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# Responsible Parenthood and the “Moral” Significance of Methods and Means of Regulating Birth

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Dionigi Tettamanzi

**T**HE QUESTION of methods and means of regulating birth presents, among others, an immediate aspect: the “technical” aspect of a mode or means to be employed to achieve the desired end.

A more careful study, however, reveals the question to be more complex, not only because it is not reducible to the merely technical aspect but also because this very aspect includes other, more profound, meanings. The very term “means” relates so intimately to the “end,” the regulation of birth, as to derive its real meaning from the latter.

Thus, the full understanding of methods and means can emerge solely from the total context of their being ordered to the regulation of birth. In reality, the very concept of the regulation of birth—and, more profoundly, of the exercise of a human sexuality capable of responsible fecundity—is what determines the choice of one method or means over another.

We propose to dwell on the specifically “moral” significance of methods and means of regulating birth, namely, on that meaning which relates to man as man, and hence with reference to its typically human value. With this understanding, our point of departure can be none other than responsible parenthood.

## I. Responsible Parenthood in Itself

With the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI intended to determine “in the light of an integral vision of man and his vocation” the two great realities of married life: love and fecundity:

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And since, in the attempt to justify artificial methods of birth control, many have appealed to the demands both of conjugal love and of "responsible parenthood," it is good to state very precisely [*accurate definire atque illustrare*] the true concept of these two great realities of married life. [HV 7]

Ten years after *Humanae Vitae* the pope returned to the topic:

It seems to us that the decade that has now passed since its promulgation . . . is an opportunity to confirm the important principles that, in the wake of the Council, not long concluded, we enunciated with the greatest care: the principle of respect for the laws of that nature which, to use Dante's expression, "takes its course from the divine intellect and from its art"; the principle of conscious and morally responsible parenthood.<sup>1</sup>

In reality, during the postconciliar period the dialogue on responsible parenthood has become more and more common and peaceful. But in its development has it respected and promoted the authentic concept of responsible parenthood? The question is more than a legitimate one in view of a frequent "reductive" interpretation, one that limits the entire meaning of responsible parenthood to merely quantitative terms, as if it had to do only with the "number" of children and the "time" of their conception.

Hence the need of a renewed understanding and a restatement of responsible parenthood, in the light of the valuable insights provided by the more elaborate text of the teaching of the Church found in *Humanae Vitae* 10. In this regard the opening words of Paul VI are basic and determinative:

Conjugal love requires in the spouses an awareness of their mission of "responsible parenthood," which today is rightly much insisted upon, and which also must be exactly understood. It is to be considered under different aspects that are legitimate and connected with one another.

The text just quoted affirms, on the one hand, the intimate connection between conjugal love and responsible parenthood; on the other hand, the complexity and the unifying tendency of the aspects involved in responsible parenthood.

#### A. *Conjugal Love as Source and Norm of Fruitfulness*

The full truth about responsible parenthood can be understood only in the light of its internal and vivifying relation to the love of the spouses: conjugal fecundity is not "other" than the love that constitutes the "two" in the reality of "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24), but it is that same love in one of its intrinsic and essential "dimensions," namely, that of the ultimate "giving of self" to the point of bringing into being a new human life.

Fecundity is the *fruit* of the love of the spouses. The mutual and total giving of self, while it fully involves the spouses in their reality as "couple," transcends them by constituting them as the principle of the new reality of the "family." Their "giving of self" blossoms and bears fruit in the living "gift" of the child. As the fruit of conjugal love, fecundity constitutes its living

*sign*, its permanent witness: the singular unity of the spouses broadens out and finds itself confirmed and perfected in the child, the living and indis-sociable synthesis of paternal and maternal love.

Now, the connection of fecundity with conjugal love reveals itself as fun-damental and as determinative of the moral life of the spouses. As Pope Paul VI said:

Born of the creative and paternal love of God, marriage finds in human love, corresponding to the design and will of God, the fundamental law of its moral value: in the mutual love of the spouses, whereby each one endeavors with one's entire being to help the other be what God wants him to be; in the common desire of faithfully interpreting the love of God, creator and father, by bringing new lives into being.<sup>2</sup>

The love-fecundity bond justifies and demands "continuity" between re-sponsibility for conjugal love in its service of the unity of the couple and responsibility for that same love in its service of life. In this sense it can and must be said that responsibility for the "gift" of the child derives, as from its source, and takes its measure, as from its norm, from the responsibility for the mutual "giving" of the spouses who love each other. This point was very clearly made by the then Cardinal Karol Wojtyla:

The only spouses capable of responsible love in marriage are those who recog-nize their mutual responsibility for the gift itself of love. For love is above all a gift, and this is precisely what constitutes its essential content. . . . The respon-sibility for this gift of love is expressed in a constant awareness of being given and, at the same time, in a clear vision of the tasks that this gift entails. . . . Par-enthood belongs to the nature of this specific love, which is conjugal love; that is, it constitutes its essential trait, it shapes it in the sphere of intentions, and in the end it imprints on it the seal of a particular accomplishment. Conjugal love fulfills itself through parenthood. Responsibility for this love is at the same time entirely, one might say, responsibility for parenthood. This means that one is part of the other and that one decides concerning the other.<sup>3</sup>

### *B<sub>2</sub> Contents and Meanings of Responsible Parenthood*

The intimate and living bond between love and fruitfulness causes the rich contents and meanings of the love of the spouses to be reflected in a real way in the richness of their fecundity. The contents and meanings of this richness are to be identified, according to *Humanae Vitae*, in relation to the "biological processes," the "tendencies of instinct or passion," the "physical, economic, psychological, and social conditions," and the "objec-tive moral order."

Hence the need to consider responsible parenthood "under different as-pects that are legitimate and connected with one another" (*variis legitimisque rationibus inter se conexas*), if one is to avoid emptying it of its richness and breaking its organic unity. We shall limit ourselves to a brief analysis of these



“aspects,” interpreting them within the living context of a conjugal love that is at once *knowledge, freedom, discernment of the situation, and service to God*.

1. “In relation to the biological processes, responsible parenthood means the knowledge and respect [*cognitionem et observantiam*] of their functions: the intellect discovers in the power of giving life biological laws that are part of the human person.”

Love is knowledge: *Ubi amor, ibi oculus*, as the ancients said.<sup>4</sup> Now, in reference to responsible parenthood, love stimulates, favors, and involves the spouses in the knowledge of themselves, of their corporeality, and of human sexuality in its fertility rhythm. The knowledge of oneself and the knowledge of the biological processes that are connected with the generative faculties meet and form a unity, because the human biological data “are a part of the human person,” even though they do not constitute its total reality.

It is a knowledge that, within the framework of marriage, is not an end in itself but is so ordained that in their fruitful love the spouses “live in the truth”: that is, this knowledge results in respect (*observantia*) for the structure and the dynamics of sexuality and in the intelligent and responsible acceptance of God’s design imprinted in the very being of man and woman.

2. “In relation to the tendencies of instinct or passion [*impulsos innatos et animi affectus*], responsible parenthood means the necessary dominion that reason and will must exercise over them.”

Love is self-control; it is freedom in the original sense of man’s “holding in hand” himself and his actions.<sup>5</sup> And so, to be truly “human,” the fruitful love of the spouses must reflect in itself what is *proper* to man, that is, reason and will. It must, then, be conscious and deliberate, not the fruit of “chance” or the result of uncontrolled instinct. Indeed, if every act is “human” to the extent to which it is under the dominion of man’s intellect and will, the conjugal act, by reason of the unique meaning it possesses, calls for a “humaneness” of a unique sort and is therefore the result of a more enlightened awareness and a more deliberate and responsible act of the will. This knowledge must be enhanced with education.

3. “In relation to physical, economic, psychological, and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised either by the deliberate and generous decision to raise a numerous family or by the decision, made for grave motives and with due respect for the moral law, to avoid for the time being, or even for an indeterminate period, a new birth.”

Love that is conscious and responsible bases its choices not on abstract principles but on concrete historical situations. In this way it becomes a love that discerns values and their concrete demands. Even the choice of the child—a unique choice in view of the lofty values involved—must come about from the discernment of the situation, that is, of that chain of physical,

economic, psychological, and social conditions that affect the various persons involved in the procreative choice, including the parents and the children that are born or are to come, as well as the family, the Christian community, and society. These are "conditions" that not only influence the growth of persons but also constitute, together with the structure and dynamics of human sexuality, a "sign" of God's plan, a "revelation" of the call given by God to the couple concerning their mission of fruitful love.

The will of God, read in the concrete situation, can lead the spouses to a regulation of birth that does not coincide always and only with a "limitation" but may also express itself in the "deliberate and generous" choice of a "numerous family."

4. "Responsible parenthood implies also and above all a more profound relationship to the objective moral order established by God, of which a right conscience is the faithful interpreter."

Love is ultimately conformity with the uncreated Good by means of the various created goods. Even responsible parenthood is loved by the spouses inasmuch as it is the expression and particular accomplishment of their conformity with the supreme Good, with God and his holy will. Seen in this light, human love is ultimately a service to God.

And so responsible parenthood takes its place as a form of "service" that the couple render to God, and for that reason it must take place with respect for the moral order established by God. Consequently, the spouses, acting with a "right conscience," are called to be "interpreters" of "God's design" imprinted in the concrete reality of their condition as man and woman united in marriage and of their historical situation. It also follows that in their "procreative decision" they are to be "collaborators" with God, who "through them continuously increases and enriches his family" (*Gaudium et Spes* 50).

As one can see, the relation between conjugal love and responsible parenthood is decisive, not only for finding in love the unifying foundation that coordinates organically the various aspects that human fecundity must take into consideration but also for identifying in love—considered as conformity with God and the moral order—the primary element that guarantees and promotes the right development of all the elements and meanings of fruitful conjugal love.

## II. Responsible Parenthood in Its Execution: The Problem of Methods and Means

Responsibility for fruitful love is expressed not only on the level of "intention" but also and ultimately on the level of "execution." The couple respond to their vocation and mission by "setting in act" God's design by the exercise of human sexuality in its spiritual and corporal totality. It is on this level that the problem arises of "methods" and "means" of regulating birth.



### A. A Reductive Reading of the Problem of Methods and Means

Among the reductive and unilateral interpretations of responsible fruitful love that have been recorded in the postconciliar period, one must note the tendency to empty of its moral meaning the question of methods and means.

This tendency has developed on the basis of two opposite and contradictory thrusts. The first stresses so strongly the role of "intention" (*finis operantis*) in moral acts that it achieves a morality of interiority alone, one that prescind from the "contents" (*finis operis*) in which the subjective intention is embodied. The second thrust is so much concerned with the "results" to be achieved that it evaluates the moral act on the basis of "consequences" alone, thus arriving at a morality of success at any cost.

These two perspectives have been expressed not only on the level of "tendencies" that have in fact been commonly publicized and accepted but also on the level of attempts at "theological reflection" that have led some to doubt the existence of intrinsic evil (and hence of an objective content that is universally and unchangeably valid) and to construct "theologically" (on the basis of "results" only) the moral norms of man's behavior with regard to himself and others (with possible exceptions). In the area of the regulation of birth the two perspectives have merged into an identical conclusion: the negation or minimization of the specifically "moral" significance of methods and means.

Beyond the specifically moral aspect, which some deny or doubt, the question of methods and means of the regulation of birth is treated in the light of other aspects. In this sense, prior, though not exclusive, emphasis is placed on the *technical* meaning, in terms of the greater or lesser degree of safety or effectiveness in the contraceptive results desired. Another significance frequently stressed is the *medical*, in terms of the safety or probability of harm to the health of the couple, especially of the woman. At other times the emphasis is on the *psychological* significance, in terms of whether or not a given method or means is agreeable or acceptable to the spouses.

Now, a careful study reveals that these aspects also involve, in their own way, a certain "moral" significance. Such would be: the safety required in the case of risky pregnancies, which morally are to be avoided absolutely; the medical "counterindications" (at least for certain persons or in certain situations) that call for refusal or caution with regard to certain "means" by reason of the moral obligation of safeguarding and promoting health; the need for a certain "harmony" on the part of the spouses in the choice of a specific method or means (especially since this method or means interferes with the typically "conjugal" act).

We are dealing, however, with "partial" aspects; and, by reason of the moral dimension itself that they contain, we are dealing with mere "traces" of a morality that goes much broader and deeper, inasmuch as this morality

demands conformity between methods and means and the typically human values involved in the fulfillment of responsible parenthood.

### B. An Unrenouncible Meaning

The fact that methods and means of regulating birth have also a specifically moral meaning is explicitly affirmed by the Council and by the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

Vatican II states:

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 that respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love. [GS 51]

As one can see, we are in the area not of mere intention but of execution, that is, of the concrete actualization of responsible parenthood. Now, the moral character of behavior (*moralis indoles rationis agendi*) does not depend only on a sincere intention (the *finis operantis*) and the evaluation of motives (the “reasons” connected with the situation, in addition to the subjective motives), but it must also be determined (*determinari debet*) by objective criteria (*ab obiectivis criteriis*), which are drawn from the nature of the human person and human action (*ex personae eiusdemque actuum natura desumptis*).<sup>6</sup> More specifically—with reference, that is, to the nature of the conjugal act—the criterion is drawn from the respect, in the context of true love (*in contextu veri amoris*), for the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation (*integrum sensum mutuae donationis ac humanae procreationis*).

In other words, the foundation from which the criteria of morality are drawn, and hence the moral norm, is a true and authentic sexual anthropology.

In the wake of the Council’s affirmation Paul VI writes:

♣ In the task of transmitting life, therefore, they [the spouses] are not free to proceed completely at will, as if they could determine in a wholly autonomous way the honest path to follow; but they must conform their activity to the creative intention of God, expressed in the very nature of marriage and its acts and manifested by the constant teaching of the Church. [HV 10]<sup>7</sup>

But aside from the argument from authority just quoted, the rationality of the person demands an “intrinsic” (*ex natura rei*) justification. This justification regards the meaning contained in human sexuality and in its specifically conjugal exercise. Indeed, it is precisely on this anthropological level that the various methods and means of the regulation of birth are involved.

There is, in fact, an intimate and necessary connection between the end



and the means, between responsible parenthood and the concrete manner of its actualization. True, the "means" is a "way" to the "end," but it can also be a "respectful" or a "non-respectful" way of values and of exigencies of man as man. It must, then, be said that, above and beyond the subjective intention of regulating birth (an intention that can be subjectively "sincere" though objectively "erroneous"), there are means that are qualified as "coherent," "homogeneous," "compatible" with the end; while other means, precisely because they contradict the values and the exigencies of man as man, stand out as "non-coherent," "non-homogeneous," "non-compatible" with the end, that is, with fruitful love regulated in a "human" way. It must also be said that the means is concretely used by the person, who, in the very act of using it, performs a human act, so that the use of a means on the part of the person always involves the person himself. Thus, the problem of means is always a "human" problem, since the means involves necessarily the person using it. And if it is a "human" problem, it is also a "moral" problem.

In other words, if one were to maintain that the methods and means of regulating birth do not posit a moral problem, one would logically have to affirm that morality is solely and entirely determined by the *intentionality* of the person acting, prescindendo from the *contents* and the *modalities* of the action. How, then, can one safeguard the principle of *bonum ex integra causa*? If morality were to be reduced exclusively to the *why* of one's actions, without taking into account *what* is being accomplished and *how*, one would end up by accepting the principle that "the end justifies the means." That is, in fact, the easy and compelling temptation of a technical and pragmatic culture, where one applies even in the order of specifically human values, such as fruitful and responsible love, the logic that calls for man's intervention in things!

### III. Sexual Anthropology and Methods and Means

If in the means used to achieve an end the action of the person is involved, and if this action—in our case, sexual action—to be moral (*secundum rationem*) must "conform itself" to the "meaning" inscribed in the "reality," the moral judgment on methods and means of regulating birth depends necessarily—in the concrete developmental process—on their conformity with, or their opposition to, the objective meaning of human sexuality.

As everyone knows, above and beyond the great variety of methods and means there are essentially *two forms* of birth control: the use of *artificial*, or contraceptive, means and the use of *natural methods*, or periodic continence.<sup>8</sup> We are dealing with two forms so different from each other as to be antithetical. This contrast arises from a number of objective data. It will suffice merely to consider the methods and means from the point of view of whether or not they interfere with the biological processes of the person; from the point of view of the period of continence that they may or may

not require; from the psychosexual point of view of their harmony with, or opposition to, the typical symbolism of sexual language. Their opposing diversity is such that the moral licitness of one form necessarily posits the moral illicitness of the other form, and vice versa.

*A. Methods and Means and the Authentic Concept of Responsible Parenthood*

The moral judgment on methods and means of regulating birth can be formed only by drawing a comparison between their "dynamics" and the desired end of responsible parenthood. From such a comparison derives their conformity with, or opposition to, the human values of responsible fruitful love. Now, in this comparison a fundamental and decisive role is played by the concept of responsible fruitful love. If this concept is looked upon in a reduced or distorted way, one ends up by evaluating as morally acceptable those methods and means that, instead, are not morally acceptable in the context of an integral and correct concept of responsible parenthood.

Even in its essential core, responsible parenthood "distinguishes," without possibility of confusion, artificial means from natural methods. The former are "monovalent," because they are designed in a one-directional way to "suppress" actual and potential procreativity, whereas the latter are "bivalent," because they are merely "notions" that can be used in the two-way direction of either "avoiding" or "seeking" procreativity.

If from its essential core (procreativity) we go on to consider the other aspects involved in responsible fruitful love, we find additional elements of "distinction" between artificial means and natural methods. In reality, while natural methods require and develop the "knowledge" of and "respect" for the "biological processes" of the person, artificial means not only do not require and do not develop such knowledge and respect but positively contradict them by establishing an "eliminative" intervention against procreativity. Furthermore, natural methods presuppose and favor the dominion of intellect and will over the instinctive and psychic sphere of sexuality (a "conjugal" dominion, to be exact, since it is rooted in, and sustained by, the "couple" as such, without undue unilateral "burdens"). Artificial means, instead, while requiring some form of control, do not demand nor develop a responsible self-control but, rather, entail reliance on the means as such.

The above-mentioned aspects, while presenting some sort of moral value, still do not express the radical motivation that explains the objective moral incompatibility between artificial means and natural methods. This motivation receives light only from the more profound and original aspect of responsible fruitful love, that is, from respect for God's design imprinted in human sexuality by way of its "meanings."



### B. *The Connection between the Meanings of Human Sexuality*

The response of Paul VI to the moral problem of methods and means of regulation of birth refers explicitly, as to its radical motivation, to the "meanings" that God has inscribed in human sexuality:

The Church, calling men back to the observance of the norms of the natural law, as interpreted by her constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life [*quilibet matrimonii usus ad vitam humanam procreandam per se destinatus permaneat*]. [HV 11]

And he immediately defines and explains:

That teaching, often set forth by the magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection [*in nexu indissolubili nititur*] willed by God [*a Deo statuto*] and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative [*quem homini sua sponte infringere non licet*], between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning [*inter significationem unitatis et significationem procreationis, quae ambae in actu coniugali insunt*]. [HV 12]

Paul VI speaks of a connection "willed by God," and he therefore addresses himself to the design that the Creator has stamped on the biological structure itself of man and woman. The couple are therefore at the service of this design by accepting and integrating the biological structure in the broader and deeper context of all personal values. The divine design is stamped on the "unitotal" reality of man, that is, on his "interiority" and "corporeality," and this reality also characterizes human sexuality.

With regard to the dimension of man's "interiority," the sexual experience (conjugal act), to be truly and fully "human," cannot exhaust its meaning in "procreation" (even though understood in a human, and therefore also spiritual, sense) but also signifies and actualizes the integration and personal unity of the spouses. With regard to the dimension of man's corporeality," the sexual experience (considered in its totality and therefore also as genitality), to be truly and fully "human," cannot exhaust its meaning in the integration and unity of the spouses but also signifies and actualizes openness to life, direction toward procreation.

But what is proper to man and differentiates him from all other creatures is the fact that he is a psychological unity, that is, a unity that is inseparable in spirit and body. It follows that the sexual experience is truly and fully "human" only if and in the measure in which it reflects in itself the psychological unity that constitutes and distinguishes man. From this arises the unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the sexual act. Such a connection must be respected if one wishes to avoid "distorting" the conjugal act, that is, depriving it of "meaning" that is truly and fully "human."

On the other hand, *Humanae Vitae* speaks of a connection "that is unable to be broken by man on his own initiative," knowing full well that the conjugal



act as it exists in the order of being (that is, in the design of the Creator imprinted in the biological structure of man) is not always fruitful nor can be always fruitful. Human fecundity, in fact, is not absolute and unconditional but is instead rhythmic, that is, bound to alternating periods of fertility and infertility. That is why there is in fact a "separation" between the unitive meaning and the procreative *effect* of sexuality. Now, for one to engage oneself in these periods of infertility in a responsible way (for reasonable motives) is morally licit. By so doing, man enters into God's design without separating on his own initiative what happens to be already separated. Such is the case when one has recourse to natural methods.

Contraception is different. On his own initiative, outside of and in opposition to the rhythmic direction of sexuality, man "dissociates" the two meanings and eliminates the procreative meaning. It must also be noted that contraception, by eliminating the procreative meaning by way of "dissociation," impairs both the "totality" of the mutual self-giving of the spouses and the "unitotality" of the persons who give themselves to each other. For this reason, contraception damages and upsets also the unitive meaning: the union counter-accepted by the spouses is not a true and effective "conjugal union," in spite of the psychological impression of the two or even in spite of their sincere unitive intention, because it is not a specifically "conjugal" union. Contraception harms the unitary and unifying reality of conjugal love, so that compromising on one "note" and "exigency" (for example, the procreative one) reflects necessarily on the other "notes" (for example, the unitive one), which are interdependent.

One can now understand why contraception is "intrinsically disorder" (*quod ex propria natura moralem ordinem transgreditur*) and therefore "unworthy of the human person" (*homine indignum*) (HV 14). Contraception is a "disorder" (something "illogical" from the rational aspect) that imbeds itself within the structure and dynamics of sexuality and is not added or imposed from the outside either by authority or by circumstances. By contraception the structure of the (total) conjugal relationship is "falsified," that is, transformed into a structure of relationship that is "non-conjugal" (non-total), and the dynamics of sexuality (the co-essential unitive and procreative meanings) are deflected toward a one-way thrust, that is, toward the supposed unitive meaning.

At this point an important question arises: *Why cannot man separate on his own initiative the two meanings of the conjugal act*, especially since already in the nature of things there are "times" when the two meanings are separated? The question becomes more pressing in view of man's universally recognized role of controlling the world of nature and in view of the danger of falling into an exasperating biologism that makes the human personal good and the good of the couple depend on absolute regard for the



biological laws of sexuality.

Still, paradoxical as it may seem, it is this very concept of human sexuality, one that is integrally personalistic and not restrictively biological, that requires man to respect the biological laws of rhythmic fruitfulness. In fact, if sexuality is understood and lived in its specifically "human" aspect, it must be called not just any "part" whatever of the organism that can and must be sacrificed for the good of the whole organism, but rather a "dimension" involving the person in his psychophysical totality. In other words, while other realities are on the level of *having* (over which the person has a true and proper dominion), sexuality instead is on the level of *being* (it is the person himself in his sexual connotation), and over it the person does not have a true and proper dominion. If he did have and exercise this dominion, the person-subject would no longer be treated in his "personal" identity and dignity but as "object": he would become an object of manipulation.

At issue, then, is the profound concept of human sexuality. It can either be interpreted as a "thing" (a purely biophysiological datum), and in that case man may *use* it, even for legitimate objectives; or it can be interpreted as a "dimension" of the person, and in that case man may only *make use of* it; that is, he may consciously and responsibly accept it in its structure and in its dynamics.<sup>9</sup>

#### Conclusion

The moral illicitness of contraception can be fully understood in the context of a personalistic conception of human sexuality: not in the fact that artificial means entail an undue interference with the reproductive faculties of man and woman<sup>10</sup> but in the fact that artificial means "distort" the conjugal act in its "conjugal" way of being, inasmuch as they effect an undue "dissociation" of the specifically "human meanings" of sexuality.

From the preceding discussion, there is established not only the existence of a specifically "moral" problem of methods and means of regulating birth but also the gravity of the issue at stake, at least on the objective level: the problem of methods and means in its concrete solution derives necessarily from the sexual anthropology inspiring its use.

At this point there stands out in all its importance the initial statement from which Paul VI started out in outlining the doctrinal principles on responsible fruitful love:

The problem of birth, like every other human problem regarding human life, is to be considered beyond partial perspectives—whether of the biological or psychological, demographic or sociological orders—in the light of an integral vision of man and of his vocation, not only his natural and earthly but also his supernatural and eternal vocation. [HV 7]

And, to use an expression of our present Holy Father, the vision of *homo humanus*:

Man in our day succumbs, in a manner that is not even perceptible to himself, to alienation from his own humanity and often, in the name of progress, becomes merely "homo economicus" or "homo technicus." The author of the encyclical is aware that he has an obligation of bringing to man's attention, with all humility and firmness, the integral vision of man, for which Christ takes a stand, lives and dies; a vision in which man rediscovers and reaffirms himself as "homo humanus."<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Paul VI, *Allocution to Cardinals*, 23 June 1978. See the careful commentary by E. Lio: "The Pope of *Humanae Vitae*," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 July 1978.
- 2 Paul VI, *Allocution to Centro Italiano Femminile*, 12 February 1966.
- 3 Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, *Responsible fruitful love*, keynote address to the International Congress, Milan, 21-25 June 1978.
- 4 St. Thomas, *In III Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, ad 2; q. 3, sol. 1.
- 5 "We owe to St. Thomas a precise and ever valid definition of what the substantial greatness of man consists in: 'Ipse est sibi providens' (*Contra Gentes*, III, 81). Man is master of himself, he is able to provide for himself and to project his own destiny." [John Paul II, at the "Angelicum," 17 November 1979]
- 6 Cf. the accurate analysis of the conciliar text and of its successive interpretations in M. Zalba, " 'Ex personae eiusdemque actuum natura' (GS 51, 3)," *Periodica de re morali canonica liturgica* 68 (1979): 201-232.
- 7 Beyond this explicit and specific affirmation of HV, there is the historical significance itself of the intervention of Paul VI. This intervention could not be adequately explained without admitting the existence of a specifically "moral" value of methods and means of regulating birth. In fact, the encyclical was the pope's reply to the theological-moral debate in progress, which was expressly concerned with the licitness or illicitness of contraception and therefore of a concrete manner of actualizing responsible parenthood.
- 8 We are considering "contraceptives" only in the strict acceptance of the term, that is, all those modalities and/or instruments that prevent conception. We are not considering those modalities and/or instruments that entail a true and proper "sterilization" of the generative faculty and an elimination of human life already conceived and not yet born. A moral judgment on these latter cases depends also on other more serious elements. It must be pointed out, moreover, that the words "methods" and "means" are often used indiscriminately in reference to the purpose that—sometimes, not always—identifies them, namely, the prevention of conception. In reality, the modalities by which the purpose is achieved are so different that they deserve to be designated with different terms.
- 9 The distinction between *using* and *making use of* is found in HV 13: "To use this divine gift destroying, even if only partially, its meaning and its purpose is to contradict the nature both of man and of woman and of their most intimate relationship, and therefore it is to contradict also the plan of God and his will. On the other hand, to make use of the gift of conjugal love while respecting the laws of the generative process means to acknowledge oneself not to be the arbiter of the sources of human life, but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator."
- 10 It is well known that intervention on the reproductive faculties is morally licit in therapeutic cases (cf. HV 15). Cf. B. Honings, "Il principio di inscindibilita: Un segno per due significati," *Lateranum* 44 (1978): 169-194.
- 11 Cardinal K. Wojtyla, "La visione antropologica della *Humanae Vitae*," *Lateranum* 44 (1978): 129.