

# PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON HUMANAE VITAE AND FIDES ET RATIO

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Forty years ago the Catholic Church reaffirmed in Paul VI's Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* one of its most controversial moral teachings, against which not only critics of the Church but many theologians raised objections. And ten years ago the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* insisted that the Catholic Church acknowledges two wings by the use of which the human mind can reach the truth: *faith* and *reason*, implying that we get to know truth not solely by faith but also by reason. Precisely in view of the Catholic insistence on the role of reason, one of the many reasons why the teachings contained in *Humanae Vitae* are so strongly attacked and so seldom followed, even by Roman Catholic Christians, is the fact that many individuals have no understanding why a moral difference should exist between natural regulation of conception, which the Church allows, and contraception, which it forbids, such that the one would be morally wrong while the other would not be essentially morally objectionable, or even morally right and conceivably, in some cases, obligatory.

The failure to understand is in this case especially serious since the Church proposes this teaching as part of the „natural law“ that is accessible to reason and not as a pure content of faith, thus appealing to rational grounds of its teaching that are not derived from Revelation.

### ***I. Some Comments on the Meaning and Purpose of Marriage and Sexuality***

In view of its own appeal to *ratio*, we will treat here the Catholic Church's doctrine on contraception and human life as an object of rational knowledge and try to show by the light of reason why contraception is immoral and that the immorality of contraception is grounded in the objective meaning of human sexuality and of marriage.<sup>1</sup> In order to understand this, we have first to grasp the meaning of human sexuality and marriage and the goods and values linked to it.

#### *A. Procreation and its Moral Relevance*

The most notable end of human sexuality is the procreation of a new life. We are confronted here with a clear instance of finality in which organs stand in the service of a specific end. Yet it is clearly not this merely biological finality of nature and of the organic being which imposes moral obligations upon us. We are allowed, for example, to castrate a bull, transforming him into an ox, even though such procedures are clearly in opposition to the immanent biological finality of the animal's fertility. The reason for this is that „nature,“ understood as the meaningful finality of a living being, is as such not morally relevant in a way that we would always be forbidden to interfere with it. Even in the case of man, a merely factual biological finality, such as the growth of a beard in a man, does not generate any moral obligation not to shave it.

We can comprehend the moral relevance of human procreation only when we grasp the deep values linked to it and especially the fact that human sexuality leads to the existence of a new human person who is endowed with intellect and free will, called to community with other persons, ordained to realize moral values and finally, to be united with God for eternity.

When we comprehend this dignity and overwhelming depth of human sexuality, being linked to the existence of a new person endowed with immense dignity, we also gain an insight into the evident truth that the connection of human sexuality with the end of procreation imposes many moral obligations upon us, above all the obligation of a great reverence and respect for the sphere of human sexuality together with the duty to avoid strictly whatever is incompatible with its dignity. Moreover, in the dignity of human procreation and human persons is also grounded a positive general call and obligation of the spouses to be open to a generous cooperation with this noble end of human sexuality.

### *B. Marriage and consent*

Consent (*consensus*) is a second element that belongs inseparably to the true meaning of human sexuality. This is the free decision of the will and the special „promise“ of a man and a woman to belong inseparably to each other and to bind themselves in a mutual union with each other in the formally deepest way that is possible between two human beings. The promise, or better yet, the „covenant“ (*Familiaris Consortio*) through which this union between two human beings is accomplished, involves a personal self-donation and a granting of the most intimate right over one's own body. And it includes the obligation of fidelity and mutual self-donation until death, which results from the self-chosen act of marrying.<sup>2</sup>

The sexual act is such a profound and intimate mutual self-donation and creates such an extraordinary and intimate union between two persons that it is morally legitimate only

when it is the expression of an exclusive, lasting and irrevocable union which the two persons enter into formally through the act of consent. Otherwise, the sexual act has the character of throwing oneself away.

Many moral obligations are grounded in the meaningful relation between human sexuality and such a profound and irrevocable bond which follows from the consent and which is demanded by the very nature of human sexuality. Examples of such obligations are the prohibition of pre and extramarital sexual intercourse; the commandment to respect the indissolubility and uniqueness of the marital bond; the prohibition of adultery, which remains immoral even when one intends to conceive a child which may not be possible within the marriage. These moral norms cannot be explained at all by the relation between human sexuality and procreation. Rather, they can be understood only in terms of the ordination of the sexual act toward the marriage covenant.

It must be added that the end of procreation and the marital consensus cannot in any way explain of themselves the innermost meaning of marriage, much less the source of the most profound happiness in marriage. Indeed, both of these elements alone cannot even be adequately understood as long as we do not take into account their ideal and natural source, namely, the spousal love which forms and grounds them from within.

### *C. Marriage and Spousal Love*

The deepest natural meaning of the consent as well as of procreation can be understood only in the light of that love between man and woman which, among all the forms of love between human beings, realizes the fundamental essential traits of love in a uniquely explicit fashion.<sup>3</sup>

Every genuine love of another person is distinguished by the fact that it is a response to the other person as a whole in virtue of her intrinsic preciousness, goodness and beauty qua person and qua this unique person.<sup>4</sup>

In spousal love, the innermost preciousness and the irreplaceable nature of the other person become transparent to us and touch our heart in a way that is different from any other kind of love. We respond and give ourselves to the other person in his or her lovability. We belong to him or her in an exclusive way.<sup>5</sup>

In spousal love we give ourselves as a gift to the beloved person. We do this to a higher degree and in a different manner than in any other form of human love. We give ourselves with our whole heart and desire to belong exclusively and irrevocably to the beloved. This essential moment in spousal love is also the natural motive and soul of the „Yes“ of consent. Insofar as the sexual self-donation springs from such a love, it acquires a new inner significance and becomes a source of the most intimate happiness. The mere irrevocable self-donation through our will in the act of consent is an impoverished substitute in the absence of the genuine love which should motivate the consent.<sup>6</sup>

In a similar fashion, the desire of every kind of love to make the beloved happy and to see her achieve her highest good finds a singular expression and achieves a unique summit in spousal love. Our yearning for the happiness of the beloved is more intimate than in other forms of love. We long for the other person's happiness in those most intimate spiritual and bodily dimensions into which no other form of human love can reach. And above all, we long to make ourselves and our love an irreplaceable gift for the other in many areas where one person can become a gift for another and which remain closed for other forms of love.

Here we can also discern a basis for the fact that spousal love is possible only between a man and a woman. For this complete spiritual and bodily self-donation presupposes the difference between the sexes and their mutual ordination for each other. This trait of spousal love finds its unique expression and fulfillment in the marital act. In its specific uniqueness, human sexuality is destined to be an expression of this love between man and woman many aspects of which are essentially unrealizable in homosexual or lesbian relationships.<sup>7</sup>

The desire for union with the beloved, which belongs to love in general, also finds its singular expression in spousal love. For here, more than in any other human love, we desire to participate in the inner life and thought of the beloved. We seek her presence and above all, in a highly thematic way, we long for a requital of our love. For only in the requital of our love does the beloved disclose herself completely to us, become fully present and thereby unite herself with us. No other human love is comparable with such a love, in which we desire to be bound to the other in all the dimensions of human existence, even unto death. No other kind of love between two human persons calls for a similar exclusive union with the beloved person in the sense that it would exclude in ourselves and in the beloved another love of the same kind as long as it endures actually and authentically. This longing for an ultimate being one endows the „Yes“ of consent with an inner meaning in as much as we strive irrevocably, spiritually and bodily to become one spirit and one flesh with the other person. As already noted, the most profound significance of the marital bond as well as of sexuality and procreation discloses itself in the light of spousal love. Indeed only this love makes it possible that the noble spousal „Yes“ of consent can be in principle and under normal circumstances responsibly given and morally justified. Understood in its deepest dimensions, then, marriage is much more than a marriage contract by means of which two individuals grant each other mutual rights to their bodies and to acts which naturally aim at procreation. And it is precisely from this perspective that a decisive clarification is cast upon the meaning of procreation. Children can be called the superabundant end of marriage because marriage should not be a mere means for this end but should already possess in itself the profound meaning of a community of love. And it is this significance which presupposes a difference, indeed, an opposition between true spousal love and isolated sexual desire.<sup>8</sup>

## ***II. The Reasons for the Immorality of Contraception***

Against the background of the understanding of the main dimensions of the meaning and the end of marriage and of human sexuality we can now turn to the grounds for the immorality of contraception.

### *1. The Inseparable Bond between the unitive and procreative meaning of the marital act: a First Reason for the Teaching of Humanae Vitae on Contraception and on the Responsible Transmission of Human Life*

Between the spousal act in its unitive aspect and procreation there obtains a profoundly meaningful bond which *Humanae Vitae* identifies as „inseparable.“<sup>9</sup>

The philosopher has to ask: „What is meant by ‘inseparable’ in this context?“ This expression certainly does not mean that the connection is inseparable in the sense that it always obtains in actuality. That this cannot be the case is already clearly proven by the fact of the restricted number of fertile days as well as by the whole sense of discussing a moral obligation not to separate these two meanings, which presupposes that we *can* separate them. Nor does this characterization of the relation between the spousal act and procreation mean that the marital union is justified only in the expectation of fertility as if the only motivation which could justify the spousal act were the intention to endow a child with life. For in this case „natural birth control“ through temporary abstinence would be just as immoral as „artificial birth control“ and any couple that could not have any children at all would be bound to observe complete abstinence. What, then, is meant by the term „inseparable?“ It means primarily that it is not morally permissible for man to actively separate the spousal act from procreation. The bond between the two is inseparable in the sense that on the side of the couple, an „openness“ toward conception should always exist in the spousal encounter. In other words, man should respect this connection absolutely during the relatively restricted time that it actually obtains.<sup>10</sup> Man is absolutely forbidden to break, intentionally and directly, the bond between the spousal act

and procreation, or even for that matter, the bond between the initial stages of the process of fertilization which leads to conception and the conception itself.<sup>11</sup>

Why is contraception not allowed? What makes this “bond” so important and ethically inseparable?

1. The moral relevance of the bond in question is grounded, above all, in the high value of the new human person which is philosophically knowable as we cannot explain here in depth.<sup>12</sup> The dignity and the importance of the child that is about to be conceived (the *procreandus*) accounts for the moral relevance of the bond. This is manifestly clear, even prior to any consideration of the problem of contraception. The very possibility of the parents to endow a child with life as well as their vocation to live their marriage already lays upon them the fundamental obligation of being ready and willing in principle to stand in the service of the coming into existence of a child.<sup>13</sup>

2. The spousal act is not only immanently ordained for the transmission of life but is also created to be the expression and fulfillment of the profound human union between the spouses. Even when we do not consider marital intercourse as the expression of spousal love (which may very well be absent in an unhappy marriage), it remains, nevertheless, the exercise and accomplishment of an unbreakable personal and even as Catholics believe a sacramental bond between the spouses. A sublime value inheres in this bond between the spousal act in its orientation toward a becoming one and procreation. For the sexual act which accomplishes the consummation of the indissoluble and lasting self-donation of the spouses is ordained to become the cause of conception.<sup>14</sup> This bond possesses a high value and sacred character which absolutely forbid any manipulation which would actively separate and isolate the meaning of the marital union from procreation - be it in contraception, artificial insemination or *in vitro* fertilization.

*2. The Violation of the Superabundant Finality between Spousal Love and Procreation – A Second Specific Reason for the Immorality of Contraception (Dietrich von Hildebrand's argument)*

A second specific reason for the immorality of contraception stands in the center of Dietrich von Hildebrand's pamphlet, *Die Enzyklika Humanae Vitae: Ein Zeichen des Widerspruchs*<sup>15</sup>, namely, the superabundant finality between spousal love and procreation. What is an expression of the most intimate spiritual love is, or at least, according to its proper nature, should be bound in a deeply meaningful way to procreation. The marital union as an expression of spousal love does not simply have the meaning of an „instrument“ serving as means for procreation. The spousal union bears a high value and has a theme that deserves to be taken seriously on its own account.<sup>16</sup> But above and beyond this, God has made it fruitful for the purpose of procreation. This type of finality will be designated in this context as a „superabundant finality“ in contradistinction to a merely instrumental finality in which the meaning of something is exhausted in the fact that it serves as a means for something else. Spousal love of two human beings for each other, an image of the eternal Love that is the fount of all creation, is destined to be the source of human life over and above the meaning that it possesses as properly its own. It can be said that the immorality of contraception lies in the separation of what is or should be the expression of spousal love and complete selfdonation from the fruitfulness which the spousal act should serve in a superabundant manner. In fact, contraception violates several essential traits of love. It goes against a) the superabundant procreative finality of spousal love; against b) the essential generosity of love and the intrinsic gesture of a mutual gift of love; against c) the integrity of the gift, that is, of the persons who give themselves to each other in love; and against d) the love of God, which should be the ultimate of all personal acts of man, especially of the spousal act.

Perhaps this third specific reason against contraception presupposes the actual existence of spousal love and is not sufficient in itself to explain the moral wrong of contraception.

It is much rather the case that next to other reasons the ordination of the marital act to spousal love on the one hand and of the marital act to conception on the other hand shed a new, additional light on the meaningful bond between the marital act and procreation. As soon as one perceives the marital act as the fulfillment of love one also sees the child in a new light since one experiences it as the fruit and gift of a tender spousal love.

Considered in this manner, the meaningful relation between spousal love and procreation yields a deeper understanding of the just discussed reasons for the immorality of contraception. In the active obstruction of conception in the performance of an act motivated by love there occurs a desecration of that same love, a betrayal of the inner meaning of spousal love. We also find a profound indication of this in the philosopher and Pope Wojtyla, who has repeatedly emphasized the fact that the mutual and unconditional selfdonation of the spouses in the marital act contradicts any contraceptive exclusion of new life from this act.

One ought not to violate the integrity of the act of love by betraying the mystery that belongs to it, that out of it and a tender love a new child should come to be.

### *3. The Integrity of the Gift of Spousal Love Includes the Integral Gift of Fertility and Masculinity Which Includes Potential Paternity and Maternity: Karol Wojtyla's Pope John Paul II's Personalistic Argument against Contraception*

If one separates, in contraception, the unitive meaning of the conjugal act, which could also be described as a mutual gift of the spouses to each other, from procreation, one does not leave intact the unitive aspect. Rather, the connection of the two gifts is so close that also the spousal gift is wounded if the "gift from the gift" is actively prevented. One might say also that only as long as the spouses leave their act open to procreation, they possess the moral purity of heart and integrity to give themselves in love. The act of actively preventing new life, as Finnis and Grisez interpret contraception, involves an

egoism and anti-life attitude which is opposed also to the loving mutual self-donation. Moreover, an important and wonderful aspect of femininity and masculinity, of the integrity of the body and of the gift is lost if the potential bond to procreation is closed.

For all these reasons one will agree with John Paul II who adds to the discussion the aspect of the gift of spousal love losing its integral wholeness and dignity if the gift of love is severed from the gift of new life.

At this point, we understand also that *Humanae Vitae* and *Familiaris Consortio* emphasize the "inseparable bond" between the unitive and procreative meaning of the conjugal act for no negativistic or oppressive reason. This teaching involves no negativistic vision of human sexuality. On the contrary, we may say that the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* contain a profound affirmation of the dignity of human sexuality in marriage. They do not only affirm the dignity and value of the child, but also the meaning and value of the mutual gift of love in marriage and in the sexual union in marriage. One could indeed regard the title of this paper as one which describes the central common theme of these two Church documents: "the Gift of Love and the Gift of New Life." They affirm these two gifts and the immense value and moral relevance which are contained in their being joined and connected in the mystery of marriage and in the infinite mystery of God who is Himself the supreme Gift of Love and of Life.

#### *4. The Inviolable Bond between Human and Divine Act in Procreation as a Fourth Specific Reason for the Immorality of Contraception*

There is still another „bond“ which discloses itself on the basis of a metaphysical intuition into the fact that the parents, their sexual union and all the physiological processes that are initiated by conception are completely incapable of calling a new human person into existence. As soon as we recognize that man is composed of body and soul, and that his

soul is a spiritual substance distinct from his body and that this soul is unique, free and immortal, we also grasp the fact that the soul of the child, in its innermost being and essence, does not come from the parents but, rather, that it must come from God in an act of immediate creation.<sup>17</sup>

A unique cooperation occurs between God and man in the fruitful marital community. God alone has the power to call an individual soul into existence, to create it „out of nothing.“ He alone can „breathe“ a soul into a body.

Because of this the parents in fact play only a very modest role in the whole process of conception, a role that despite its great dignity simply does not have the capacity, of and in itself, to call into being a new human person with an immortal soul. The soul must be directly created by God. Hence, man is invited and challenged to a most intimate cooperation with the Divine creative power in the procreative act. The divine activity of creating a soul is bound in a mysterious way to the procreative act freely initiated by the spouses. In a mysterious and awesome way God even makes his creation of a soul in a certain sense „dependent“ on the parental union. When the marital act takes place by a free decision of the parents and a conception becomes possible and realized, God Himself creates a personal soul out of nothing and summons it to its eternal destiny. Therefore husband and wife should consider themselves as humble servants of a wonderful and above all a divine and divinely initiated process to which the child owes its existence.

It is absolutely immoral for the spouses to break, actively and freely, the bond between their union and procreation and no longer to remain „open“ for the latter. For when they do this, they seek, in an objectively or also subjectively sinful manner to exclude God from an act which, in effect, He Himself ordained to be bound with His own act of creating a person. It is a hybris, a rebellion against God when one initiates an act in connection with which God would create a spiritual and immortal soul, and then intervenes to exclude God from this act by quite consciously and actively destroying the intimate bond which unites it with the infinite depth of the divine creative love.

Because of the depth of the union of the spouses who „become one flesh,“ on the one hand, and in consideration of the sublime character of the coming into existence of a new person, on the other hand, we can recognize how this bond cannot be a mere biological fact nor only a kind of natural meaning and wonder but how the personal Creator of all things must have quite specifically willed it and established it and how, consequently, this bond is subject only to Him. Man is allowed to approach this bond only with a profound reverence before its mystery.<sup>18</sup> Man’s use of contraception constitutes an overweening rebellion against his own creatureliness. In a Promethean gesture he claims all rights for himself and wills to be Lord over everything, even over those things and situations which are subject only to God’s divine authority. Such an attitude constitutes the common element, even if with essentially different modifications, between the proponents of abortion or euthanasia and those that approve of contraceptive practices.

##### *5. The Moral Wrongness of Contraception as Consequence of the Spousal Acts as Free Commitment*

Freely contracted and chosen commitments are also a partial ground for the immorality of contraception. We are frequently quite free to decide on some specific measure. We are free to marry or to remain single, to adopt a child or not, to make a promise or not. In this sense we are often admittedly free to decide whether we want to endow a new child with life or not. But once we make a promise we lose the freedom of choosing whether what has been promised is to be fulfilled or not. And in a very similar sense, in accomplishing the spousal act we incur an obligation which demands that we „be open“ towards its essential structure and meaningful consequences. From the moral perspective we may have been originally free either to assume this responsibility or to refrain from the marital act. Yet, the moment husband and wife decide to perform it, they freely give up the kind of freedom they had before. They have taken the first step toward

the possibility of endowing a child with life and are no longer free to prevent the „second step.“<sup>19</sup>

## ***6. A Defense of the Anti-Life Argument***

Many of the previous considerations already imply a philosophical explanation of another reason for the moral wrongness of contraception, an argument of which an old version of the *Canon iuris canonici*, quoted in 1988 by Mons. (now Cardinal) Carlo Caffarra, which made the controversial claim that contraception is not only an attack directed against human life, but a worse attack against it than abortion because it deprives the child not only of temporal life on earth but of existence in all eternity.

Certainly one might object that the reality of human life makes a huge difference and an attack against the life of an already living person is very different from an attack against one that does not exist yet.

Nonetheless, notwithstanding this critique of the hierarchy of evil attacks against life, the anti-life argument itself carries great weight. It has recently been defended by John Finnis and others. Let us understand it better:

In the moment that the spousal act is accomplished, it is no longer a question of the abstract possibility that the child could come into existence, a situation in which a couple also chooses in natural birth control, through abstinence, not to give life to another person at this time; nor is it even a question of the „real“ possibility that the child can come into existence here and now, under the present empirical conditions (during the wife’s fertile days, for example). Much rather, we are now confronted with the new situation brought about by the marital act. The preciousness of the future child is no longer a mere possibility or even an immediately actual potentiality. No, in those instances which are the sole reason for using contraception, namely, in the case of potentially fruitful marital acts, the child is „about“ to enter into life. The marital act will in fact give him life if one does not actively prevent it. Therefore, contraception includes a “No” to life which is not necessarily (though possibly) underlying natural family planning. The first step in the direction of the existence of the child has already been taken. The process that is

constituted and ordained for the transmission of life has already begun. We are no longer simply invited to give a child the gift of life, we are obliged not to hinder actively the existence of the child that is about to receive life.

The moral relevance of the child once again acquires a completely new level as soon as the child is actually conceived. After that point, any action which aims at taking its life is murder, not contraception.

### *7. Act-Mutilation: Contra Naturam*

Another reason for the moral relevance of the bond between the spousal act and procreation lies in the profoundly significant finality according to which the marital act is destined to bring a child into existence during the fruitful periods of the woman's cycle. The marital act as such is profoundly stamped by the (possible) transmission of life toward which it is oriented in virtue of its innermost nature. During the time of ovulation this capacity, as the natural end of the marital act, becomes actual. This forbids the misuse of marriage by frustrating the naturally given and noble end of an act that would otherwise have been fruitful.<sup>20</sup> In other words, contraception constitutes an intrinsically immoral form of mutilation. While the cutting off of a limb or permanent sterilization is the mutilation of the body in its permanent structure and integrity, contraception is the mutilation of the structure and integrity of a bodily act of man. Moreover, this mutilation is especially grave for reasons of the personal structure and meaning of this act. Human sexuality is related to the world of the person in important ways. First, it should be the expression of a personal act of union and communion between persons; second, it is the only sphere of the human body which is destined to play a decisive role in the coming into being of new persons. In addition, it is structurally and qualitatively deeply linked with the life and intimacy of persons. All these three dimensions of the personalistic meaning and value of the human sexual act are intrinsically related to each other. For all

of these reasons, the biological mutilation of the marital act is more seriously immoral than other mutilations of the body.

*8. Argument from Consequences for Love, Marriage and Respect of Partner (Max Horkheimer):*

It is certainly remarkable that already in 1970 the Neo-Marxist Max Horkheimer, father of the new Left, defended *Humanae Vitae* against many German moral theologians.<sup>21</sup> He argued that the pill is the death of love because a modern Julia would tell her Romeo that he should wait because she first had to take the pill before coming to him.<sup>22</sup>

***9. Humanae Vitae und das Prinzip des einzig würdigen Ursprung menschlichen Lebens in der Liebe***

The Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* also formulates the principle that became basic for the document *donum vitae* about the only worthy origin of human life being love, not only ultimately divine love but also human love.<sup>23</sup>

### ***III. Why is then „Natural“ Regulation of Conception Legitimate?***

Since contraception is immoral one could ask why is this not also the case with „natural“ measures? Why is the marital act not equally sinful in those cases in which the couple either knows that conception is excluded (eg., for reasons of age) or even intends sexual intercourse quite explicitly on those days when conception is impossible?

If procreation were the „primary end“ of marriage in the sense that one always had to intend procreation to justify the conjugal act, then every marital union without the explicit intention of procreation would indeed be immoral, as some maintain.

But if the generation of a child is only a „primary end“ of marriage in the sense that it is forbidden us to actively hinder or oppose this actual end, we are not obliged to realize something exclusively when we intend its primary end. The clearest example of this is precisely the marital act. We have already discussed the reasons for the prohibition against *going against* its ordination toward procreation. Yet it is evident that there are other meaningful realities of a high order of value which also justify the marital act even when conception is not possible or when, for serious reasons, children are not desired. Instances of the things that justify or even render the marital act noble are spousal love and fidelity, the accomplishment of the sacramental bond in the becoming one in one flesh, and others. We see, then, that in the second sense of „primary end“ here under consideration, only an active obstruction of the „primary end“ of marriage is always and essentially wrong for the already mentioned reasons. On the other hand, when the spousal act is performed, for legitimate reasons, at a time that conception is precluded, or when the spouses justifiably intend to avoid the conception of a new child, the marital acts remain legitimate and noble and are in no way immoral.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, one may even raise the question whether there exist circumstances serious enough to make natural family planning morally obligatory. Examples of such situations would be the danger to the physical or mental wellbeing of the mother or some serious neurological or other conditions under which the pregnancy would be the occasion for a profound bitterness.

One could argue against the position that contraception is immoral by invoking the observation that nature or God frequently bring about a separation of the marital act from procreation. From this it becomes clear that the bond between the two can not be so inseparable and naturally given. Hence, one could draw the conclusion from this that man could also do what occurs in nature and through God, and thus be allowed to actively separate the marital act from generation.

In responding, one must first of all uncover the disastrous fundamental error about the nature of moral action hidden in the objection. It is a currently widespread notion that it is morally permissible for man to do whatever occurs often or with some regularity in the order of nature without human intervention. If this were true, we could in due order cause others every conceivable injury that is often brought about by natural catastrophes, through accidents or through natural events that afflict man, such as sickness and death. In other words, by invoking such a false principle we could justify almost any immoral or criminal behavior. The absurdity of such a consequence clearly brings to light the erroneous nature of the underlying principle.

This principle is not wrong only with respect to evil. It would be just as wrong to apply to many goods that often accrue to men without any human intervention but which can not be procured by us intentionally without any further ado. Thus, for example, we are not morally permitted to take someone's life in order to free him from the evils of a pain which he cannot bear patiently or from the temptation to despair, not even when that person begs it of us as a favor or when death in such cases would really be a form of relief and salvation for which we could otherwise pray and hope.

The fact that something occurs in nature must not be interpreted in any way as a normative sanction of these events or as a license for their active realization.

Returning to our theme, the objection is grounded in a completely false interpretation of morality as well as in a mistaken attempt to turn empirical data into a norm for moral action.<sup>25</sup>

Someone could also argue: Why should we not manipulate a merely biological fact such as the time of fertility? In answering this question, we must first note that it is obvious that we are allowed to intervene in many neutral biological states or processes but that there are also many biological facts that impose moral obligations upon us even if, considered in themselves, they are neutral. The basis for this surprising state of affairs is

the connection of these facts with very important and morally relevant goods. It is because they are in fact related to such morally relevant goods that they deserve to be morally respected as a matter of pure fact, not because of their own morally relevant nature but on account of the factual connection with morally relevant realities.

The neutral, merely biological fact that, for example, some specific food harms a baby, while other food is healthy for it, imposes a moral obligation not to give the harmful food to the baby simply because the biological fact in question is as a matter of simple fact connected with the baby's sickness.

The marital act is connected with generation only during the fertile periods and as long as this connection actually obtains it should be respected. A specific Manichean pride reveals itself in the practice of contraception; a pride which refuses to recognize and accept the dignity that certain facts, in themselves neutral, draw from their factual connection with important goods in whose importance they participate.

#### *Concluding Remarks on Moral Theological Consequentialism and Veritatis Splendor*

The teaching of the Church, as contained in *Humanae Vitae* and in the more recent pronouncements of the Magisterium, is often presented as an inhuman moralizing in which one forgets the real circumstances and the really important facts and problems, the sufferings and the existential situations in which many couples find themselves and which they cannot possibly overcome, in the way demanded by *Humanae Vitae*, and which in effect forces them to practice contraception.

Now, one should certainly have compassion and full understanding for those married couples who must bear the difficulties and suffer the tragic consequences that may result from their compliance with these and other moral demands.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, it is necessary to identify the fatal error in this objection, an error which fails to grasp the very nature of the moral sphere and its relation to reality (and the real problems). Morality, the question of moral good and evil, does not refer to a theorizing in

an abstract void, but rather aims at the very heart of reality and the drama of human existence. Every moral evil, no matter how small, outweighs in an incomparable way any extramoral evil and in the calculus of goods weighs more heavily on the negative side than all the extramoral goods on the positive side, goods that may accrue to the individual or the state as consequences of the morally evil acts. It does not profit a man even when he gains the whole world but suffers harm in his soul. Because of the specific absoluteness of the moral sphere, there can be no grounds whatever for permitting an act that is morally evil in itself. Indeed, if we could save the whole world through one single, intrinsically immoral act, we would still not be allowed to perform such an act. Both the utilitarianism and consequentialism that are so widespread in ethical circles as well as the principle that „the end justifies the means“ obscure this fundamental truth which was already recognized by Socrates, namely, that a moral injustice is an incomparable more serious evil than other evils. It „is a lesser evil for man to suffer injustice than to commit it.“<sup>27</sup>

This essential tenet of any genuine ethics, the existence of moral absolutes, was taught forcefully by the new Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, which did not defend some isolated Catholic position but where the Church proves to be an advocate of a great natural moral truth which from Socrates to Cicero many pre-Christian authors and all Reformers (Luther, Calvin) as well as many Jews and Moslems and even some atheists have defended: that there are moral absolutes. From an assumption to the contrary it would follow that adultery, sacrilege, pornography, lying, yes, every infraction and crime could be allowed in view of the possible consequences of avoiding suffering. On the basis of such a principle every call to martyrdom could also be rejected or simply explained away.

One can discern an intrusion of a contraceptive attitude even among the defenders of „natural methods,“ an attitude that can make even the natural family planning immoral.<sup>28</sup> A selfcentered refusal to cooperate with the coming to be of a new human life can also make use of the natural means of birth control and thus be evil.

What is already a presupposition for any perception of moral value is of special importance in this context, i.e., the need to attend reverently to the voice of being and truth if one is to understand the difference at hand. Pope John Paul II says correctly of this difference that it is not something superficial but that in the final analysis it presupposes two radically different philosophical anthropologies.<sup>29</sup> We must open our souls in order to grasp the profound meaning and value of marriage. We must „descend into our own depths“ if we are even to begin to understand the mystery of the cooperation between God and man as it unfolds in procreation.

Contraception occurs not only in secret but it easily escapes notice and the voice of conscience.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In what marriage is by its nature and not only in what marriage, in its ideal and objective ordination, *ought to become*.

<sup>2</sup> This unique act of *consent* acquires its ultimate meaning only in terms of spousal love. Nevertheless, it can be motivated by other considerations and still constitute a valid marriage.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*, No. 8 and 9 for a brief but beautiful presentation of the nature of spousal love; for an extensive and enlightening philosophical analysis of the nature of love, Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*; Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Das Wesen der Liebe* (Stuttgart, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> Love is not exclusively the response of the will to the preciousness of the other person which is revealed to our knowledge as a gift but also a response of the heart. Nevertheless, in virtue of the cooperative freedom, the free personal center, by an act of the will, makes also the affective act of love its own, as it were, and transforms it into a free act.

<sup>5</sup> As expressed in the oldest German love poem:

Du bist mîn,

Ich bin dîn;

des solt Du gewiz sîn;

Du bist beslozen in mînem herzen;

verlorn ist das sluezzelîn,

muost immer darinne sîn.

Thou art mine.

I am thine;

Of this shouldst be assured:

Held captive in my heart,

The key is lost,

Forever more must thou abide within.

<sup>6</sup> In spousal love we long to make the response to the other in his or her preciousness a central theme of our life.

<sup>7</sup> See Josef Seifert, „Kirche und Homosexualität“, *Forum Katholische Theologie*, Ed. v. Leo Scheffczyk, Kurt Krenn und Anton Ziegenaus, 8 (1992) H 4, 278-289; „Familie, Homosexualität und Staat“, in: *Mut zu Ethik II. Schutz der Familie und der heranwachsenden Jugend*, Ed. v. VPM (Zürich: Verlag Menschenkenntnis, 1994), pp. 209-233.

<sup>8</sup>. This decisive distinction was made by von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical*, p. 13f.; Cf. also his *In Defense of Purity*, Part I, Ch. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Already Pius XI had stated in *Casti Connubii* that in a certain way the loving community of the spouses could be regarded as the primary end of marriage, even if not with respect to marital intercourse but only with respect to marriage as a community.

By emphasizing - as two most basic aspects of marriage - the loving union/communion of the spouses and procreation, recent Church documents avoided more legalistic earlier definitions of marriage such as the designation of marriage as a contract by which the spouses bestow on each other the right to acts which are by their nature capable of procreation. Not the mere legal or physical side and the causal role of the conjugal act for procreation are mentioned, but the personal love and union of the spouses. Thus the new emphasis in Church documents - since the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes* - on the link between spousal union and procreation is a strong move towards a more personalistic vision of marriage and towards a more personalistic ethical foundation of the intrinsic wrongness of contraception.

*Humanae Vitae* does not even use any more another earlier ecclesiastic terminology with reference to marriage, according to which procreation is the "first end" of marriage and all other ends are subordinated to it. Rather, *Humanae Vitae* stresses, almost as if to say that both are on the same level, the union of persons - and thereby also love and the "gift of love-aspect" of marriage - on the one hand, and procreation, on the other.

This personalistic vision, which marks many earlier writings on marriage in our century, most notably those of Dietrich von Hildebrand and Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, and which is a distinguishing mark of recent Church documents since Pius XI and Pius XII, is continued and in some respects deepened in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. The Pope - both as a philosopher and as the author of *Familiaris Consortio*, addressing himself to "all men and women," - adds to *Humanae Vitae* and to the philosophical and theological background of Church teaching a profound theology and philosophy of the human body, of the personal gift of love, and of marriage as a personal communion of love. Thereby, he has laid the foundations for any proper and timely interpretation of the specific teaching of the Church on contraception.

See D. von Hildebrand, *Marriage. The Mystery of Faithful Love*, with a Foreword by John J. Archbishop O'Connor (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, <sup>2</sup>1984). The first German edition appeared 1928. See by the same author, *In Defense of Purity* (originally published in 1926), and other works, including *Die Enzyklika "Humanae Vitae" - Ein Zeichen des Widerspruchs* (Regensburg: Habel, 1968).

See also Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility* (New York: Farrar-Straus-Giroux, 1981). See also

<sup>10</sup>. This bond exists "actually" only during a limited number of days each month for a limited number of years during a lifetime, a number often shortened by natural obstacles, operations, etc. Sometimes - as in the case of sterility - this bond never exists "actually."

11. In this context I abstract from the question whether this point refers exclusively to marriage and whether contraception ceases to be immoral in the case of a crime such as rape or of a sin such as adultery or premarital intercourse. This problem deals with the difficult and disputed ethical question whether an act that is immoral in itself (such as adultery) becomes more immoral in every instance where it is accompanied by another immoral act (such as contraception). This question involves the further problem concerning the procedures that may be legitimately undertaken by the innocent victim of a rape after the process which leads to conception has already been initiated. It seems that even here some of the reasons for the immorality of contraception remain valid while others do not apply. (The question also arises whether it is not the case that most or even all forms of the pill are effective not only before but also after conception and are therefore abortifacient and hence also for this reason, even when used for purely therapeutic reasons, are always immoral.)

<sup>12</sup> On the nature and many essential features of the person in which this dignity is grounded, there is an immense literature. I myself have presented many reflections on this topic. See Josef Seifert: „Osservazioni dal punto di vista di una metafisica fenomenologica della persona“, in: Paul Ricoeur, *Persona, comunità e istituzioni*, a cura di Attilio Danese (San Domenico di Fiesole: Edizioni Cultura della Pace, 1994), pp. 202-211; „Die vierfache Quelle der Menschenwürde als Fundament der Menschenrechte“, in: Burkhardt Ziemse (Hrsg.), *Staatsphilosophie und Rechtspolitik. Festschrift für Martin Kriele zum 65. Geburtstag* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1997), pp. 165-185; “Defender a la mujer del feminismo. Reflexiones sobre su dignidad y su perversión.” *Atlántida*, Enero/Marzo (1993), 17-27.

“La natura e la dignità della persona umana come fondazione del diritto alla vita: Le sfide del contesto culturale contemporaneo” (Atti dell’8<sup>a</sup> Assemblea della Pontificia Accademia per la Vita, Città del Vaticano, 25-27 Febbraio 2002), eds. Juan de Dios Vial Correa e Elio Sgreccia (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), pp. 194-215; “The right to life and the fourfold root of human dignity. In: Pontificia Academia pro Vita, Juan de Dios Vial Correa and Elio Sgreccia (Ed.), *The nature and dignity of the human person as the foundation of the right to life. The challenges of the contemporary cultural context*. Proceedings of the VIII Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life (Vatican City, 25-27 February, 2002), Libreria Editrice Vaticana; “Defender a la mujer.” *El Mercurio* 9. May 1993. *Artes y Letras*, S. E 1, E 10, y E 11; „La vérité de l’homme et la dignité humaine“, in: ACCE (ed.), (*Une Culture pour l’Europe*;) *La vérité vous rendra libres*, (Paris;Mame, 1994), pp. 255-262; “La vérité de l’homme et la dignité humaine”, *Presença Filosófica* 23, 1-2 (1998/99), 167-176; „Dignidad humana: Dimensiones y fuentes en la persona humana“, in: Juan Jesús Borobia, Miguel Lluch, José Ignacio Murillo, Eduardo Terrasa (Ed.), *Idea Cristiana del Hombre. III Simposio internacional fe cristiana y cultura contemporánea*, (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2002); „Zur Verteidigung der Würde der Frau. Feminismus und die Stellung der Frau in Kirche und Gesellschaft: Philosophische und christliche Aspekte“ in *Wissenschaft und Glaube. Vierteljahresschrift der Wiener Katholischen Akademie*, H 2-3, 1989, 33 pp; “Über die Frau: Wesen - Würde - Zerrbilder”, in: Enrique Banús (Ed.), *Studia Europea Navarrensis, Volumen 2, El espacio social femenino/Women’s social space* (Navarra: Centro de Estudios Europeos - Universidad de Navarra), pp. 7-40; „Philosophische Grundlagen der Menschenrechte. Zur Verteidigung des Menschen“, *Prima Philosophia* V. 5 (4) (1992), 339-370; „Zu den Menschenrechten und Pflichten der Jugendlichen. Philosophische Reflexionen über die universale Erklärung der Rechte und Pflichten der Jugendlichen,“ with an English and an Italian summary, *Medicine, Mind and Adolescence* 10 (1995), 187-211 (actually 1997); „Los Fundamentos filosóficos de los Derechos humanos“ in *Teología y Sacerdocio. En la situación actual* (Madrid: Centro de Cultura Teología, 1991); “Zur Erkenntnis der Menschenrechte und ihrer axiologischen und anthropologischen Grundlagen”, In: (Hrsg.), *Wie erkennt man Naturrecht? Mit Beiträgen von Rocco Buttiglione, Franz Bydlinski, Theo Mayer-Maly, Josef Seifert, Wolfgang Waldstein*. In: *Philosophie und Realistische Phänomenologie/Philosophy and Realist Phenomenology*. Studien der Internationalen Akademie für Philosophie im Fürstentum Liechtenstein. Ed. Rocco Buttiglione and Josef Seifert, Bd. VI (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1998), pp. 65-106; *The Philosophical Diseases of Medicine and Their Cure*. Philosophy and Ethics of Medicine. Vol. 1: *Foundations*. Philosophy and Medicine, vol. 82 (New York: Springer, 2004), ch.2, and Kluwer online e-book, 2005, ch. 2; *What is Life? On the Originality, Irreducibility and Value of Life*. Value Inquiry Book Series (VIBS), ed. by Robert Ginsberg, vol 51/Central European Value Studies (CEVS), ed. by H.G. Callaway (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), Ch. 4; „Menschenwürde - Fundament der Grundrechte“, in: Gudrun Lang und Michael Strohmer (Ed.), *Europa der Grundrechte? Beiträge zur Grundrechtecharta der Europäischen Union*, edition pro munis Bd.

<sup>13</sup>. According to Catholic teaching - in profound harmony with the given nature of marriage - this general openness to children is even a necessary and decisive condition for the validity of a marriage.

14. Thus, we consider the connection between procreation and an essential, constitutive trait of marriage as the decisive root of the moral imperative prohibiting contraception.

15. Cf. D. von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical*, pp. 29f., 3536, 4344. Some of the other grounds for the immorality of contraception are also mentioned in this book. See Note 26 below.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 33ff.

17. Cf. L. Hoelscher, *The Reality of the Mind* (IAP Studies, 1984); also Christoph Schönborn criticizes well in various articles the unclear thesis of Karl Rahner that asserts as "transcendence of secondary causes" which would allow human sexuality to produce the soul of the child on its own. Cf. also J. Seifert, *Leib und Seele. Ein philosophischer Beitrag zur philosophischen Anthropologie* (Salzburg, 1974) for the question concerning the soul and its origin.

<sup>18</sup> The Christian and believing Jew will additionally only approach it with a consciousness of both the majesty of its Creator and the biblical injunction, „What God has joined together , let no man put asunder.“

In conjunction with the fact that the marital act has been ordained for procreation we find a number of realities that possess a morally relevant value. First, we have the morally relevant value of the child as a human person that will come into existence when one does not actively intervene to hinder it. Second, there is a morally relevant value inherent in the finality and determination of the spousal act as the faculty for the transmission of life, when this faculty is actualized during the fertile period. And thirdly, a morally relevant value belongs to the very bond which unites the two determinations of the marital act, namely its power to express and realize the most intimate human union of the spouses and its power to endow a child with life.

Another general source of moral obligations is to be found in the metaphysical situation and limitation of man. Because of this, man is not permitted to perform certain acts which „in themselves“ could very well be good if considered exclusively in their relation to the morally relevant object without taking into account the morally relevant elements in the finite subject. Inasmuch as he is a contingent person, man necessarily has his boundaries and therefore lacks certain rights. When he claims rights which he does not possess, or decides to do what, as man, he is not allowed to do, he transgresses his metaphysical situation as contingent person.

Cf. *Humanae Vitae*, No. 13, where the same point is emphasized, Cf. also Carlo Caffarra's contribution to *Elternschaft und Menschenwürde* (Schönstadt: Patris Verlag, 1984).

In our relations to earthly authorities there are analogies to this. Thus, for example, parents have certain rights over children and their education which a third party may not claim, at least as long as the parents do not wholly abuse their rights. Similarly, a judge possesses a jurisdiction which allows him to legally condemn or acquit.

If our fellow human beings be they parents, judges, or hold other offices possess rights which we cannot claim, then it is not surprising that God, as absolute person, possesses exclusive rights which are grounded more deeply in his absolute nature than the above mentioned rights are grounded in the nature of their subjects who acquire these rights in virtue of merely accidental circumstances. It is essentially and necessarily impossible for man, in virtue of his human and contingent nature, to possess those rights which proceed from the nature of the divine Being. Thus God is the Lord of life, while man has no authority with respect to the termination of human life. In a similar way, man is not the lord of the beginning of human life. The exception to this is that limited sphere within which he has been given responsibility for the origin of human life. And this responsibility is tremendous and awesome enough, despite its limited character. For man is free to enter into marriage, to consummate it and even to exercise natural family planning when there are serious enough reasons for avoiding the conception of a new child. Yet man has no sovereignty over the bond that exists between the spousal union and fertility. Hence, any active intervention or any rupture of this sacred bond constitutes a transgression of the essential limits of justifiable human action.

Similarly, man has no right to end another's life by euthanasia or his own by suicide. One of the reasons for this is that in doing so man arrogates for himself a right which he absolutely does not possess. The fact that he lacks such a right is grounded, in the first instance, in his

19. For the Catholic there is still a fourth general source of moral relevance. It is the theoretical authority of the Church, that is, the Godgiven authority to teach the truth in matters of faith and morals. The Church disposes of this theoretical authority not only when she speaks *ex cathedra* or proclaims dogmas through conciliar decrees, but also whenever she exercises, even if not with the same explicit clarity, the official magisterium grounded in tradition.

There is perhaps also a fifth source of moral obligation for the believing Catholic. It is the positive or practical authority of the Church. The simple fact that the Church has clearly rejected contraception as immoral should be a sufficient reason for the Catholic not to practice it, if only out of obedience to the Church. For the Church possesses a positive authority in general, in virtue of which she can impose obligations and make positive prescriptions which bind us morally, even when the matter in question is neutral in itself (such as abstinence from meat on Fridays).

But apart from this and much more important is the fact that every believing Catholic is bound in conscience to believe - as long as he believes in the divine origin of the Church and its divine government and illumination as it is manifested in the theoretical authority of the Church - that the position of the Church on a moral question (even when it is not presented with a formally infallible authority) is much more reliable than his private judgment and much safer from error than any other private opinion. This is especially true when the individual Catholic has no clear evidence to the contrary of a position taken by the ordinary magisterium of the Church. Moreover, no one can claim earnestly, after serious investigation, that the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* are merely the singular individual opinions of one Pope rather than recognizing them for an expression of a teaching of the Church that has been repeated and formulated throughout different periods of time. (Even most Protestants have held the same until the Lambeth Conference in 1930). Thus many authors, including Hans Küng in his book against Papal Infallibility, have argued that this teaching possesses the marks of „general infallibility“ of Church Teaching.

Cf. J.F. Constanzo, SJ, "Papal Magisterium and *Humanae Vitae*," *Thought*, XXIX, No. 4 (October, 1970), especially pp. 640, 642-653. For Catholics that do not understand the inner evidence of the arguments and the rational grounds for the immorality of contraception, the argument from authority retains its full validity.

20. Cf. *Humanae Vitae*, No. 13.

21 Max Horkheimer, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz anderen*, (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> Max Horkheimer , *ibid.*, p. 74:

„Die ‘Pille’ müssen wir mit dem Tod der erotischen Liebe bezahlen. Ja. Die ‘Pille’ macht Romeo und Julia zu einem Museumsstück. Lassen Sie es mich drastisch sagen: Heute würde Julia ihrem Romeo erklären, daß sie nur noch schnell die ‘Pille’ nehmen wolle und dann zu ihm komme. Ich halte es jedoch für meine Pflicht, den Menschen klar zu machen, daß wir für diesen Fortschritt einen Preis bezahlen müssen und dieser Preis ist die Beschleunigung des Verlustes der

Sehsucht, letztendlich der Tod der Liebe“.

Horkheimer writes:

„Zugleich mit dem Gedanken an Gott stirbt auch der Gedanke nach einer absoluten Wahrheit und die Moral wird zur Sache von Geschmack und Laune“.

Max Horkheimer „Es stellte sich nämlich heraus, daß gläubige Katholiken die größte Bereitschaft zeigten, den Verfolgten zu helfen“.

<sup>23</sup> See *Humanae Vitae*, 8, 62 ff., and 73.

<sup>24</sup>. This was emphasized in *Gaudium et Spes* and in *Humanae Vitae*.

<sup>25</sup>. Such an attempt is undertaken with a philosophically incredible naiveté by W. Wickler in his book *Sind wir Sünder?* In this work he not only uses merely factual behavioral patterns of men but also general animal behavior and statistical data on their sexual behavior in order to establish or reject moral norms. Thus, Wickler attempts to attack *Humanae Vitae* and to justify artificial birth control on the basis of ethological research. Cf. Wolfgang Wickler, *Sind wir Sünder?* (München, 1969). For an analysis of the relation between biological facts and morality see also D. von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical* and A. Laun, *Die naturrechtliche Begründung*, p. 51ff., where this naive interpretation of "nature" as moral norm is thoroughly refuted.

<sup>26</sup> And it have been precisely Pope Paul VI and John Paul II who have projected extraordinary understanding and loving compassion of the Church in both their teachings and it may be hard to imagine a more loving and compassionate Pope than John Paul II.

27. Cf. D. von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical*, p. 70: The argument in question "equates a moral evil, the use of artificial contraception, with a misfortune, a morally relevant evil the harming of marriage. And here all the amoralism of situation ethics appears, which showed its ugly face in the 'majority report' of the papal commission on birth control. We must say here with the greatest emphasis that we are never allowed to do something morally evil in order to prevent a misfortune. Sins, which offend God, and great misfortunes (the destruction of high values through no moral fault of ours) are absolutely incomparable. Sin alone offends God; no misfortune - however great - is commensurate with the fearful disharmony issuing from an offense of God."

Unfortunately, many of those who attack *Humanae Vitae*, among them some Catholic moral theologians, defend their positions by using arguments grounded in situation ethics and utilitarianism. They do this by not only pointing out the difficulties that would burden some couples who would submit to the teachings of the Church, but by making these hardships the decisive argument against the teachings presented in *Humanae Vitae* and other documents. The Christian can never love or sympathize too much with those who are undergoing serious trials. Yet he must beware of a false compassion and disorderd sympathy which carries with it the risk of leading to an opposition against moral absolutes.

What is ignored in all of this is the central fact of the above noted absolute primacy of the moral sphere. One also overlooks usually because of an implicit or often even an openly held hedonistic philosophy the profound happiness that is possible in marriage even when the marital act is excluded for a short time or even for longer periods or, indeed, for ever. There are certainly great sacrifices involved for the couple, be it because of external separation, travel, war or imprisonment or of the demands implied by moral obligations. But the authors in question usually forget the numerous possibilities outside of sexual intercourse in which one can express and fulfill the intention of marital love to give oneself to and be united with the beloved, to bring happiness to the beloved and receive it in return.

That a temporary restraint from sexual relations leads to a deepening and spiritualization of love rather than harming it, is borne out by the experiences of numerous married couples, even nonChristians, as reported by M. Horckheimer in his response to *Humanae Vitae*, in which he speaks of the necessity of overcoming a consumer attitude which takes sexual selfdonation for granted.

Above all, when it is a question of an act that is immoral in itself, no suffering can be so great as to allow the commission of a sin in order to avoid it.

<sup>28</sup> For it is certainly morally questionable or even objectionable when one uses the natural regulation of conception in order to escape the noble obligation and vocation of husband and wife to cooperate generously with God's creative intentions.

<sup>29</sup> See the passages from *Familiaris Consortio*, No. 31 and 32, quoted on pp. 2-3 of this article.

<sup>30</sup> Hence the moral obligation, the clarification of which was the task of the present investigation, issues a special call to us to strive toward and to yearn for a liberation from a secret arrogance and rebellion against God. In order to be understood, this truth demands that we grasp without any reservations the fundamental fact that God must be affirmed as God and man as man in all his contingency, and that „only one thing is needful: “that God not be offended but rather glorified, and that it profits a man nothing „if he gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his soul.“ (Mark 8:36.) See also Luke 10:42.