

The Anthropological Vision of *Humanae Vitae*

KAROL WOJTYLA

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM E. MAY

John Paul II Institute
Washington, DC

Translator's Introduction

THE ITALIAN text of Karol Cardinal Wojtyla's "La Visione Antropologica della *Humanae Vitae*" was published in *Lateranum* 44 (1978), pages 125–45, the tenth anniversary of the publication of Pope Paul VI's encyclical. It is a most important and helpful essay. In particular, Cardinal Wojtyla's painstaking analysis/comparison of relevant texts from Vatican Council II's pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and from *Humanae Vitae* enables us to see that Paul's encyclical deepens and enriches the "personalistic" understanding of human beings and of the conjugal act. By doing so, Wojtyla shows how totally false is the claim, commonly made by dissenting theologians such as Louis Janssens, Charles Curran, and Bernard Haering that the "personalism" of *Gaudium et Spes*, to which they contrast the "biologism" or "physicalism" of the encyclical, actually justifies contraception. Moreover, in his analysis of the "principle of totality" Wojtyla shows that the "integral vision of the human person" set forth in Paul's encyclical fully respects the truth that the human body is integral to the *being* of the human person, whereas the "partial vision" championing contraception looks upon the human body as material over which the "person" has been given dominion.

This essay by the future Pope John Paul II simply ought not and cannot be ignored. It provides one of the strongest and most profound defenses of Paul VI's great encyclical that I know of. It also offers invaluable background not only to his teaching in *Familiaris Consortio*, §32,

where he says that the differences, both “anthropological and moral, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle . . . are ultimately rooted in irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality,” but also to the ideas he developed so magnificently in his “theology of the body.” I think it highly fitting to make this essay, written to commemorate the tenth anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, available in English.

The text of Wojtyła’s great essay in English translation follows.

A Question of Method

In a series of themes dedicated to consider the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which is one of the key documents of the pontificate of Paul VI, it is necessary to take into consideration the theme of anthropology. The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* contains not only a definite vision of man—a properly anthropological vision—but is, in addition, based on this vision as a foundation. This corresponds, after all, to the nature and content of the document. *Humanae Vitae* is concerned with principles of conjugal morality and is a document of the pontifical Magisterium in the field of ethics. It is evident that ethics presupposes anthropology. The truth about man is at the basis of all the principles of human morality. Thus this truth about man is a premise in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the truth without which the relevant principles of morality would not be fully founded and, even more, would in a certain way be suspended in the air. The author of *Humanae Vitae* is aware that, by reminding us of and confirming these principles of conjugal morality to which his encyclical is dedicated, he proclaims the law of God. The law of God, with its entire content, is concerned with man. It obliges him, but at the same time it serves him. It always tends to a good objective, which is the “good of the person,”¹ the good by means of which the essential value of man is confirmed and his very “humanness” (*humanum*) is strengthened.

It is therefore evident that a document such as the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* characterized by this content embraces an adequate concept and vision of man. Such a concept and vision is indeed its basis. This anthropological stratum of the document does not appear in the form of a systematic exposition, but is rather “outlined” in it and in this way

¹ The concept of “the good of the person” (*das objektive Gut für die Person*) has been elaborated in contemporary ethics by Dietrich von Hildebrand. See his *Ethik* [English translation: *Christian Ethics* (New York: David McKay Co., 1953)]. Both components of this concept are important, whether that indicating the objectivity of this good or that giving evidence for its relationship with the personal object and its connaturality with respect to the person.

permeates the whole content and the entire text from beginning to end. By analyzing the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* we can discover a broad portrait of *anthropological* thought, and we can also see the possibility of enriching it with a content that will be simultaneously more detailed and more systematic. A penetrating reflection on individual formulations of the text allows us to ascertain how these are fitted into the whole of the truth about man and how from this emerges that coherent image that we can rightly call the “anthropological vision” of the encyclical.

In what has been said thus far are contained already the premises for defining the method that must serve us in this present study. In broad lines we are dealing with an exegetical method. We propose above all to analyze the text of *Humanae Vitae* and, in a certain way, the whole text, focusing our attention particularly on those points that directly present, as was already said, its anthropological stratum. But we will not limit ourselves only to interpreting the text from the viewpoint of its anthropological content; we will also try to penetrate into the profound significance of this content, searching for the coherence among the formulations that seem to be “dispersed” throughout the document, given that they are matched in various parts of the text and, in a certain way, in the different circumstances created by the guiding thread of the encyclical. Thus the exegesis (analysis) of the text (in different contexts), by means of a search for coherence among its individual formulations, must be transformed simultaneously into a synthesis of its concept of man, of that truth about him that is explicitly presupposed in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and, what is even more important, constitutes both the basis and the support of the normative text of the document.

Humanae Vitae, in which the normative content is the most essential (we are, in fact, dealing with a document of the Magisterium on morality), precisely for this reason gives its greatest attention to the consideration of human actions. Therefore the anthropological vision proper to the encyclical is a vision of the man who acts in a quite specific relationship to another man; specifically, in the reciprocal relationship between man and woman as spouses, and, indeed, in their marital embrace. The principal theme of the document is thus that particular action, and at the same time the mutual cooperation of the man and the woman, that constitutes the “conjugal act.” Nonetheless, according to the ancient adage “*operari sequitur esse*” (action follows being), in the sphere of human acts is revealed a most profound image, the image of the acting subject precisely in what properly constitutes his being.² Thus the many enunciations proper to the

² The author of the present article has already expressed his view on this matter in *Osoba I czyn* (Krakow: Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, 1969) (*The Acting*

encyclical on action, and particularly on the action and cooperation of husband and wife, concretized in the acts of marital embrace, allow us to draw conclusions regarding the nature of the acting and cooperating subjects. These enunciations permit us to investigate the way in which the author of the document sees the person through the prism of his acts, how he sees the person who is the man and the woman through the prism of these individual acts that reveal not only the masculinity and femininity of the acting subjects but also their personal subjectivity.

Our method of anthropological analysis must therefore be in a certain way *a posteriori*; it must be deduced from judgments on human action with this aim in view: to formulate judgments on man himself.

The Context: Man in a Period of Progress

These considerations of the method to be used in this study are in no way changed by the fact that the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* introduces us from beginning to end into the context of some general judgments about man that explain the genesis of the ethical problem that will be the object of the document. A general judgment of this kind is, for example, the affirmation that “man has made enormous progress in the dominion and rational organization of the forces of nature, so that he strives to extend this dominion to his whole being: to his body, to his psychical life, to his social life, and finally to the laws that regulate the transmission of life” (*Humanae Vitae*, §2). This global characteristic is enough to show that the ethical problem to be treated in the document and the anthropological truth that must support the resolution of this problem point to contemporaneity, that is, to the level of thought about human acts that is reached by means of all the conquests of man himself in the field of nature. Thus on the horizon of this encyclical appears contemporary man, “economical man” or “technical man,” the one who in the name of the premises of that same “progress in the dominion and organization of the forces of nature” would like to take a position with respect to himself, to his own humanity, not foreseeing that a position of this kind could include in itself a certain alienation from what is decisive for his very being. By this is meant an alienation from what immutably constitutes man as the object of morality: “ethical man,” the man who has entered into the perennial era of the “knowledge of good and evil” (cf. Gen 3), that is, the man of conscience. The level of his responsibility for the world of objects—things that constitute the exterior criterion of progress—is one

Person [Boston: Riedel, 1979]). In a more concise form he has expressed it in his essay “Teoria-Prassi: un tema umano e cristiano,” during the inaugural session of the International Homonymous Congress at Genoa, September 8, 1976.

thing; quite another is the level of his responsibility for the humanity in his essence, his own and that of others: for the world, that is, of the personal subject.

This pervasive way of speaking about the man of the epoch of progress provides a clear context in which the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* tends to direct its lens on the man who has entered once for all into the era of the knowledge of good and of evil and can never abandon it without putting his very humanity at risk. The "ethical man" is not interchangeable; it is impossible to replace him with respect to his own proper being with the formula "technical man" or "economic man." To render judgment about questions that concern the person in the essence of his humanity, and also precisely there where procreation is at stake, that is, in a certain way the reproduction of humanity in every new human being through the cooperation of persons, man and woman, we must again ascend to the concept of the humanity of man himself. The "ethical man" cannot be obscured by any of his incarnations, the fruit of civilization. Incarnation or perhaps alienation? Does the "technical man," the "economic man," signify only the man who dominates the forces of nature or also the one who subordinates himself to them, who considers his own humanity only as a function of these forces? Where is the limit between the one and the other?

One can suppose that these profound reflections and these thoughts about man emerged in the heart of Paul VI when he prepared his encyclical, when he had to respond to the questions posed to the supreme Magisterium of the Church by the contemporary "man of progress": "the conclusions which the Commission³ had reached could not be considered by us as definitive, nor could their judgment dispense us from a personal examination of a serious question. . . ." The author of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, "having attentively evaluated the documentation and after mature reflection and assiduous prayer," is certain that, "in virtue of the mandate entrusted to us by Christ" (*HV*, §6), he cannot respond in any other way to the question addressed to him, a question that pertains to most delicate matters in the field of human morality, in the field of the self-realization of man, except by doing so in the name of "an integral vision of man." The author of the encyclical, moreover, is aware that he has an obligation to the man of today, who in a way perhaps not perceptible to himself succumbs to alienation from his own proper

³ Here Paul refers to the Commission established by John XXIII in 1963, whose composition and field of research had been amplified by Paul VI the following year. The task of this Commission, one of strictly consultative character, was the study, possibly in its various aspects, of the problem of the regulation of births in conformity with the principles of ethics.

humanity and, in the name of progress, becomes only the “economic man” or the “technical man,” to call to mind, humbly and firmly, the integral vision of man, through which, so to speak, Christ lives and dies: a vision in which man finds once more and confirms himself as “man the human—*homo humanus*.”⁴

It might even appear strange that the response to a concrete question in the field of conjugal morality can have such strong anthropological implications, that it can become the field of this struggle for the value and meaning of humanity itself. Nonetheless, the analysis of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* seems to persuade us of this, above all if we take into account not only the text but also the context. The “context” signifies here the concurrence of the circumstances that accompanied this document of the Magisterium of Paul VI. In fact, it is well known that the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* is not only a document but an event that immediately had many phases and repercussions.⁵ It seems that at the deepest level of this event must be considered the controversy and the struggle for man himself, for the value and meaning of humanity, that is, for the most fundamental vision of man. The controversy and struggle unfolds, in a certain way, in each man, and at the same time it is carried on by men of the modern stage of history. It is necessary that in this controversy the word of Christ be heard, the word of the One of whom Vatican Council II has said: “he fully reveals man to himself” (*Gaudium et Spes*, §22). Certainly, indeed, the fullness affirmed by Vatican Council II was in the mind of the author of *Humanae Vitae* when he appealed to an integral vision of man.

Dimensions of the Person

The encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, at the end of its introduction of the positive meaning of the integral vision of man, calls to mind the analysis of conjugal love, referring to what has been set forth on this subject in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican Council II. Without any doubt there had been made the affirmation that, in considering the prob-

⁴ This integral vision of man was expressed in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican Council II, where almost the whole of part 1, “The Church and the Vocation of Man,” was dedicated to this issue. See in particular *Gaudium et Spes*, chapter 1, §12 ff, especially §22.

⁵ See *Wprowadzenie do encykliki Humanae Vitae w “Notificationes” e Curia Metropolitana Cracoviensi, A.D. 1969*, Nn. 1–4. Italian translation: *Introduzione all'Enciclica Humanae Vitae da “Notificationes” e Curia Metropolitana Cracoviensi A.D. 1969* (Januarius–Aprilis) Nn. 1–4 (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1969). See also “*Analecta Cracoviensia*,” 1969, Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne w Krakowie (Associazione Polacca di Teologia a Cracovia).

lem of procreation, one must keep in mind “man in his integrity and his vocation in its integrity.” The constitution *Gaudium et Spes* places at the very first the integral vocation of man, whose basis is nothing else than the truth about man, the full reality of humanity, that is, the dignity of the person. These terms show with sufficient clarity the intimate relationship between the ontology of man and his axiology: being and value together must be the hermeneutic principle of man. This becomes particularly so when we unite hermeneutics, or the science of understanding man, with the analysis of love, as happens in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and subsequently in *Humanae Vitae*. In fact, the meaning of love is for man a most peculiar value [*la ragione dell’amore è l’uomo quale valore peculiare*]. Consideration of this value allows us to understand better the very being of man as person and gift. An understanding of this kind seems to be an essential and constitutive condition of any enunciation whatsoever on the theme of love.

In *Humanae Vitae* we read: “Through their reciprocal personal gift, proper and exclusive to them, the spouses seek the communion of their being in view of a mutual personal perfection, to cooperate with God in the generation and education of new life” (*HV*, §8). The document here emphasizes “the communion of their being,” but the use of the concept of “person” seems to be very sparse in the entire document. It speaks simply of man; and in speaking of love it does not call it “personal” but rather “human” (“it is first of all a truly human love”). In this regard it is possible to say that the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* is a document that can be called “humanistic” rather than “personalistic.” At the same time, it is difficult to understand this humanism in any other way than as personalistic. If *Humanae Vitae* places as a fundamental condition for the integral vision of man (or of the correct concept of him) the so-called principle of integrity or totality, that is, the necessity of considering him beyond “partial perspectives—be they of the biological or psychological, the demographic or sociological orders” (*HV*, §7)—the encyclical seems by this to indicate that the ethical order must be based on what is essentially human. And this precisely seems to be what is essentially personal. Moreover, the whole argumentation of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, to which *Humanae Vitae* explicitly refers,⁶ authorizes this way of

⁶ See *Humanae Vitae*, §7: “[I]t is good to state very precisely the true concept of these two great realities of married life [the author notes that Paul here is referring to conjugal love and responsible parenthood], keeping foremost in mind what was recently set forth in this regard, and in a highly authoritative form, by the Second Vatican Council in its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.”

thinking: the dignity of the human person is the basis of man's vocation; it thus constitutes the essential content and meaning of that vocation.

Even if we note that *Humanae Vitae* rarely uses the term "person," there is nonetheless no doubt that it considers man as person and understands the reciprocal gift of man and woman in marriage in the same way that *Gaudium et Spes* does, that is, as that reciprocal gift of persons, "who," we read, "mutually give and receive each other" (GS, §48), in such a way, indeed, that there arises "this intimate union, insofar as it is the mutual gift of two persons" (ibid.). By seeking, in conformity with the directives of the encyclical itself (HV, §7), its bases in an analysis of the concept of love in the pastoral constitution of Vatican Council II, we reach in this way the anthropological vision of the aforesaid constitution, which is profoundly "personalistic."⁷ Certainly, this document is not content solely with the term "person," but seeks to clarify what reality corresponds to this term and this concept—in particular, what reality corresponds to it in revelation, and therefore also in theology.

It is here that we encounter the bold analogy by means of which the pastoral constitution seeks to respond to the whole tradition of theological anthropology that conceives man above all as made "in the image and likeness of God." This image and likeness concern not only his spiritual nature, by means of which he is constituted a person in his individual unrepeatable, but also the dimension of relation, that is, the reference to another person inscribed within the interior structure of the person. This dimension reflects in a certain way the Trinitarian mystery in God. In the pastoral constitution we read: "The Lord Jesus, in praying to the Father, 'that they may all be one . . . even as You, O Father, are in me and I in You' (Jn 17:21–22), has suggested to us . . . a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons and the union of the children of God in truth and love." The following phrase explains what this likeness consists

⁷ It suffices to compare the formulations that we find in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, part 2 (chapter 1: "The dignity of marriage and the family and their valuation"). There, for example, we read of the "human act" by means of which there arises the institution of marriage and "personal progress." Of conjugal love it is written that it is "directed from person to person," and that it embraces "the good of the whole person." Marriage is defined as a covenant of personal love rooted in the "irrevocable personal consent" of the spouses. Of the spouses we read that they have been "created to the image of the living God and have been established in an authentic personal dignity." It seems that, in *Gaudium et Spes*, the term "person" is the equivalent, in a certain way, to that of "eminently human." We read, for example, that conjugal love, precisely because it is "eminently human, is directed from person to person with a sentiment rooted in the will, and embraces the good of the whole person."

in: this likeness shows that man, “who is the only creature on earth that God has willed for his own sake, can discover his own self only by means of a sincere gift of himself” (GS, §24).

If the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* makes reference to this analysis of conjugal love that we find in the pastoral constitution of Vatican Council II, it indirectly also refers to the personalistic anthropology that in *Gaudium et Spes* constitutes the basis of the argument on the subject of love, “in a very authoritative way,” as we read in *Humanae Vitae* (§7). If in the document cited it is said that “the spouses seek by means of their reciprocal gift . . . a communion of their being,” then behind a formulation of this kind, of necessity short and laconic, lies concealed the whole truth about man as a person, that is, “the only creature God has willed for his own sake . . .,” the man who “can fully discover his own self only by means of a sincere gift of himself.” This communion of persons to which, according to the words already cited from *Humanae Vitae*, “the spouses tend by means of their reciprocal personal gift” is the communion that comes to birth from the mutual gift of persons, from the gift of one person to the other.⁸ The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* affirms the personalistic vision of marriage, in which man, considered as person, signifies not only his being (“an individual substance of a rational nature”) but also his quality. In fact, only when considered as a quality can this being become a gift: it can objectively offer a gift and at the same time be accepted as a gift and be experienced as such. Love also means to give, that is, to make a gift, which is simultaneously to receive; in addition, this receiving becomes at the same time a giving. In this way the spouses “tend to the communion” that becomes always more intimate and perfect (see *HV*, §8). If we make our exegesis of the document of Paul VI on the basis of “this very authoritative formulation” of Vatican Council II—and therefore in conformity with the methodological directive of the document itself (see *HV*, §7), we will see to what extent this global anthropological vision penetrates the concept of love that we find in both these documents, and to what extent and in what form it emerges from this conception. It seems that we can have no doubt of its personalistic concept of man, conformable to the tradition of the entire Christian anthropology that is expressed in the doctrine of Vatican Council, particularly in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. The reality of the person has become the key for resolving many humanistic problems and many ethical dimensions of our day. Among these, marriage and the family have a particular place.

⁸ Very significant is the formulation in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, §12, where this “community” is defined as a “*communio personarum*.”

Subjectivity

Humanae Vitae in its own analysis of conjugal love affirms that “it is first of all a fully human love, that is to say of the senses and of the spirit” (§9). In the following it explains what this simultaneously twofold and unitary character of conjugal love consists in. It is not, then, “a simple movement of instinct or sentiment, but is also and principally an act of free will, destined to maintain itself and to grow by means of the joys and sorrows of daily life, in such a way that the spouses may become one only heart and one only soul, and together attain their human perfection” (ibid.). All this must be present if we are able to verify conjugal love as “fully human.” Ethical and psychological elements that are successfully integrated belong to such a verification. This reciprocal compenetration brings it about that conjugal love is “fully human” and at the same time “of the senses and of the spirit.” Since the integrality of the anthropological vision seems above all to refer itself to the person, it simultaneously also reveals the full complexity of the person himself, that is, the “human composite.” Both the traditional concepts of man, the personalistic and the dualistic [understood in the sense that the tradition affirms man as a composite of body and soul (translator’s clarification)], are present in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. But perhaps the dualistic tradition is expressed in a more explicit way in the text itself. The personalistic tradition is found more as the implication of many formulations that derive from the dualistic tradition. In particular, this stands out when we pass from the analysis of the paragraphs devoted to conjugal love to those that concern responsible parenthood. The aforementioned methodological directive (cf. *HV*, §7) permits us, even here, to call to mind the parallel exposition of this theme presented in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (§51).

By taking this approach we can take into account the fact that the relevant text of the pastoral constitution, which presented in 1965 the teaching of the Church on the “harmony between human love and respect for life” as the expression of the supreme Magisterium of the Church, is related in a very special way to *Humanae Vitae*, to what Paul VI taught in 1968. The comparative analysis of both texts in which the principal concern was the formulation of the ethical principle shows clearly a noteworthy progress in this matter with respect to the anthropological vision. “For when it is a question of harmonizing conjugal love and the responsible transmission of life,” we read in *Gaudium et Spes*, §51, “the moral character of the behavior does not depend only on sincere intentions and the evaluation of motives; but this must be determined by objective criteria that have their foundation in the very nature [Wojtyła’s

Italian text has *dignità* and not *natura*] of the human person and of his acts, and that preserve the full meaning of mutual giving and of human procreation in the context of true love.”

The parallel text in *Humanae Vitae* contains fewer elements of a general nature, but deepens and synthesizes what is pertinent to the specific problem, confirming the “inseparability of the two aspects: unitive and procreative” (§12). Under this heading we read what follows: “This doctrine, often expressed by the Magisterium, is based on the inseparable connection, willed by God and that man may not break on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act, the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning.” In what follows, *Humanae Vitae* explains the fundamental thesis of the ethical problem treated here. “Indeed, by its own intimate structure, the conjugal act, while it unites the spouses in a profoundly intimate way, makes them fit (worthy) [the Italian of Wojtyła’s text has “*li rende atti*”; the Latin text has “*eos idoneos facit*”] of generating new lives according to laws inscribed into the very being of man and woman. By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves integrally the meaning of mutual and true love and its orientation to the most high vocation of man to parenthood” (§12).

The author of *Humanae Vitae* closes this paragraph, which seems to be the central one of the encyclical, with a meaningful expression. “We think that men of our time are particularly capable of affirming the profoundly reasonable and human character of this fundamental principle” (§12). If we consider certain reactions to the encyclical, in particular those given the widest publicity, we can doubt whether the men of our day are truly prepared, that is, in an adequate way, to comprehend the teaching that the encyclical contains. Moreover, beyond those clamorous and spectacular reactions, we must take into consideration the objective moral good and also the state of contemporary science, to which the author of the document appeals in what follows. It is necessary to take into account the level of knowledge and of self knowledge of man, in other words, the state of contemporary anthropology. Paragraph 12 of *Humanae Vitae*, essential from the viewpoint of the moral doctrine contained in the document, presents very significant anthropological implications. In regard to this we can point out a certain progress with respect to *Gaudium et Spes*, §51, perceiving at the same time that this progress follows the line of the theses contained in the earlier document.

The constitution *Gaudium et Spes* appeals in this matter to the “nature of the human person and of his acts,” emphasizing that these are fundamental objective criteria that must “preserve the integral sense of mutual

donation and of human procreation in a context of true love.” If the nature of the human person is considered as an objective criterion, it will be necessary to let oneself proceed objectively in the whole question and to avoid every error of subjectivism. The human person, being by nature the determining element of objectivity and of the objective order, enters into this consideration as an objective reality.⁹ Equally, both the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* 51 and the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* 12, rigorously distinguishing between what is objective and what is subjective, agree on, and therefore impose, the consideration of the objective reality of the human person from the perspective of the subjectivity of this person. Indeed, they exhort us to concentrate not only on acts, that is, on the human acts of the man and the woman, but they give essential significance to the meaning of these acts (see *Gaudium et Spes*, §51): concern focuses on “the mutual donation of the spouses and of human procreation in the context of true love.” If we wish to analyze this action, we cannot do this without detaching it from the person as the subject who is conscious of the meaning of his own acting. The indispensable objectivism of the ethical order, so emphasized in *Gaudium et Spes* 51 and in *Humanae Vitae* 12, must be, as we can note in both these documents, essentially united with the dimension of personal subjectivity, such that man can see himself as the author of his act and of its meaning, that is, of its significance.

If we affirm that *Humanae Vitae*, §12, represents a certain progress with regard to the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, §51, we do this because the formulations of the encyclical seem to make more precise and to advance the anthropological analysis, or at least they furnish explicit premises. Indeed, it seems that by engaging in an analysis of the act, or rather the cooperation of the spouses in the act we call the “conjugal act,” *Humanae Vitae* 12 emphasizes even more the subjectivity of the cooperating persons. The constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on this matter appeals to the “nature of the human person and of his acts” as the criteria of the action (cooperation) of the spouses. One can say that man as the subject of action is here [in *Gaudium et Spes*, §51] conceived above all objectively and essentially in relationship to the nature of the person that is proper to him. The text of *Humanae Vitae*, presupposing the entire objective dimension of the anthropological vision at the basis of the action-cooperation of the spouses, stresses the subjective moment proper to this action-cooperation. In the objective dimension it is necessary to understand that the “conjugal act, while uniting the spouses intimately, makes them fit to generate

⁹ With respect to this matter, I have elaborated the concept of the “personalistic norm.” See my *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981), 41.

new human lives" (*HV*, §12). To this objective dimension of the act-cooperation of the spouses corresponds "the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning" of the act-cooperation. Objectively, of its nature, the conjugal act "signifies" the one and the other "according to laws inscribed into the very being of the man and of the woman" (§12).

However, the same act is considered in *Humanae Vitae* as an act realized subjectively by concrete persons—a man and a woman—as an act effected and experienced together. The author of *Humanae Vitae* does not limit himself to ascertain, therefore, what that act, that singular act-cooperation of man and woman, objectively "signifies" (*significa*) but broadens his analysis to the "meaning" (*significato*) that the man and the woman can and must attribute to themselves as acting and cooperating subjects. The author of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* therefore affirms that, in this subjective dimension of the act-cooperation, "man may not break on his own initiative [the bond] between these two meanings (*significati*) of the act." There must be actualized a harmony between what the conjugal act objectively "signifies" (*significa*) and the "meaning" (*significato*) that the spouses—the acting and cooperating persons—confer on it in the subjective dimension of their action-cooperation. This dimension, which stands out in the text, is at the same time a direct dimension of obligation since in it the moral value of the conjugal act is affirmed.

The personal subjectivity of man is therefore fulfilled in a definitive way in his "right conscience" (*HV*, §10). A right conscience makes its decisions from the maturity and fullness of human subjectivity; it determines (judges) because it is "the faithful interpreter" (one would rather say, "the *truthful* interpreter") "of the objective moral order established by God." As a consequence, an equitable objectivity that is expressed by means of the observance of that "just hierarchy of values" is the condition and, at the same time, the expression of a mature subjectivity. This true objectivity, the objectivity of a right conscience, allows the spouses to establish an authentic harmony between what the conjugal act objectively "signifies" (*significa*) and the "meaning" (*significato*) that the spouses themselves attribute to it in their own inner attitude, in their subjective action and in their intimate experience. In fact, we cannot doubt that the experience, in our case the intimacy of the conjugal act, belongs to the subjective dimension of man. *Humanae Vitae* equally formulates the ethical norm and the personalistic postulate, requiring that the man and the woman live their marital act in the truth. This interior truth of the act is indicated by the text of *Humanae Vitae* that stresses the unbreakable bond "between the two meanings (*significati*) of the conjugal act" and insists on this so that the spouses may safeguard both those meanings (*significati*) of

that act. This attitude is a confirmation of the right conscience and the mature subjectivity of the persons.

If the author of *Humanae Vitae* has thought it necessary to declare expressly in this context that “the men of our time are particularly capable of affirming the profoundly reasonable and human character of this fundamental principle” (§12), without doubt he had in mind this particular sensitivity of contemporary man regarding the subjectivity of his action and of his experience. The development of anthropology in contemporary philosophy also corresponds to this sensitivity.¹⁰ As is evident from our analysis, this sensibility does not lead man to the position of pure subjectivism. Thus man becomes capable of seeing in a more mature way the authenticity, the reasonableness, and the beauty of the objective moral order when he conceives it with his own conscience as subject. Perhaps then is accomplished precisely what St. Thomas Aquinas wanted to express by speaking of the “participation of the eternal law in the rational creature.”¹¹ The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* follows the same direction, postulating that man “observes with intelligence and love” the laws “written by God in his nature” (§31). Surely he is not speaking of the subjectivity of the person in the sense of the autonomy conceived by Kant and even less in the sense Sartre gives to it, but rather that concept of acts and of the subject that leads to the triumph of a sound liberty without license, by means of a respect for the moral order (see *Humanae Vitae*, §22).

Anthropological Implications of the “Principle of Totality”

In harmony with the analyses already made, we must seek to understand the “principle of totality” recalled in *Humanae Vitae*.¹²

Paul appeals to the principle of totality “illuminated by our Predecessor Pius XII” (*HV*, §17), and insists on its “proper understanding” because,

¹⁰ We find this thought in Decartes, Kant, Husserl; it also reverberates in the development and contemporary state of Thomistic anthropology based on the premises of realism and objectivism.

¹¹ See *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 93, a. 2.

¹² See Pius XII, *Address to the Participants in the 26th Congress of the Association of Italian Urologists*, 8 October 1953, AAS 45 (1953), 673–79: “In virtue of this principle the individual members are subordinate to the body in its totality, and must be subordinated to it in case of conflict. As a result, the one who has received the use of the whole organism has the right to sacrifice a particular member if the preservation or functioning of this member causes notable harm to the whole, a harm impossible to avoid in any other way.” In what follows the pope declares that sterilization that prevents pregnancy is not morally admissible because it does not correspond to the conditions set forth in the “principle of totality.” Fertility itself does not pose a danger to the organism.

as is clear from *Humanae Vitae*, §3, this principle can be interpreted in an erroneous way. The proper understanding of the principle of totality, to which he refers, is strictly tied to the integral vision of man, a vision that is the point of departure of the whole doctrinal reasoning of the encyclical. In this way, as we have already said, anthropology enters into the document from beginning to end, even if its ethical power must be discovered by taking leave of the anthropological elements of the text, of its formally ethical and normative content.

“If the mission of generating human life is not to be exposed to the arbitrary decrees of men,” we read in *Humanae Vitae*, §17, it is necessary “to recognize unsurpassable limits to the possibility of man’s dominion over his own body and its functions . . . these limits cannot be determined except by the respect due to the integrity of the human organism and its functions, according to the principles noted above and according to the proper understanding of the ‘principle of totality’.” In fact, the whole line of reasoning in favor of the inseparability of the two meanings of the conjugal act had been based—as we have sought to show—on the anthropology of the personal subject. In the following also the reasoning on the moral licitness of the recourse to the so-called infertile periods (see *Humanae Vitae*, §16) obliges us to consider not only man the person, man the subject, but at the same time this specific, concrete man: the man and the woman whose action is above all a cooperation having as its common object the body, specifically in its sexual structure, the body proper to a human. The entire balance of *Humanae Vitae*, as a document of the Magisterium of the Church that it seeks to express, refers principally to this concrete reality. The elements of the anthropology of the person-subject, thus outlined, stand at the base of the document; while the importance of this, its reasonableness, the force of the conviction, and its efficacy depend essentially on the way in which these anthropological elements of the person-subject succeed in unifying themselves within the concrete reality of the actions and sentiments, the immediate substrate of which is the body and the sexuality of man.

As the author of *Humanae Vitae* emphasizes from the beginning of his document, there is widespread in the contemporary world the tendency to consider the whole problematic regarding human life under partial aspects, “be they of the biological or psychological, the demographic or sociological order” (*HV*, §7). We cannot deny that each of these aspects enriches, each in its own sphere, the global vision of man.¹³ But none of these can take the place of this integrality or totality. We will have

¹³ Thus in the encyclical we read, among other things: “The Church is the first to praise and commend the use of intelligence in a work which associates the creature

committed the mistake of absolutizing an aspect, which would be most serious both for anthropology and for ethics. The integral vision of man serves as the base for ethics. That is particularly important in the present field in which there is such a great tendency to consider everything in the light of definite biological processes (or—according to another way of looking at the matter—of physiological processes).¹⁴ Precisely here is the field of the problematic directed at *Humanae Vitae*. The vision of man under different partial aspects is the indirect fruit of particular sciences that, in order to know the same object—because of his complexity (therefore also because of his sovereign richness)—use different methods. With these methods we can surely succeed in reaching a richer knowledge, but indirectly this leads to the dividing and destruction of what is in itself the supreme unity of man. The history of anthropology, of methodical thought about man, manifests different moments of this division and destruction. In particular, there seems to weigh on the modern mentality the division of a Cartesian type that opposes in man his understanding, his consciousness, and his body. As a result of this division it is too easy to examine everything regarding the body as exclusively and solely in the light of somatic processes that, as the progress of medical sciences shows, can be directed and dominated artificially. It is precisely here, among other things, that the problem of the practice and technique of contraception is situated.

If the author of *Humanae Vitae* noted “the unsurpassable limits to the possibility of man’s dominion over his own body and over their functions,” arguing that “these limits cannot be determined except with the respect due to the integrity of the human organism and its functions,” he considers the body not as an autonomous being, with its own structure and dynamic, but as a component of the whole man in his personal constitution; therefore he appeals to the “principle of totality” in a context of the global vision of man. The respect due to the body, particularly in its procreative functions—functions rooted in the whole specific somatic quality of sex—is respect for the human being, that is, for the dignity of the man and the woman. This personal dignity is precisely

in such a close way with his Creator, but she affirms that this must be done with respect for the order established by God” (*Humanae Vitae*, §16).

¹⁴ These concepts have caused equivocations in the polemic that took place after the promulgation of *Humanae Vitae* and, among other things, have led to the charge that the encyclical is biologicistic. See *Wprowadzenie do encykliki Humanae Vitae w “Notificationes” e Curia Metropolitana Cracoviensi, A.D. 1969*, No. 1–4, translated into Italian as *Introduzione all’Enciclica Humanae Vitae*. Here we read, among other things: “The encyclical adopts the integrally anthropological norm and not a ‘biological’ norm in the narrow sense.”

what determines those “unsurpassable limits to the possibility of man’s dominion over his own body and over its functions.” To think and to act correctly, we cannot confine ourselves to any partial aspect that one or another particular science with the greatest “technical” efficacy suggests. We must, on the other hand, integrate these aspects continually in order to reach the integral vision of man, the personal subject. Only on the basis of this vision can we correctly judge the one or the other technique of action (in this case we are dealing directly with the so-called technique of contraception) that assert themselves in the field of particular sciences—for example, those techniques that interfere efficiently in the bio—physiological processes themselves.

These unsurpassable limits of man’s dominion over his own body are rooted in the profound structure of personal being and stand in relationship to a specific value, that is, the personal value of man. It is absolutely indispensable to put these structures and values into evidence, if our aim is the interior correctness in the conjugal act that is destined, above all, to realize the “communion of beings” (see *Humanae Vitae*, §8). It is this that creates the basis for a just criterion in this matter. Man cannot exercise power over his own body by means of interventions or techniques that, at the same time, compromise his authentic personal dominion over himself and that even, in a certain way, annihilate this dominion. This way of exercising dominion over one’s own body and over its functions, although effected with a method elaborated by man’s intelligence, is in contrast with the profound and “global” “given” that man is himself, namely, a person with dominion over himself and that this dominion over himself enters into the integral definition of his freedom.¹⁵ The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* justly exhorts us to see that sound freedom triumphs over license (see §22).

In a particular way the conjugal act demands this, the act where the spouses “by means of a reciprocal personal donation, proper and exclusive to themselves . . . tend to the communion of their being” (*HV*, §8). The

¹⁵ Allow the author to make here a connection between the “principle of totality,” according to the meaning that has been attributed to it in the enunciations of Pius XII and, later on, in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and the “global vision” of man, particularly accentuated in the latter document. Also allow the author to introduce here, in the consideration of this integral vision of man, the concepts elaborated in his own thought on the subject of the human person. See his *The Acting Person*, especially chapters 5 and 6; see also his intervention at the Congress of St. Thomas held in Rome and Naples on 17–24 April, 1974, “Struttura personale dell’ autodeterminazione.” The direction of the analyses in this part of the text of *Humanae Vitae* is explained by the fact that the encyclical not only treats of the “principle of totality” but of the anthropological implications of that principle.

authentic donation, which must express and form the communion of persons, demands dominion over one's self (*HV*, §21). This is the logic of this reciprocal donation of persons: it results necessarily from the control over oneself that is strictly joined to the dominion over oneself with which the encyclical is concerned. Only those who have this dominion over themselves, those who are thus self disciplined, can authentically make a mutual gift of themselves at the level of a person who is aware of his own dignity, that is, to give himself in true freedom. In a donation of this kind is realized equally the personal value of each one of the spouses and the essential value of conjugal love, which is expressed in the communion of persons, in their authentically personal union.

If at this level we seek the just criterion relevant to morality, if at this level we are authorized by the "principle of totality" cited by the author of *Humanae Vitae*, it is obvious that, in order to determine the limits of man's dominion over his own body, we must penetrate into the structures of the personal being and base ourselves on these. One can say with certainty that the anthropological vision of *Humanae Vitae* implies a "personalism," and undoubtedly that form of humanism that, in principle, is opposed to any kind of theory of a materialistic concept of man. This is stressed, for example, by the phrases in which Paul VI (starting from the position of John XXIII) exhorts men, in their efforts to resolve the difficult problems of conjugal morality, not to have "recourse to methods and means that are unworthy of man, that find their explanation only in a materialistic concept of man himself and of his life" (*HV*, §23). It has already been said at the beginning of this study that the problematic of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* introduces us into the very center of essential problems of anthropology and obliges us to give a response to fundamental questions concerning the very being and value of man. "The materialistic conception" of which *Humanae Vitae* 23 speaks can be understood in the sense of a practical and theoretical materialism. Moreover, there are tight and reciprocal bonds between the one and the other form of materialism. Precisely for this reason the author of the encyclical repeatedly appeals to the "principle of totality" in the context of the integral vision of man, a vision essential for a correct concept of morality. For the same reason he admonishes us not to stop with only "partial" aspects (pertaining to biological, psychological, demographic, and sociological orders). Different forms of the materialistic concept of man are a product of the application of only "partial" methods, a product of the absence of an integral vision of the being and value of man in the fullness and depth that are appropriate to him.

The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* explicitly points out the connection between theory and practice in the ambit of anthropology and, above all, of ethics. When he expresses fear that “man, habituating himself to the use of contraceptive practices, ends up by losing his respect for his wife . . . and begins to consider her simply as an instrument of his selfish enjoyment” (*HV*, §17), he undoubtedly uses very severe words, but he does so, solicitous for the dignity of the person, of his inviolable value; he does so, basing himself also on the “principle of totality,” understood within the context of the integral vision of man that demands that we pass beyond the “partial” aspects in order to penetrate the structures of being and action proper to man as person, in order to determine on this level the truth of human acts. One can say that the entire ontology and together with it the entire axiology of the person find their meaning in the affirmation that man cannot be for another man “an instrument.” This truth we find in the philosophical tradition in various formulations. Perhaps Kant has defined this in its most radical form in his so-called second categorical imperative.¹⁶ The doctrine of Vatican Council II, summarizing the traditions of Christian thought and therefore also of Christian anthropology, has expressed this truth in the affirmation that “man . . . is the only creature on earth that God has willed for itself” (*GS*, §24). Hence he can never be treated as a means, prescinding from his personal dignity. The integral vision of man excludes of itself utilitarianism as a principle of action.

Man Seen in the Light of the Intellect and of Faith

The analysis of the different paragraphs of the text of *Humanae Vitae*, taking into account the character of the document, which proposes as its end to present above all the doctrine of conjugal morality, permits us to observe how rich and many tiered are its anthropological implications when it treats, among other issues, the “principle of totality.” Certainly, in a sketch such as the present, one can only point out those implications that help to reconstruct the anthropological vision that stands at the basis of the doctrine set forth and of the practical directives of the encyclical. Nonetheless, this anthropological sketch shows itself verified and completed by a coherent content. The author of *Humanae Vitae* has before his eyes concrete men, applying to them the fundamental dimension of humanity, and it is to this dimension above all that he refers himself.

At the same time he appeals to everything that unites man in a very essential way to God. First, to God as Creator. The theme of the encyclical is directed, in a way quite special, precisely to this bond between man

¹⁶ See I. Kant, *Die Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1904), 65.

and his Creator. Therefore the author of *Humanae Vitae* devotes a paragraph in the section dealing with the question of the fidelity of the spouses to the level of their fidelity to God, “by whom marriage has been established,” emphasizing that the spouses must conform themselves to “the will of the Author of life” (*HV*, §13). “One who uses the gift of conjugal love,” so we read in what follows, “respecting the laws of the generative process acknowledges that he is not the arbiter of the sources of human life but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator” (*ibid.*). The pope is speaking to Christian spouses, but it is certain that his words refer to all who accept the fundamental principle of the relationship between the Creator and the creature; and, recalling to mind the statement of John XXIII, he affirms: “Human life is sacred. . . . Indeed, from its very beginning it requires the creative action of God” (*ibid.*).

This theological realism permits the introduction into the whole of the vision of man apparent in the document of a just proportion between the dignity of man and his fragility. This proportion permeates as it were all the considerations and permits us, after formulating the principle of the divine law, to examine the possibilities of putting it into practice; nor does the encyclical conceal the fact that, “just as with all good things outstanding for their nobility and utility, [keeping] this law requires strong motivation and much effort,” in order to emphasize in what follows that “this cannot be done without the help of God who supports and strengthens the good will of man” (*HV*, §20). In another part of the document, the Eucharist, the sacrament of reconciliation, and prayer are indicated as the means that strengthen human fragility in this difficult way.

There is, therefore, no doubt that the integral vision of man, to which the author of *Humanae Vitae* makes appeal from the very beginning of the document, is a vision of faith. It considers in the light of Revelation the full vocation of man “not only earthly and natural but also supernatural and eternal” (*HV*, §7). No reader of the document can have doubts on this point. A deep study of the text and, among other things, a study of the anthropological implications of the “principle of totality” to which the text of *Humanae Vitae* refers on so many occasions, clearly shows how this vision of faith penetrates into the picture of man shaped by perennially human reflections and by a persevering search for the *truth about himself*. This truth is at the center of the encyclical of Paul VI, which begins with the words “of human life.”