human person²⁶ and to the objective criteria defined by his nature and natural activities. These criteria safeguard the full meaning of the spouses' mutual gift of self and of the transmission of life, accomplished in the manner worthy of man; but this requires the cultivation of the virtue of chastity.²⁷

For this reason, conjugal love can be manifested not only in the fertile act but also just as much in a normally completed but naturally infertile act. It can also be manifested in abstinence from the conjugal act, when prudence counsels to abstain from procreation. On the other hand, conjugal love cannot be manifested by an act that is voluntarily deprived of fertility, because active intervention in the sexual act or in the organic functions of the human person contrary to their purpose, solely for the sake of pleasure or sensual love, is equivalent to using one's partner for one's own ends. Such use is opposed to the dignity of the person²⁸ and to conjugal chastity (in that one seeks sexual satisfaction in a way contrary to reason); and it is certainly not in the image of the fruitful union of Christ and the Church, nor in the image of the fully disinterested union of the divine Persons in the heart of the Trinity. Rather, it involves egoism and self-seeking on the part of one of the spouses—or sometimes of both, which is nonetheless always egoistic. The elements essential to all virtues—self-mastery, self-gift, and disinterestedness—are

²⁵ The Lord Jesus implies “that there is a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of the sons of God in truth and love”; *Gaudium et Spes* 24.

²⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* 49.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 51. See note 41.

²⁸ See above, II.1.2.

eliminated for the sake of pleasurable experience, satisfaction of the senses, or emotion.²⁹ Such acts not only do not constitute true love, but, when repeated, necessarily lead to the destruction of love, for they are contrary to it.

Moreover, such acts do not contribute to creating in the home an atmosphere of love, the indispensable climate for the spiritual and fully human formation of children. Parents who cannot master themselves, who cannot sacrifice their egoism to the good of their spouse, will likewise lack generosity, patience, serenity, and calm assurance in their relations with their children. They will love their children to the degree to which their children bring them joy, i.e., selfishly and not for their own sakes; they will cajole them and teach them self-indulgence and self-love. Instead of the peace given by self-mastery, unrest will reign in the family, because the state of tension created by a truncated sexual act surrounded by precautions, an act that is not an unreserved gift of self, must in the long term be communicated to the children. It seems that the increasing prevalence of anxiety and even certain neuroses results in large part from contraceptive practices. The good of the family therefore requires true love, namely, the love that is able to master itself for the good of the loved one. And this is nothing other than to love God in the person of one's spouse.

3. *The Equality of Man and Woman in Marriage*

a. Universally accepted principles

- Man and woman are equal in their nature (metaphysically), in their dignity as persons, and in their final vocation.³⁰

²⁹ "A love like that . . . is actually developed and increased by the exercise of it. This is a far cry from mere erotic attraction, which is pursued in selfishness and soon fades away in wretchedness"; *Gaudium et Spes* 49. "Married people should realize that in their behavior they may not simply follow their own fancy . . . Whenever Christian spouses in a spirit of sacrifice and trust in divine providence carry out their duties of procreation with generous human and Christian responsibility, they glorify the Creator and perfect themselves in Christ"; *Gaudium et Spes* 50.

³⁰ "All men are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God's image; they have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all men and it must be given ever greater recognition"; *Gaudium et Spes* 29. "Any human society, if it is to be well-ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation this principle, namely, that every human being is a person, that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will. Indeed, precisely because he is a person he has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature. And as these rights and obligations are universal and inviolable, so they cannot in any way be surrendered"; John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* 9 (English translation cited from *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O'Brien and

- They are likewise equal as to the right of contracting marriage, in the choice of a spouse, and in the activity proper to spouses in everything concerning the essence of marriage.
 - Nevertheless, their parity as human persons, in their life as spouses, is marked by the difference of the sexes.
- b. Man and woman both have an equal right to the full flourishing of their own (individual and unique) vocations, in which their different sexes must be taken into consideration. The fact of being one sex or the other does not in itself determine the vocation of the person, since this vocation essentially transcends sexuality as such; it only determines the manner in which this vocation is accomplished. The person is sexual, but sexuality, in itself, does not define the person. The vocation of a person is accomplished not through sexuality but through an encounter between persons of different sex (referring here to the vocation to marriage). This is why relationships between persons are never fulfilled solely at the sexual level; rather, in beings endowed with reason, the sexual relationship can be forged only at the level of the person.
- c. Sex differentiates man and woman, but this differentiation is not merely in service of the personal and exclusive good of the individual. Moreover, this differentiation does not justify burdening one of the two spouses with a greater responsibility. Marriage consists in community and not only in reciprocity, and it is only with respect to the common, objective end that transcends them both that one can define the roles belonging to the man and the woman as spouses and determine the proper reciprocal relationship in the actions of the spouses. The matrimonial right is not the “sum of individual rights” and does not consist exclusively in the “reciprocal gift.” The “reciprocity” of marriage is truly accomplished only when it is based objectively and essentially on what is genuinely communal and trans-individual, and not only on the purely subjective “intention.” True community between the two exists solely in its relation “*ad Tertium*” (a communal, interior, transcendent relation).
- d. Man and woman, equal in human dignity, differ nevertheless in their sex, a property that inheres in the human body and therefore in the

Thomas A. Shannon [New York: Orbis Books, 1992], 132). The equality of human persons in their human dignity is, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the source of the unity of marriage: “The unity of marriage, distinctly recognized by our Lord, is made clear in the equal personal dignity which must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection”; *Gaudium et Spes* 49.

human person. Sex constitutes a biological fact that correlates to, and remains in the service of, the power of transmitting life. But the biological participation in the sexual act and in the labors of parenting is not the same for the man and for the woman. The sexual act is accomplished within the body of the woman, who, unlike the man, can be violated. Moreover, pregnancy and childbirth are uniquely a burden for the woman. The education of the child, especially in the first years of life, also falls primarily to her. Moreover, under normal conditions the man is always fertile; in contrast, the woman is only periodically fertile, for very short, though relatively frequent, stretches of time. Furthermore, it is the man who generally takes the initiative for seeking sexual encounter.

All these biological inequalities between the man and the woman, in the sexual act and in the labors of parenting, and in the obligations of the woman resulting from sexual activities (incomparably heavier than those of the man)—all this imposes on the man a correspondingly greater responsibility. When the man eschews his responsibilities, the woman's equality in human dignity is no longer being respected. Her elementary human rights will not be protected.³¹

- e. Contraception makes no contribution to the woman's personal rights. Since it is a process that makes it possible to satisfy the "needs of the sexual instinct" without taking on any responsibility for the consequences of sexual activity, it primarily benefits the man. This is why, once accepted, contraception leads to sanctioning his erotico-hedonist behavior. In this situation, inevitably, the man benefits at the expense of the woman. He ceases to regard the woman in the context of transmitting life. She becomes for him simply the occasion for enjoying pleasure. If one adds to this the fact that it is inscribed in the very structure

³¹ "It also follows that in human society to one man's right there corresponds a duty in all other persons: the duty, namely, of acknowledging and respecting the right in question. For every fundamental human right draws its indestructible moral force from the natural law, which in granting it imposes a corresponding obligation. Those, therefore, who claim their own rights, yet altogether forget or neglect to carry out their respective duties, are people who build with one hand and destroy with the other"; John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* 30 (*Catholic Social Thought*, 135); "A civic society is to be considered well-ordered, beneficial and in keeping with human dignity if it is grounded on truth. As the Apostle Paul exhorts us: 'Away with falsehood then; let everyone speak out the truth to his neighbor; membership of the body binds us to one another' [Eph 4:25]. This will be accomplished when each one duly recognizes both his rights and his obligations toward others"; *ibid.*, no. 35 (p. 136).

of man to take initiative in the sexual realm and that the danger of being violated is a threat primarily to the woman, then one must admit that the moral condition of the woman appears grim indeed. Therefore, when contraception is used, the woman faces not only inequality, but also sexual slavery.³²

4. *The Consequences of Original Sin*

The claims of those who defend a practically limitless freedom in the regulation of births seem to be anchored in a belief in the innate goodness of man and the absolute integrity of his nature. Unfortunately, this optimism does not find any confirmation in Holy Scripture, or in the doctrinal tradition and practice of the Church, or, finally, in the history and daily experience of humanity.

In our view, man is not only far from this ideal, but he presents in certain respects such a tragic face that even those observers who reject the doctrine of original sin tend to recognize an inexplicable deterioration in human nature, which is responsible for his current disharmony and inclination to evil. The whole human person bears the mark of this interior disorder, but it is most strikingly evident in the realm of sexual instinct, which is without doubt one of the strongest human instincts.

The Old and New Testaments concur in pointing out an innate human inclination to sin, together with the concrete reality of his sins.³³ But if the Old Testament remains perplexed by this, awaiting divine assistance and unsure of how the story will end, the New Testament, in contrast, shows us the powerful sources of strength flowing from Christ and his salvific work, which are capable of destroying sin in us, since they are infinitely more powerful than sin.

This does not mean, however, that the Redemption has radically changed human nature for the better, or that it has totally extinguished therein the embers of sin. These embers continue to smolder, and we must always reckon with their destructive power. It is necessary to remain on guard, especially where concupiscence and sin ally with the “*sarx*” [flesh], the enemy of spirit. Vigilance thus is one of the essential elements in the conversion of man to God.

³² “If the positions of the contracting parties are too unequal, the consent of the parties does not suffice to guarantee the justice of their contract, and the rule of free agreement remains subservient to the demands of the natural law”; Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* 59 (English text cited from *Catholic Social Thought*, 254).

³³ Cf. Sir 25:24; Sg 2:23–24; Jer 1:14–15; 1 Jn 2:16; Rom 1:24–32 and 7:18–24; Gal 5:16–26.

III. Responsible Parenthood

1. The couple fulfills their duty of transmitting life and raising children in the context of the concrete conditions of their state of life. In desiring to carry out this duty effectively and in accordance with the divine plan, the spouses must weigh all circumstances and consider all the requirements imposed by these circumstances, with prudence and conscious of their responsibility.³⁴ This is why the number of children called into existence cannot be left to chance. On the contrary, because of all the human values which are involved here, the number of children must be decided by the spouses in full consciousness. They therefore undertake this work as persons, and the decision itself must be an act of human responsibility.

All of this has been recognized by the bishops in the Second Vatican Council³⁵ and by Paul VI in his encyclical *Populorum*

³⁴ The conception and birth of the child has a considerable impact on the organic functions of the mother. One must therefore consider her health. The education of the child requires many years of work on the part of the parents. Moreover, the child has the right to health and life: from the moment of his conception, he is the subject of the rights belonging to the person. Once born, he has the right to be raised in conditions that are appropriate to his dignity as human person. Moreover, other circumstances must be taken into consideration. The child must be a member of society, which is composed of other persons who also have rights. In short, the transmission of life is an act of great significance, not only for those who are intimately affected by this event, but also for society; it therefore necessarily demands a strong sense of responsibility. The obligation to bear and raise children is certainly incumbent on the parents—an obligation that used to be called the duty of “preserving the human race” or more simply of assuring its continuation. But “the general principles can now be stated that the fulfillment of a positive duty may be withheld should grave reasons, independent of the good will of those obliged to it, show that such fulfillment is untimely, or make it evident that it cannot equitably be demanded by that which requires the fulfillment—in this case, the human race.” Pius XII, “Allocution to Midwives,” in *The Human Body: Papal Teachings*, ed. Monks of Solesmes (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1979), 164.

³⁵ “Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby cooperating with the love of God the Creator and are, in a certain sense, its interpreters. This involves the fulfillment of their role with a sense of human and Christian responsibility and the formation of correct judgments through docile respect for God and common reflection and effort; it also involves a consideration of their own good and the good of their children already born or yet to come, an ability to read the signs of the times and of their own situation on the material and spiritual level, and, finally, an estimation of the good of the family, of society, and of the Church. It is the married couple themselves who must in the last analysis arrive at these judgments before God. . . . Whenever Christian spouses in a spirit of sacrifice and trust in divine providence carry out their duties of procreation

Progressio.³⁶ Consequently, the spouses' consideration of the number of children that they undertake to bear and raise necessitates a decision regarding the responsible regulation of births and involves the following factors:

- an attitude of faith and trust in God;³⁷
- a serene magnanimity and a willingness to undergo renunciation and sacrifice;³⁸

with generous human and Christian responsibility, they glorify the Creator and perfect themselves in Christ"; *Gaudium et Spes* 50. "Because in virtue of man's inalienable right to marriage and the procreation of children, the decision regarding the number of children depends on the judgment of the parents and is in no way to be left to the decrees of public authority. Now, since the parents' judgment presupposes a properly formed conscience, it is of great importance that all should have an opportunity to cultivate a genuinely human sense of responsibility which will take account of the circumstances of time and situation and will respect the divine law"; *ibid.*, no. 87.

³⁶ "Finally, it is for the parents to decide, with full knowledge of the matter, on the number of their children, taking into account their responsibilities toward God, themselves, the children they have already brought into the world, and the community to which they belong. In all this they must follow the demands of their own conscience enlightened by God's law authentically interpreted, and sustained by confidence in him"; Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* 37 (*Catholic Social Thought*, 249).

³⁷ In contracting marriage, Christian spouses receive from God a specific duty to fulfill in his creative and salvific plan. Conjugal life is a vocation. The first question that every Christian must ask in order to be able to respond to other problems of his life to the best of his ability is, "How does God view the fulfillment of my duties in the concrete situation of my life?" As Christians, we believe in the love that God has for us. This is the reason for our unshakeable confidence in divine assistance in the fulfillment of the duties dictated by conscience.

Moreover, parents must be conscious of the fact that "human life and its transmission are realities whose meaning is not limited by the horizons of this life only: their true evaluation and full meaning can only be understood in reference to man's eternal destiny"; *Gaudium et Spes* 51.

³⁸ The education of children is certainly the source of many joys, but nevertheless the fulfillment of this duty often involves much labor, disappointment, and suffering. The same applies to the other obligations that life brings. But it is precisely the attitude towards suffering and the labors of life, more than anything else, that constitutes the essential difference between those who believe in the Son of God, Jesus Christ the man, who by his passion and cross has redeemed the world and called all to salvation. As Christians we must be conscious that the Son of God lives, is present, and acts in his Body the Church—the People of God of the New Covenant. The sufferings of this People and of each of its members participate in the work of salvation. Christ himself says: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23); and

- a consciousness of their community, the fruit of conjugal life: this decision regarding the regulation of births ought to be reached within a dialogue of love between husband and wife;³⁹
- justified motives;⁴⁰
- the behavior of the spouses in undertaking the regulation of births must be in accord with the divine law expressed by the Magisterium of the Church.⁴¹

“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:27).

Moreover, we are conscious that Christ accompanies us in our daily labors: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mt 11:28–30). Cf. ch.V of the Second Vatican Council’s *Lumen Gentium*, AAS 56 (1964): 125–28.

It would be good for parents, in deciding how many children they wish to have, to meditate on the following exchange between Christ and his apostles in this scene from the Gospel: “And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.’” (Mt 9:36–37).

The Magisterium of the Church respects the magnanimity of parents: “Therefore, since the primary office of matrimony is to be at the service of life, Our special regard and Our paternal gratitude go to those generous husbands and wives who, for the love of God and trusting in Him, courageously raise a numerous family”; Pius XII, *Allocution to the National Congress of the Italian Family Front and the Associations of Large Families* (English translation cited from *Papal Teachings: Matrimony*, trans. Byrnes, no. 616, p. 416). “Among the married couples who thus fulfill their God-given mission, special mention should be made of those who after prudent reflection and common decision courageously undertake the proper upbringing of a large number of children”; *Gaudium et Spes* 50.

³⁹ The parity of the man and the woman in their dignity as persons, the character of the matrimonial contract, which imposes on them a similar obligation to respect mutually the person of the other spouse, and the demands of reciprocal respect, as well as common duties entailing common responsibilities—all this results in that the spouses must, “with common accord and common effort” make a well-considered judgment regarding the regulation of births. Parents bear a common responsibility towards the child: in the same way, the regulation of births must be the fruit of a common discernment of the duties that both bear together.

⁴⁰ Pius XII was the first to discuss the moral requirements in this area. He enumerated “medical, eugenic, economic, and social indicators” as motives for a morally justified regulation of births. See the citations from the *Allocution to Midwives*. See notes 35 and 36.

⁴¹ “Married people should realize that in their behavior they may not simply follow their own fancy but must be ruled by conscience—and conscience ought to be conformed to the law of God in the light of the teaching authority of the

The last two factors require a deeper analysis.

2. The documents of the Second Vatican Council and of Paul VI outline a deeper and more detailed teaching on the motives for responsible parenthood than that of Pius XII. The spouses must consider:
 - the vocation to which God calls them in his creative and salvific plan;
 - their own good and their own responsibility towards themselves (here one must add the care for their health, namely, the motives that Pius XII designated as the “medical indicator” for the regulation of births);
 - the good of the children already born or yet to be born, and responsibilities towards them (to this group of motives belong Pius XII’s “eugenic indicators”);
 - the good of the community to which the spouses belong: family, temporal society, and Church;
 - the temporal circumstances;
 - material as well as spiritual conditions (here one would include the “economic and social indicators” mentioned by Pius XII).⁴²

Church, which is the authentic interpreter of divine law. For the divine law throws light on the meaning of married love, protects it and leads it to truly human fulfillment”; *Gaudium et Spes* 50.

“Man’s sexuality and the faculty of reproduction wondrously surpass the endowments of lower forms of life; therefore the acts proper to married life are to be ordered according to authentic human dignity and must be honored with the greatest reverence. When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, it is not enough to take only the good intention and the evaluation of motives into account; the objective criteria must be used, criteria drawn from the nature of the human person and human action, criteria which respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love; all this is possible only in the virtue of married chastity is seriously practiced. In questions of birth regulation the sons of the Church, faithful to these principles, are forbidden to use methods disapproved of by the teaching authority of the Church in its interpretation of the divine law”; *ibid.*, no. 51.

⁴² These motives must be evaluated with the utmost probity. The spouses must have a “well-formed conscience.” For instance, it is often said that the fewer children one has, the better they can be raised. Experience teaches us that this generalized and unqualified statement is without basis in actual fact. It is difficult to educate an only child normally. Often someone who has been raised without the company of brothers and sisters remains unhappy throughout his life, experiences difficulties in developing his personality, and is less able to adapt to others (cf. C. Combalusier, *L’enfant seul* [Paris, 1954]). Moreover, the child has the right

Present-day catechesis recognizes the importance of appealing to the responsibility that Christians have for their life and journey towards God. The various motives listed above, which must prevail in a decision so important to the lives of the spouses, can not only motivate them to abstain from procreation but even encourage them to procreate consciously and voluntarily.

3. The intention with which we act clearly bears moral weight. But in order for an act to be morally good, further conditions must also be met. “We concede that God wants always and first of all a right intention; but this is not enough. He also wants the act to be good.”⁴³ The act of a person must itself correspond to the divine plan, which is inscribed in the concretely existing structure of the human being, as well as in the action that is properly human. The Second Vatican Council merely restates the Church’s unchanging teaching on this point.

It is therefore necessary to formulate the fundamental moral requirements governing the means that the spouses employ in regulating births, so that their actions may conform to the dignity of the human person. In order to preserve rectitude, these means must take into account the inherent meaning of human sexual life. This is the goal of divine law in this realm.

- a. The first of these postulates follows from the equality between man and woman because they both are human persons: in short, there must be equality and proportionality between the contribu-

to receive formation in a normal situation, such as one finds in a family environment that includes other children. To deprive the child of these surroundings is a decision that could affect him for life, and consequently it can be motivated only by truly serious considerations.

The same applies to the judgment concerning the concrete situation of the spouses. It is evidently often the case that the income of the spouses is modest, and that their living arrangements are not what they should be. Still, it is not unusual for egoism to exaggerate these difficulties; what is identified as an economic difficulty is in this case often simply a hidden desire for an easier life. All this creates serious educational problems. Material well-being, the goal for which the parents strive throughout most of their lives, is accepted by children as normal and owed to them. Consequently, they do not take care of their belongings, do not value the parents’ labor or respect their work, and finally have only disdain and distrust for the less fortunate. It is this desire for an easier life that is the cause of the contemporary shift towards bourgeois life.

⁴³ Pius XII, *Allocution to the Congress of the World Union of Young Catholic Women*, 18 April 1952 (translated into English from *Discorsi e radiomessaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII* [Tipografia Poligotta Vaticana], vol. 12, pp. 69–78).

tion of the man and the woman in the work of regulating births.⁴⁴ This principle must be kept in mind when examining the morality of women's use of oral contraceptives (ovulation inhibitors) or intrauterine devices (IUDs). To cause biological changes in the woman that make fertility impossible, which at the same time frees the man of his responsibility in the sexual act, is to do violence to the person of the woman and to transgress against justice.⁴⁵

- b. The place which sexuality occupies in the structure of the person and in his actions provides the foundation for other postulates. In the life of the human person, sexuality fulfills several functions:
- the biological function of procreation
 - a trans-individual, interpersonal, and social function
 - a sign-function, an element in the communication between people in the formation of social bonds

From a biological point of view, sex is essentially linked with procreation. We have already emphasized that the body participates in the dignity of the person: together with the soul, it forms one single human being.⁴⁶ This is why sex, a property of the body, is a property of the person; likewise, sexual activity, an essentially bodily event, participates in human activity.

Indeed, man is a social being.⁴⁷ The reproductive system is the only organic system that requires the cooperation of two persons in its normal operation. The sexual act involves the human body, but through the body it reaches the person, who, by this bodily bonding-gesture (which is essentially a function of the *vis generativa* [the generative power]) enters into a special personal bond with another person.

The sexual instinct therefore is the essential factor that gives rise to the basic interpersonal and social bonds—those of marriage

⁴⁴ See above, section II.

⁴⁵ Cf. note 32.

⁴⁶ Doubtless all theologians are aware of this, but not all draw therefrom the consequences that logically follow from it. See *Schema*, I.II.2 (p. 182) and *Documentum*, II.3 (p. 159) and IV.2 b (p. 161).

⁴⁷ "Man by his very nature stands completely in need of life in society. . . . Life in society is not something accessory to man himself: through his dealings with others, through mutual service, and through fraternal dialogue, man develops all his talents and becomes able to rise to his destiny. Among the social ties necessary for man's development some correspond more immediately to his innermost nature—the family, for instance, and the political community; others flow rather from his free choice"; *Gaudium et Spes* 25.

and family. This is why the sexual instinct, impelling one to physical union with an individual of the opposite sex, is a kind of instrumental dynamism serving the person's social needs.

The trans-individual function of sexuality is not limited to the formation of interpersonal bonds. Sexual life, intimately linked to the power of procreation, is therefore an essential factor in the existence of society.⁴⁸ The mature desire for a child properly belongs to interpersonal sexual love.⁴⁹ The documents of the Second Vatican Council articulate precisely what is required for the parental attitude of the spouses and do not merely affirm that marriage as an institution is ordained to procreation.⁵⁰

As for sexuality as a sign, it offers the possibility of communicating with one's fellows. It is therefore not only a need proper to the human being as a "social being" but also a condition *sine qua non* of the existence of society. Indeed, the sexual life of man

⁴⁸ For a more detailed philosophical-moral analysis of the problem, see Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 216–23. See also H. Schelsky, *Les formes sociales des relations sexuelles*, in H. Giese et al., *Seksuologia* (Warsaw: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, 1959), translated from the German: *Die Sexualität des Menschen* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1955).

⁴⁹ In its teaching, the Council never separates the ends of marriage as institution from the love of the persons who engage in it. In fact, there is not and cannot be any opposition between these two realities. See *Gaudium et Spes* 50: "Marriage and married love are by nature ordered to the procreation and education of children. Indeed children are the supreme gift of marriage and greatly contribute to the good of the parents themselves. . . . Without intending to underestimate the other ends of marriage, it must be said that true married love and the whole structure of family life which results from it are directed to disposing the spouses to cooperate valiantly with the love of the Creator and Saviour, who through them will increase and enrich his family from day to day. Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby cooperating with the love of God the Creator and are, in a certain sense, its interpreters." And *ibid.*, no. 48: "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory."

⁵⁰ Among other texts already cited above, one reads in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11: "Christian married couples help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in the rearing of their children. Hence by reason of their state in life and of their position they have their own gifts in the People of God (cf. 1 Cor 7:7). From the marriage of Christians there comes the family in which new citizens of human society are born and, by the grace of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, those are made children of God so that the People of God may be perpetuated throughout the centuries." English citations taken from *Vatican Council II*, ed. Flannery.

belongs to the order of signs by which one subject expresses something to another, manifesting the realm of the spirit that cannot be directly grasped. Sexuality attracts individuals to each other. This is why its manifestations are a very appropriate means of expressing that which unites human beings, namely, a recognition that the other possesses a value by which one is drawn towards common union for the sake of the ends proper to human persons. It is in this that love consists. The sexual life, in its expressions, is therefore a very appropriate way of showing one's love.⁵¹ And since this body-soul conjunct constitutes, in this life, the undivided unity of the person, the love that is expressed through sex, that is, through the genital organs, is clearly defined in its genus by the sexuality of the body. As a consequence of the unity of the person, who is simultaneously body and spirit, the sexuality of the body and therefore the sexuality of the person creates special requirements for the personal love that is marked by sex.

Every sexual act between spouses ought therefore to be "a reciprocal self-gift,"⁵² a bodily expression of their mutual love.

⁵¹ "Thus the man and woman, who 'are no longer two but one' (Mt 19:6), help and serve each other by their marriage partnership; they become conscious of their unity and experience it more deeply from day to day. The intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons"; *Gaudium et Spes* 48.

"Married love is an eminently human love because it is an affection between two persons rooted in the will and it embraces the good of the whole person; it can enrich the sentiments of the spirit and their physical expression with a unique dignity and ennoble them as the special elements and signs of the friendship proper to marriage. . . . Married love is uniquely expressed and perfected by the exercise of the acts proper to marriage. Hence the acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude"; *ibid.*, no. 49.

"But marriage is not merely for the procreation of children: its nature as an indissoluble compact between two people and the good of the children demand that the mutual love of the partners be properly shown, that it should grow and mature"; *ibid.*, no. 50.

Besides the text cited above, which concerned "the truly human performance of acts," the Council elsewhere uses the following expression: "the acts proper to married life are to be ordered according to authentic human dignity and must be honored with the greatest reverence"; *ibid.*, no. 51. This whole passage is cited in note 41. See also the very important passage cited in note 53.

⁵² *Ibid.*, no. 48. Cf. also in no. 49 the following text: "A love like that, bringing together the human and the divine, leads the partners to a free and mutual giving of self, experienced in tenderness and action, and permeates their whole lives; besides, this love is actually developed and increased by the exercise of it."

Because this love “by its very nature . . . is ordered to the procreation and education of offspring,”⁵³ it should also express their parental attitude.

The multiple functions of the human sexual act are safeguarded only in the act that retains its proper relation to procreation—in other words, when its sexual structure (as an act of the *vis generativa* [generative power] is willingly preserved. Because procreation can and must be directed by man, and because this act has other functions besides the purely biological, it follows that man can engage in acts that do not result in fertilization,⁵⁴ as long as the purpose and

⁵³ Ibid., no. 48. See also in no. 51 the following text: “When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life . . . the objective criteria must be used . . . criteria which respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love.”

⁵⁴ “But marriage is not merely for the procreation of children . . .”; *ibid.*, no. 50. This has been, in fact, always the Church’s conviction. The exercise of the conjugal right by sterile or elderly spouses has never been considered illicit.

The memorandum *Schema documenti de responsabili paternitate* [*The Scheme of the Document Concerning Responsible Parenthood: The Report of the Majority of the Special Commission on Birth Regulation*—to which this document is a response] includes the following passage: “Moralitas ergo actuum sexualium inter coniuges imprimis et specificae significationem sumit ab ordinatione eorum actuum in vita coniugali fecunda . . . et non pendet proinde a fecunditate directa uniuscuiusque actus particularis”; I, II, 2 (pp. 182–83). [“Therefore the morality of sexual acts among married people takes its meaning first of all and specifically from the ordering of their actions in a fruitful married life. . . . It does not then depend on the direct fecundity of each and every particular act” (Hoyt, *The Birth Control Debate*, 87).] The same thought is expressed by the authors of the *Documentum syntheticum*: “Actus coniugales quae ex intentione infoecundi sunt (seu infoecundi redduntur) ordinantur ad expressionem unionis amoris: ille amor autem suum culmen attingit in ipsa foecunditate cum responsabilitate accepta et propterea alii actus unionis quodammodo incompleti sunt et eorum plenam moralitatem cum ordinatione ad actum foecundum recipiunt . . . Actus coniugales infoecundi cum actu foecundo unam totalitatem constituunt et unicam specificationem moralem accipiunt”; III (p. 160). [“Conjugal acts which by intention are infertile (or which are rendered infertile) are ordered to the expression of the union of love; that love, however, reaches its culmination in fertility responsibly accepted. For that reason, other acts of union in a certain sense are incomplete and they receive their full moral quality with ordination toward the fertile act. . . . Infertile conjugal acts constitute a totality with fertile acts and have a single moral specification” (Hoyt, *The Birth Control Debate*, 72).]

It is difficult to agree with this opinion, which argues that sexual relations of sterile couples or of those who for grave reasons are dispensed from the obligation of procreating, should be considered to be deprived of their positive moral value. This would amount to rigorism and would not conform to the teaching of the Church.

On the other hand, a participation of the infertile acts in the fertile acts, or even the moral unity of both, requires some sort of grounding. But this grounding is

meaning of their biological structure remain intact. This requirement results from the fact that the sexual act of the person is one act, though polyvalent and structured. It is a biological act of the person: all the personal values are signified in it precisely through its biological orientation. Active intervention in the structure of the act results in its truncation, which does violence to its value as sign [means of communication]. It is marked by a disintegration of instinct and love. In such circumstances, the sexual act is impelled by auto-eroticism, and does not fully constitute the revelation of a love encompassing the entirety of affections and instincts.

A complete sexual act that is nevertheless preceded by an intervention into the woman's organic functions in order to prevent fertilization (the "Pill," IUDs)—independently of the violence done to the rights of the person—expresses the same disorder as intervention into the act itself.

This analysis of the role of sexual life in the structure of the person and his actions makes it possible to formulate the postulates of morality governing the responsible regulation of fertility, as follows:

- Sexual life must always signify and express, in full truth, the spouses' mutual gift of self and a love that is attentive to the good of the person;
- Every sexual act must express the "parental" character of conjugal love and of married life;
- The sexual integrity of conjugal relations must be preserved.

In light of these principles, all contraceptive procedures displaying anti-parental behavior must be excluded from sexual activity. Contracepted relations cannot constitute the expression of the parental attitude, since they are not an unrestricted gift of self, a total communion with the other, regardless of whether this fact is veiled by various illusions.

These requirements demand from us a great ascetic effort, self-mastery, and full consciousness of our actions.⁵⁵

found only in the biological relation of the sexual act to procreation and therefore in the structure of the act, which is essentially procreative (*actus potentiae generativae* [acts of generative power]) and sexual.

⁵⁵ The moral requirements clearly also show the importance of a proper formation for young people.

- c. Other postulates dictated by morality, to which methods of regulating births must conform, flow from each person's call to seek maturity and growth towards perfection.⁵⁶

Personal development consists, among other things, in perfecting one's actions, which ought to become ever more rational and free. The obstacle [to this goal] will be the tendency to disorder that results from original sin. This tendency is similarly manifested in the realm of sexuality, and personal development and perfection is no less necessary here than in other areas of life.⁵⁷ Contemporary discussions of marital morality do not adequately recognize a point of which every pastor is aware, namely, that the mere fact of entering into marriage does not cure the spouses of their tendency to moral disorder.⁵⁸ The teaching of the Council manifests a considerable effort to highlight the positive aspect of marriage and its dignity. Yet it also offers a very lucid assessment of corrupted human nature: "Outstanding courage is required for the constant fulfillment of the duties of this Christian calling: spouses, therefore, will need grace for leading a holy life: they will eagerly practice a love that is firm, generous, and prompt to sacrifice and will ask for it in their prayers."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ "In the design of God, every man is called upon to develop and fulfill himself, for every life is a vocation. At birth, everyone is granted, in germ, a set of aptitudes and qualities for him to bring to fruition. Their coming to maturity, which will be the result of education received from the environment and personal efforts, will allow each man to direct himself toward the destiny intended for him by his Creator. Endowed with intelligence and freedom, he is responsible for his fulfillment as he is for his salvation. He is aided, or sometimes impeded, by those who educate him and those with whom he lives, but each one remains, whatever be these influences affecting him, the principal agent of his own success or failure. By the unaided effort of his own intelligence and his will, each man can grow in humanity, can enhance his personal worthy, can become more a person"; Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* 15 (*Catholic Social Thought*, 243).

⁵⁷ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 8 and 13.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Documentum*, II (p. 159); III (p. 160) and especially the following phrase: "Copula etiam cum interventu est oblativa . . ." IV.4.d (p. 162) ["Intercourse even with intervention is self-offering" (Hoyt, *The Birth Control Debate*, 77)]. Although certain theologians appeal to the "progress of sexology" (*Documentum*, I.4 [p. 157]; *Schema*, I.III [p. 183]), they do not seem to notice the existence of a psycho-sexual infantilism that is often found especially in men (cf. A. C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* [Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1948]). One must reckon with the case of auto-erotic fixation that appears precisely, among other things, in a contraceptive choice (see among others: M. Oraison, *Vie chrétienne et problèmes de la sexualité* [Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1952], and M. de Wilmars, *Psychopathologie de l'anticonception* [Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1955]).

⁵⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* 49.

The Conciliar constitution *Lumen Gentium* repeatedly emphasizes the revealed doctrine of the universal call to perfection and imitation of God.⁶⁰

We cannot fail to note the tendency to sexual disorder, together with the fact that “the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life” (Matt. 7:14).⁶¹ Opinions that blame the difficult moral situation of today’s couples (and is this really a uniquely contemporary problem?) on the unsuitability of the Church’s moral teachings [to the contemporary situation] are quite simply naïve. On the one hand, they manifest a completely unjustified optimism according to which every desire for the sexual act is solely a yearning of love.⁶² On the other hand, these same opinions are grounded in a theological pessimism according to which man, the subject of disordered tendencies, is practically incapable of ordering his own actions. Finally, these opinions exhibit moral legalism, which manifests itself in the barely concealed belief that reason is unable to discern what is morally ordered or disordered in marriage,⁶³ and

⁶⁰ The words of Christ: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48), so often repeated by the apostle Paul, e.g. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph 5:1), are broadly developed in ch.V of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* 40: “It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love”; *ibid.*, no. 41: “The forms and tasks of life are many but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who act under God’s Spirit and, obeying the Father’s voice and adoring God the Father in spirit and in truth, follow Christ, poor, humble and cross-bearing, that they may deserve to be partakers of his glory”; *ibid.*, no. 42: “Therefore all the faithful are invited and obliged to holiness and the perfection of their own state of life. Accordingly let all of them see that they direct their affections rightly, lest they be hindered in their pursuit of perfect love by the use of worldly things and by an adherence to riches which is contrary to the spirit of evangelical poverty, following the apostle’s advice: Let those who use this world not fix their abode in it, for the form of this world is passing away (cf. 1 Cor 7:31).”

⁶¹ See Mt 19:8–9; Mk 10:5; Rom 1:24, 26–27 and 7:14–25; 1 Cor 5:1, 6:9, and 6:13–20, as well as many others.

⁶² This is why one encounters the simplistic affirmation that spouses who use contraceptives only do it to solidify their love. See note 58 and *Documentum*, I.3 (p. 157) and II.4 (p. 159). The memoranda *Schema* and *Documentum* include statements that imply that their authors are taking into account the sexual disorder within marriage. But they attribute it solely to an interior attitude, and not to the exterior manifestations of sexual life in marriage. See *Schema*, I.II.2 (p. 183) and *Documentum*, III (p. 160).

⁶³ Cf. *Documentum*, I.1 (p. 156); I.2 (p. 157); II.1 (p. 158); *Status*, I.D (p. 167). This memorandum, however, also includes a very detailed critique of the thesis that

that thus the requirements of the natural law are neither knowable nor definable. Consequently, in order for man to stop sinning, it suffices to change the “law,” namely, the principles proclaimed by the Church.

In this domain of sexual life, there is tension between man’s sensations in the sexual act and the interpersonal and social values of this act. Sexual activity becomes morally disordered every time that these interpersonal values are subordinated to the sensory dimension of carnal intercourse. Rational sexual behavior therefore requires, by the very nature of things, abstinence from the act whenever love demands it. This willed abstinence from the sexual act can even express a greater love than the act itself.⁶⁴ To strive towards perfection in the conjugal life thus requires on the one hand, being able to express love in abstaining from the conjugal act, and on the other, subordinating one’s own pleasure in the sexual act to the interpersonal and social values of the act.

It should also be noted that there is an essential difference between rational behavior that is conscious of its consequences and the precautions prudently taken to avoid the results of undisciplined behavior. Striving for perfection necessitates that one’s

upholds the relativity of reason’s principles in relation to the present subject (the whole second part).

The *Schema* frequently invokes the natural law, which the authors seem to consider to be evident: “Ceterum vero, ipsa naturalis lex, atque ratio fide christiana illuminata, dictant ut coniuges in eligendis mediis non pro arbitrio, sed secundum criteria obiectiva procedant.” [“Moreover, the natural law and reason illuminated by Christian faith dictate that a couple proceed in choosing means not arbitrarily but according to objective criteria” (Hoyt, *The Birth Control Debate*, 93).] The first of these criteria, according to the authors, is “ut actio correspondeat naturae personae eiusdemque actuum, ita ut integer sensus mutuae donationis ac humanae procreationis in contextu veri amoris observetur.” [“The action must correspond to the nature of the person and of his acts so that the whole meaning of the mutual giving and of human procreation is kept in a context of true love” (Hoyt, 94).] Unfortunately, the authors say nothing of the conditions that the sexual act must fulfil in order to comply with this fundamental requirement (*Schema*, I.IV.2 [p. 185]). We also find the statement: “Non ergo arbitrarie, sed,—lege naturae et Dei sic iubente,—coniuges omnibus criteriis simul consideratis iudicium obiective fundatum sibi formant” (ibid., p. 186). [“Therefore not arbitrarily, but as the law of nature and of God commands, let couples form a judgment which is objectively founded, with all the criteria considered” (Hoyt, 94).]

⁶⁴ The authors of the *Schema*, I.II.1 (p. 182), note this fact; the authors of the *Status*, II.B.5 (p. 176, towards the end) express the same thought with more circumspection.

activity become ever more rational, for it is here that the integration of the person becomes apparent. This is why instinctive impulses must be integrated into behavior that is governed by reason. This is the path to the true maturation of the person. On the other hand, this should not be taken to include calculated foresight into the undesirable results of thoughtless and disintegrated action.

On the basis of these observations, we can now formulate the two last moral postulates to which the regulation of births must conform:

- It must be the expression of growth in Christian perfection, towards the full maturing of the person;
- The sensory dimension of sexual life must always be subordinated to the interpersonal values of this life: each must also be able to express his or her love by abstinence from the sexual act.

In light of these principles, no contraceptive method can be reconciled with the human vocation to full maturation through ever more perfect actions. These methods most often result from entirely subjective difficulties experienced by man in the realm of sexual instinct.

IV. Responsible Parenthood: The Sketch of a Solution

The condemnation of contraception as a method of regulating births in no way leaves today's couples without resources for resolving this problem efficaciously and morally. Leaving aside total continence, which more than one couple, loving each other deeply, has undertaken due to circumstances, and of which every human being must be capable (for it is absolutely required of celibates and guarantees marital fidelity when one of the spouses is absent), there is also another path opened by contemporary science. In fact, it is possible to regulate births by abstaining from fertile conjugal acts.

1. Medical Summary

Under normal conditions, the male human being constantly produces sperm in large quantities. In contrast, the woman is fertile only at intervals. In principle, the ovaries release eggs one at a time, at relatively fixed points in time.⁶⁵ Moreover, the woman is fertile only when an egg has

⁶⁵ In 1827 K. E. Baer published the results of his research on female gametes in mammals and man (*Epistola de ovi mammalium et hominis genesi* [Leipzig: Leopoldi Vossii, 1827]) and from that moment, reproductive science entered new paths. Soon the relation between the woman's visible sexual cycle and the preparation in her

been released into her reproductive tract. In these conditions, it is possible to regulate births efficaciously by abstaining from sexual relations, as long as one has sufficiently certain knowledge of the functional state of the woman's reproductive system. Observations recorded for more than sixty years by numerous doctors have made it possible to understand the functional changes in the woman's reproductive system that accompany the various phases of the menstrual cycle. Among all the methods that have precisely, methodically, and systematically examined the functional state of the woman's reproductive system, the method of body temperature taken at rest is the simplest. It is, moreover, accessible enough that anyone can practice it, and verified by meticulous studies undertaken by several

reproductive system of a gamete for release was recognized. Shortly thereafter theories began to surface concerning the woman's periodic fertility. In 1853, the Holy See was questioned for the first time regarding the morality of engaging in matrimonial relations while aware of their infertility, given the woman's physiological infertility.

For some years, medical opinions on the woman's periodic infertility were contradictory, due to imperfections in methods of research. In 1924, Kyusaku Ogino published in Japan the results of his studies of the fertility of the woman, relying on a considerable number of observations. His work was published in German ("Ovulationstermin und Konzeptionstermin," *Zentralblatt für Gynäkologie* 54 [1930]: 464) in the same journal, and almost simultaneously with that of Herman Knaus ("Eine neue Methode zur Bestimmung des ovulationstermines," *ibid.*, 53 [1929]: 193), who had arrived at the same results independent of Ogino. The results of their research can be summarized as followed: gametes are released into the female reproductive tract in cyclical cycles in the defined phase of the sexual cycle. The woman can be fertilized only when the ovum has been released from the ovary. This is why, taking into consideration the limited vitality of the ovum and variations in the length of sexual cycles, one can statistically pinpoint a woman's fertile period and therefore her infertile period. The research effected by Ogino and by Knaus gave rise to two different methods of calculating the woman's periods of fertility and infertility (called "calendar methods"). We note in passing that it is unfortunate that the names of these two scientists are paired, as though there were only one method. The above methods rely on statistical observations, which makes them fairly easy to use in practice.

In Europe, H. Stieve attempted to cast doubt on Knaus's thesis by arguing that there is a paracyclical ovulation (*Der Einfluss des Nervensystems auf Bau und Tätigkeit der weiblichen Geschlechtsorganen* [Stuttgart: Thieme, 1952], 85–111). This would mean that, contrary to the claims of Ogino and Knaus, the woman can become pregnant at any moment because a number of stimuli can cause the release from the ovary of a second ovum within the same sexual cycle.

Medical opinion too hastily agreed with Stieve's conclusions, with the consequence that Ogino's and Knaus's conclusions were treated with hesitation. Finally H. Rauscher showed in 1963 that Stieve's theses were incorrect ("Ovulation [Morphology]," *Archiv für Gynäkologie* (1965): 202, 121–31. See also W. Fijałkowski, "Zagadnienie paracyklicznej owulacji w świetle obserwacji własnych [The problem

researchers.⁶⁶ The temperature curve makes it possible to determine precisely the periods of the woman's physiological fertility and infertility. The interpretation of this curve is quite simple, and any interested person

of paracyclical ovulation in light of proper observations],” *Ginekologia Polska* 38[1967]: 501, summarized in English). Medical science today agrees that:

- the release of the ovum or ova occurs in the woman at a specific stage in the sexual cycle;
- in the rare event that there is more than one ovum, they are all released at the same time;
- one phase of preparation in the reproductive system precedes the release, and after this, the system remains prepared for the implantation of the ovum when fertilized;
- after releasing the ovum, the reproductive system undergoes a transformation that inhibits the expulsion of the next ovum;
- because the ovum, once released, lives only for a short time after ovulation, a phase of physiological infertility begins for the woman;
- the release of the ova and the changes connected to the sexual cycle depend on hormonal changes that provoke different symptoms, making it possible to verify the functional state of a woman's reproductive system;
- the term of ovulation can fluctuate (these physiological variations never surpass five days), which depends on several factors and can be noted by observing accompanying symptoms. Subsequent ovulation of two or more ova in the course of one and the same cycle does not occur.

From these observations, we can conclude that, from the medical point of view, abstinence from sexual relations during the fertile part of the cycle (i.e., during the phase of ovulation, taking into consideration the period of the ovum's vitality and that of the sperm in the female body) is a sure method of regulating births.

⁶⁶ T. H. van der Welde, *Über den Zusammenhang zwischen Ovarialfunktion, Wellenbewegung und Menstrualblutung* (Harlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1904); “Basal Body Temperature in Disorders of Ovarial Function and Pregnancy,” *Surgery, Gynaecology and Obstetrics* 75 (1924): 768; 1904. R. Palmer, “Basal Body Temperature of the Woman,” *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (1950): 551, 155ff. M. Chartier, “Fécondité et continence périodique,” *Cahiers Laennec* 14/4 (1954): 2–34; “Interprétation de la courbe thermique pour le diagnostic de l’ovulation et des périodes dites fécondes du cycle menstruel,” *Journal des sciences de Lille* 83 (1965): 515–32. J. G. H. Holt, *Het getij. Het verband tussen vruchtbaarheid en temperatuur bij de vrouw* (Bilthoven: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1956). K. G. Döring, *Die Bestimmung der fruchtbaren und unfruchtbaren Tage der Frau mit Hilfe der Körpertemperatur* (Stuttgart: Thieme, 1957); *Empfängnisverhütung, ein Leitfaden für Ärzte und Studenten* (Stuttgart: Thieme, 1966), with a substantial bibliography; “Über die Zuverlässigkeit der Temperaturmethode zur Empfängnisverhütung,” *Deutsche medizinische Wochenschrift* 92 (1967): 23, 1055–61. S. Geller, *La courbe thermique, guide de la femme* (Paris, 1960); *La courbe thermique, guide du praticien en endocrinologie féminine* (Paris: Masson et Cie, 1961). J. Marshall, *The Infertile Period* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965). G. van der Stappen, *Précis de la méthode des températures* (Paris: Editions ouvrières, 1961). C. Rendeau, “La régulation des naissances dans le cadre familial et chrétien,”

who receives proper instruction can use it.⁶⁷ Difficulties of interpretation are rare.⁶⁸ The application of the method almost never disappoints: the failure rate varies from 0.8 to 1.3 of unplanned pregnancies per one hundred users of the method.⁶⁹ A serious and well-informed expert observes, “The exact observation of the thermal method yields no negative results due to the method itself. No fertilization has been noted from the third day of the hyperthermal phase, among women who were following the rules. The few pregnancies that occurred despite the practice of the method were almost all due to errors made by those involved.”⁷⁰

Conclusion. We have at our disposal today a method of regulating births that is “absolutely unobjectionable and voluntarily practiced.”⁷¹ It is sufficiently certain, simple, and low-cost so that every family of good will, with adequate instruction, can use it. It consists in abstaining from conjugal relations during the fertile period of the woman’s menstrual cycle. This phase can be recognized by using an empirical method. In order to make it available to everyone, however, appropriate individual instruction is required—publicity alone is not enough.⁷² It is therefore crucial to train instructors in this method, both men and women, who can give assistance to those who need it.

2. Some Remarks Relating to the Moral Analysis of the Problem

- a. Some people believe that methods involving periodic continence are merely another way of practicing contraception. The difference, they say, consists solely in a use of different secondary factors, namely, time

NRTh 87 (1965): 606–31. C. G. Hartmann, *Science and the Safe Period* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1962). J. Rötzer, *Kinderzahl und Liebeseh* (Vienna: Herder, 1966). A. Vincent and B. Vincent, “Valeur de l’abstention periodique comme méthode de regulation des naissances,” *Journal des sciences de Lille* 83 (1965): 643–92. C. S. Keefer, *Human Ovulation* (London: J & A Churchill, 1965).

At a conference of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in April 1967, periodic continence was presented as the first among the birth-planning methods (Rhythm Method—The Use of Basal Body Temperature). Cf. “International Planned Parenthood News” 157 (March 1967).

⁶⁷ Instruction should not be given by a doctor. Pastoral experience in Poland shows that those best suited are women instructors who have been properly trained, i.e., young mothers who have personal experience of this practice in their married life.

⁶⁸ See Chartier, *Fécondite*, 24.

⁶⁹ See Döring, “Über die Zuverlässigkeit,” table II.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* [This and the following quote are translated from the French translation given in the original text of the memorandum.]

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² This is the experience of parish counseling in the dioceses of Poland.

(for those who employ periodic continence) and place (for those who employ contraceptives), for the sake of the same goal—rendering a sexual encounter sterile. According to these authors, the method of periodic continence consists in choosing infertile days for sexual relations, which they consider to be equivalent to an active sterilization of this relation (or of the woman).⁷³

1. This opinion could perhaps be justified if the spouses were faced with the alternative of engaging in sexual relations either solely on infertile days, or solely on fertile days. One could therefore speak of choosing the period of infertility for sexual relations. But this is not the case.⁷⁴ Consequently, the regulation of births by means of periodic continence essentially consists in abstaining from sexual relations during the fertile phase, while engaging in these relations at other times according to the norms of conjugal life. It is thus a matter of giving up an action whose results would be undesirable. By using contraceptives, the subject demonstrates unwillingness to give up this action; this is why he intervenes actively to obstruct the inherent consequences of the act. It seems to us that this is an essential difference.
2. Because sexual relations on infertile days are normal and willed as such, they maintain the respect due to the hierarchy of values and the full meaning of sexual life. Thus they can fittingly express the “parental” character of conjugal life and of the love uniting the spouses. This is entirely the opposite of the conscious sterilization of the relation, which, actively deprived of its proper role, cannot be the sexual expression of the love uniting two persons.⁷⁵

For example, consider the case of oral contraceptives. A practice such as periodic continence, that takes into consideration the sexuality of the woman and consequently her dignity as person, is entirely opposed to the inhibitive intervention into her sexual biological functions, which amounts to an intrusion into the private domain of the person. It is necessary to recall that the body is not distinct from the person, nor “subject” to it; rather, with the soul, it constitutes one single unique person, and it participates in the rights and dignity of the person.⁷⁶

⁷³ L. Janssens, *Mariage et fécondité* (Paris, 1967).

⁷⁴ Pius XII, “The right deriving from the marriage contract is a permanent, uninterrupted and not intermittent, of each of the partners, in respect of the other.” “Allocution to Midwives,” in *The Human Body: Papal Teachings*, 163.

⁷⁵ See above, III.3.b.

⁷⁶ See above, II.1; III.3.b.

- b. In examining the moral aspect of the problem, we must point out the essential difference between that which is permissible to will (that which may be willed, “*volitum*”) and that for which one is free to strive (“*voluntarium*”).⁷⁷ All agree that in certain cases, the choice not to transmit life does not necessitate total abstinence from the sexual act, since in man, that act is not solely limited to the function of procreation.⁷⁸ But it is wrong to conclude therefrom that it is morally justifiable to actively deprive sexual relations of their procreative function, and that one can knowingly engage in such behavior. In light of what has just been said, we see no possibility of rationally or theologically justifying such a conclusion.
- c. Abstinence from sexual relations during the fertile time, together with the safeguarding of the sexual character of relations outside this phase, can be a manifestation of respect for the hierarchy of values. But although it *can* manifest such respect, it does not do so necessarily, for the practice of periodic continence for the sake of not transmitting life without sufficient rational motives (for example, an aversion to children, pleasure alone, aesthetic considerations, etc.) bears witness to a disorder within one’s psycho-sexual behavior. But this possibility in no way changes the fact that periodic continence, practiced for reasonable motives, is the only morally good way of regulating births.
- d. Nearly every couple undergoes periods of continence in their sexual life. A number of factors are involved.⁷⁹

For instance, there are some days on which spouses are constrained by the very nature of things to renounce sexual encounter (for example, in the case of illness, or in the weeks before and after childbirth). To take some additional—and very important—factor into consideration is normal and ordinary.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ See P. Böckle, “Pour un débat Chrétien sur la regulation des naissances,” *Concilium* 5 (1965): 111.

⁷⁸ See above, III.3.b.

⁷⁹ Sexologists have even sought to define frequency of sexual intercourse as the test of abnormal sexual life. See S. Liebhart and B. Trębicka-Kwiatkowska, *Zagadnienia życia seksualnego kobiety* (The problems of the sexual life of the woman) (Warsaw: Państw. Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, 1964), 34–55; and R. von Urban, *Sex Perfection* (London: Rider and Co., 1964), 96–97.

⁸⁰ It is in [such consideration] that the “humanization of the intellect” consists. Man does not and should not “spontaneously” satisfy any of his instinctive needs. That would not be a human way of acting.

It is relevant to note here that the Old Testament prohibited sexual relations during menstruation and the following week (Lv 15:19–24, 28; 13:19; 20:18; Ez 18:5–6) as well as after childbirth (Lv 12:1–5). Similarly, soldiers in time of war

- e. Intentional abstinence from the sexual act is clearly the common project of both spouses.⁸¹ Here there is no danger of one spouse subordinating the other to his/her own sexual pleasure. On the contrary, abstinence can be the appropriate expression of the respect due to the person as sexual being.

To the objection that in this case the male is placed at a disadvantage because it is harder for him to master his instinct and because his desire for sexual relations is generally stronger than the woman's, it must be replied that, precisely on account of his constant power to fertilize, the male must recognize that he bears a correspondingly greater responsibility.⁸² In the realm of sexual life, there is no biological parity between the male and the woman. The just proportion of their common contribution to the regulation of births can only be found, therefore, when the male is able to integrate the dynamism of his instinct into the totality of his reason-dominated life, and to express his love by the sexual act in a reflective manner. Otherwise, the woman would be excessively burdened by sexual life and its consequences, or would simply become—at least to a certain extent—an object which her husband uses to satisfy his lust.

Moreover, the difficulties experienced by the male in the realm of sexual instinct most often derive (setting aside pathological cases) from a lack of effort to master himself.

It has been objected more than once that the woman experiences a stronger desire for sexual encounter in the fertile phases. Studies on this subject, however, have shown that this is not the case.⁸³

- f. Human sexual life is to a certain degree, by its very nature, the sign of love.⁸⁴ One might therefore ask whether abstinence from sexual relations does not weaken this love.

The response to this question is that not only the consciously willed sexual act, but also abstention from the sexual act, can be a sign

were forbidden to approach a woman, even if they had the occasion to spend some time at home (1 Sm 21:6; 2 Sm 11:11). Although these prohibitions were of a ritual order, they nevertheless show that abstaining is possible within marriage and that it does not destroy the essence of conjugal love. St. Paul even foresees the possibility of abstaining from conjugal relations within marriage (1 Cor 7:5–6). The example of the Holy Family also implies that sexual continence in itself does not weaken the bond of marriage.

⁸¹ See above, II.3.a.

⁸² See above, II.3.

⁸³ See S. Liebhart and B. Trębicka-Kwiatkowska, *Zagadnienia życia . . .*, 34–35, and the bibliography cited; R. von Urban, *Sex Perfection*, 193–94.

⁸⁴ See *Gaudium et Spes* 49, and above, II.3.b.

of love.⁸⁵ This naturally occurs during the course of an engagement, when the engaged couple must abstain from sexual relations: this is, for them, a sign of mutual love. The necessity [for abstinence] likewise arises occasionally for married couples, and when it is practiced out of respect for higher values, it can manifest an even greater love than the sexual act on its own.⁸⁶ Abstaining from the sexual act can help spouses live the sexual act more deeply, precisely inasmuch as it is an act of love, and continence is often counseled for sterile couples, inasmuch as it is a way of deepening mutual love.⁸⁷

- g. Recourse to contraceptive practices is often the result of an inability to overcome impulses.⁸⁸ Lacking the strength to oppose them, the individual also wishes to avoid the possible consequences of this disordered behavior. This results in a situation of conflict. Literature on this subject also refers to the psycho-pathological character of contraception.⁸⁹ In those who practice contraception, the fear of children, a significant source for neuroses, is well known. Serious medical and pastoral observations show that when spouses adopt periodic continence as a method of regulating births after having practiced contraception during a more or less extended period of time, they experience a deepening of their mutual bond and the disappearance of neuroses and the fear of children—indeed, they often begin to desire a child, even if their state in life prevents them from having one. But all these symptoms are unknown to couples who voluntarily sterilize their sexual relations.

Without a doubt, there are no couples who would not like to have normal sexual relations. Thus every intervention into sexual relations by means of a contraceptive element entails a frustration that weighs on the psyche of the spouses.

- h. From what has been said earlier,⁹⁰ it clearly follows that the regulation of births by means of periodic continence fully conforms to the Christian vocation to strive for perfection.
- i. It seems that there is a link between inadequate theological appreciation of celibacy and the defense of contraception. It must be clearly

⁸⁵ See above, II.2 and III.3.c.

⁸⁶ Analogous to silence, which in some cases can be more eloquent than speech.

⁸⁷ See above, III.3.c.

⁸⁸ See above, II.2, II.3, and III.3.

⁸⁹ Among others, M. de Wilmars, *Psychopathologie de l'anticonception*.

⁹⁰ See above, III.3.c.

recognized that the regulation of births by means of periodic continence presupposes:

1. First, that such continence is not only possible, but a condition of psycho-sexual maturity;
2. Second, that abstinence from the sexual act can be a sign of truly mature love.

Those who do not understand the meaning of periodic continence in the life of the couple will not be able to understand the meaning of celibacy, in which these two presuppositions are fully expressed.⁹¹

V. Pastoral Problems

1. Education

New obligations facing today's families require that the faithful be adequately prepared for conjugal life. This is why education must be informed by a respect for the other, respect for the body, and respect for the realities of sex. It is necessary to speak straightforwardly to young people about family life, its bonds and its laws; about conjugal life, its values and qualities, its joys, duties, and difficulties. It is necessary to make clear to them that men and women have equal rights as well as psychological and biological differences that make enormous demands for mutual responsibility. It is necessary to emphasize the special value of a life that takes its origin from the body of the parents, but whose human personality is called into existence by the creative act of God alone.

The formation appropriate to family life is at the same time a formation for the choice of celibacy, for those who have a calling to that state. The choice of either vocation requires equal maturity in men and women. Education cannot neglect this aspect of the Christian call to perfection.

All the problems that young people encounter on their road and that may cause them distress must be discussed and resolved in a fraternal dialogue full of understanding.

⁹¹ One gets the impression that the intensive propaganda in favor of contraception conceals other motives than that of research into theological and moral truth and the good of humanity. In our own country, we are aware of the efforts made in this respect by the institutions responsible for the secularization of life and for atheism. In capitalist countries, one must doubtless take into consideration the interest of capital, which gains a considerable source of revenue from the manufacture of contraceptives, particularly chemical ones. This manufacture is clearly profitable, if every couple has to use these products throughout the entirety of their fertile years, i.e., for at least twenty years.

In addition to catechesis properly speaking, it is advisable to organize classes for young people to discuss the problems of family and marriage and to provide a psycho-sexual formation. The problem of regulating births must also be treated. A responsible approach to this problem requires long preparation for young men and women.

Classes for marriage preparation, introduced by numerous pastors, are extremely important, and should include the participation of doctors, psychologists, teachers, married couples, and parents.

Finally, we must always remember that pastors have an obligation to provide immediate marriage preparation for engaged couples. A suitable catechesis, directly preceding the marriage itself, is likewise necessary.

2. Pastoral Matters

It is essential to the present problem that all those who have the care of souls throughout the world be unanimous in explaining the principles of morality as taught by the Church, and in applying the directives of the Magisterium in the same way. The ministers of the Church must not only inform the faithful about the principles of morality but also make available to them all the means of facilitating moral behavior in life. Neglect in this area is, unfortunately, considerable. Our contemporaries are greatly confused about the principles of morality governing the regulation of births; the source of this confusion is, among other things, a lack of energy and determination in efforts to help people to benefit from scientific discoveries that make it possible to regulate births in conformity with divine law. This is why, wherever the need is manifested, pastors should provide services through the parish by means of which lay professionals from various disciplines can counsel couples and families, not only concerning all the problems relating to responsible parenthood, but also in other areas related to family life (education, conflict management, etc.). The faithful must be guaranteed free, professional, and responsible counseling that is faithful to Christian doctrine. Without this endeavor, it is useless to speak of forming consciences. The pastor who neglects to organize this aid for the good of his flock will be gravely culpable and co-responsible for the moral disorder that destroys the domestic and religious life of contemporary families.

3. The Laity

In providing formation for marriage and assistance to Christian couples, the laity has a primary and irreplaceable role in introducing a regulation of births worthy of the human person. No one can provide better assistance to spouses experiencing difficulties than other informed Christian couples who are faithful to the directives of the Church.

A special role belongs to doctors, nurses, and midwives. People have the right to expect from them appropriate assistance in everything concerning the regulation of births, in conformity to the demands of morality. Responsible parenthood is a grave duty and, and at the same time, a weighty issue for today's couples. Abandoned to their own devices, married couples will have no way out of their difficulties. Without competent help, they risk turning away from God and becoming imprisoned in inextricable and desperate moral conflicts. Doctors, nurses, and midwives ought therefore to follow attentively the progress of medicine in this area and to draw their knowledge from dependable sources. Already in 1951, Pius XII exhorted them to do so.⁹² The Council directs a similar appeal to all those who are competent in this area. "People should be discreetly informed of scientific advances in research into methods of birth regulation, whenever the value of these methods has been thoroughly proved and their conformity with the moral order established."⁹³ N-V

⁹² Pius XII, "You are rightly expected to be well informed, from the medical point of view, of this well-known theory and of the progress which can still be foreseen in this matter; and moreover, your advice and help are expected to be based, not on simple, popular publications, but on scientific facts and the authoritative judgment of conscientious specialists in medicine and biology." In "Allocution to Midwives," in *The Human Body: Papal Teachings*, 162.

⁹³ Or: "Some men nowadays are gravely disturbed by this problem [of population]; it is to be hoped that there will be Catholic experts in these matters, particularly in universities, who will diligently study the problems and pursue their researches further"; *Gaudium et Spes* 87. "Experts in other sciences, particularly biology, medicine, social science and psychology, can be of service to the welfare of marriage and the family and the peace of mind of people, if by pooling their findings they try to clarify thoroughly the different conditions favoring the proper regulation of births"; *ibid.*, no. 52.