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## *Humanae Vitae*, Women's Rights, and Responsible Parenthood

**Abstract:** The purpose of the article is to analyze the arguments present in *Humanae Vitae* which found positive resonance in the writings of women adopting the papal teaching on the nature of human sexuality and sexual ethics. According to some women, in particular the new feminists, the logic of the papal teaching concerning contraception contributes to promoting the dignity and rights of women as well as responsible parenthood. In their view, contraception does not contribute to women's rights. Instead, it rather exacerbates the imbalance between men and women as well as sanctions the man's irresponsible and hedonistic attitude towards a woman. Using contraception is in a deep sense anti-ecological. It is both disrespectful of the nature of woman's fertility and destructive of relations within the family. The responsible parenthood defined by the papal teaching and by his commentators (both men and women quoted in the article) means taking responsibility for one's sexual acts and their possible effects. The analyzed authors claim that by defending the nature of love, the nature of human beings, and the nature of the objective moral order, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* defends women by defending their nature against the arbitrariness of men or society.

**Keywords:** *Humanae Vitae*, women's rights, new feminism, responsible parenthood

Feminism is commonly associated with the fight for the so-called reproductive rights (rights of free access to abortion and contraception) among other kinds of women's rights. Similarly common is such an understanding of the concept of "responsible parenthood" which associates it with the planned control and limitation of the number of children by means of artificial contraception. Within this mainstream feminist view, the contraceptive pill has contributed to the development of the women's rights as well as enabled the practice of

limited, hence “responsible” reproduction. Therefore, the feminist opposition to the historical encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which condemned the artificial contraception, has come as no surprise. However, the past fifty years since the publication of the encyclical have witnessed the developing variety of the feminist standpoints, while many women have had the chance of experiencing the value of the papal teaching concerning the ethical dimension of human sexuality and conjugal acts.

Within the rich variety of feminisms, there appeared the new feminism which was inspired by the teaching of John Paul II and based on his teaching called *Theology of the Body*.<sup>1</sup> The views of John Paul II, in turn, were largely influenced in terms of the topic of the feminine by St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), who wrote on the equality and specificity of women before World War II. Even before the name “new feminism” itself appeared with this particular meaning (in 1995 in *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 99), quite a few outstanding women expressed their wholehearted support for the Catholic standpoint against not only abortion but also contraception. A lot of these women (some identifying themselves later as new feminists, others not using this term) found the theology of the body attractive and appealing to female sensitivity as well as truly defending women’s dignity and rights. They saw the continuity between the teaching of Paul VI and John Paul II. Obviously, the theology of the body constituted a deep justification for and development of the argumentation given in *Humanae Vitae*. What is more, this collection of Wednesday catecheses of John Paul II (given between 1979 and 1984) was a result of the long-term work started many years earlier, which included Karol Wojtyła’s work on *Love and Responsibility*<sup>2</sup> and the collective work of ethicists contributing to the development of the *Humanae Vitae* arguments published as *Memoriał krakowski*.<sup>3</sup> The team was authorized to work in 1966 by Cardinal Wojtyła, who was asked by Paul VI to provide a deep study of the issue to be resolved in the 1968 papal encyclical. Both the *Memoriał* and the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* discussed the questions of the position and rights of women as well as the responsible parenthood. However, these issues got a radically different interpretation from the mainstream feminist viewpoint. The purpose of this article is to analyze the arguments present in *Humanae Vitae* which found positive resonance in the writ-

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006). Later in my article I use the name theology of the body without capital letters to refer to the teaching of John Paul II on human sexuality.

<sup>2</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (London: William Collins Sons & Co., 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Jerzy Bajda, Karol Meissner OSB, Stanisław Podgórski CSSR, Stanisław Smoleński, Tadeusz Ślipko TJ, Juliusz Turowicz. *Memoriał krakowski. Uzasadnienie katolickiej nauki dotyczącej podstaw moralnych życia małżeńskiego oraz Wprowadzenie do encykliki Humanae Vitae*, 2nd ed. (Poznań: BONAMI, 2012).

ings of women adopting the papal teaching. The question is: Why have some women found the logic of *Humanae Vitae* attractive as promoting the dignity and rights of women as well as responsible parenthood understood in a totally different way from the mainstream feminists? In other words, what is the theoretical basis of the alternative kind of feminism and alternative view on women's rights and responsible parenthood?

Let us look first at the three most important points of the encyclical from the perspective of the topic of this article (described in nos. 10, 12, and 17). In *Humanae Vitae*, 10, Paul VI recommends rational means of recognizing and respecting the natural functions of human procreative processes as well as rational self-control over one's drives and emotions together with careful discernment of the number of children which responsible parents can raise within the framework of respect for the objective moral order. Let my short summary of these points be followed by the exact quotation from the encyclical:

With regard to the biological processes, responsible parenthood means an awareness of, and respect for, their proper functions. In the procreative faculty the human mind discerns biological laws that apply to the human person. With regard to man's innate drives and emotions, responsible parenthood means that man's reason and will must exert control over them. With regard to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time. Responsible parenthood, as we use the term here, has one further essential aspect of paramount importance. It concerns the objective moral order which was established by God, and of which a right conscience is the true interpreter. In a word, the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society. From this it follows that they are not free to act as they choose in the service of transmitting life, as if it were wholly up to them to decide what is the right course to follow. On the contrary, they are bound to ensure that what they do corresponds to the will of God the Creator. The very nature of marriage and its use makes His will clear, while the constant teaching of the Church spells it out. (*Humanae Vitae*, 10)

Responsible parenthood is here associated with using the rational means of planning the size of one's family but always within the frame of respect for the given moral order. Arbitrary redefinition of what is good and bad or counter-natural behavior is irresponsible. With respect to the sexual and procreative activity, it refers to the proper attitude to its natural direction and end. The very meaning of the conjugal act is observed to be objectively given and twofold:

This particular doctrine, often expounded by the magisterium of the Church, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act. (*Humanae Vitae*, 12)

In other words, the conjugal act does not unite effectively if it is willfully deprived of its procreative meaning. Natural infertility, either permanent or temporary due to the phase of the fertility cycle, is not an obstacle to unity of the loving couple, but the artificial intervention is connected with the disuniting exclusion of an important aspect of the person, who should rather be accepted totally. Therefore, the contraceptive pill, being the major topic of ethical consideration in the encyclical, constitutes a serious obstacle to the conjugal unity as it excludes the female fertility and is thus deeply antifeminist because it treats the vital feminine quality as a drawback. Anticipating such negative consequence of using the artificial contraception, Paul VI warns that

a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection. (*Humanae Vitae*, 17)

The pope further warns against the possible effects of artificial methods of contraception being used by public authorities to intervene in the most intimate relations in order to influence the demographic trends.

The extended explanation of the logic of marital love, as I mentioned before, has been provided in the Wednesday audiences by John Paul II. A concise summary of the major points of the theology of the body must include at least four pivotal issues: (1) the personal character of the human body, meaning that human beings express themselves in bodily acts; (2) the conjugal character of marital love, including the physical love of mutual self-giving; (3) the language of the body speaking the truth of a total gift only by joining the unitive and procreative meaning of the sexual act; (4) the given, objective character of the moral order written in human nature and discovered in experience of longing for love and being fulfilled only by love of self-gift following the loving Trinitarian God. So, the theology of the body presented the value of sexual division of humanity: man and woman are both equal and different in order to exist in complementary *communio personarum*. While the dominant world view of human history equalized the human with the male, the papal vision drawn from the depth of the biblical reflection of both the Old and the New Testaments justifies the equal value of both sexes in their complementary difference (yet also stressing the wholeness of each particular person).

Probably never before have women been so deeply recognized and valued in their differences, contributing their femininity to the fullness of humanity. No wonder that this standpoint constituted the basis of what later came to be called the new feminism. Its major tenet stressed that humanity should respect the values represented by women (like certain sensitivity to the value of persons and personal relations, connected with ability to give birth and care for children) and thus make it possible to realize the fullness of humanity by every human being. Promoting women's rights and equality according to new feminists have become associated with recognizing women's right to be different and equal in these differences working for the common good of both men and women. Janne Haaland Matlary claimed that "the real radicalism of emancipation consists in the freedom of truly being oneself, being woman on woman's terms."<sup>4</sup> In her book she refers to the need to promote equality of women, most often being mothers, and requiring recognition of being different and equally valued as men in the public sphere, in politics, in business, etc. However, we can extend this standpoint also to the question of respecting women's nature more broadly. Looking from this perspective, *Humanae Vitae* defends the rights of women by appealing to the man's duty to emotional self-control and duty to adapt to woman's nature and fertility cycle. Man is called to comply with woman's nature and thus respect her rather than use woman as an instrument of his pleasure. A woman using contraception is not really helping herself or caring for her health, but is rather depriving herself of a vital part of her femininity in order to allow a man to use her for his sexual pleasure without his self-control and without taking responsibility for the effects of his sexual behavior. According to the logic of *Humanae Vitae*, explained in an in-depth way by the theology of the body, the conjugal act worthy of its name is only the one in which both man and woman are accepted *in toto*, without interference introduced by any contraceptive means. After all, love requires the total acceptance and total self-gift of persons.

John Paul II's theology of the body, though still not known widely enough, is gaining more and more widespread popularity, especially among Catholics of English-speaking countries due to the energetic activity of its popularizers. Compared to that, the collection titled *Memorial krakowski* is hardly known even in Poland, while it prepared the way for the argumentation present both in *Humanae Vitae* and in theology of the body. It is worth our attention because it contains many anticipatory comments and warnings later confirmed by experience. One of the co-authors of the *Memorial*, Fr. Jerzy Bajda notes the importance of the basic fact of a certain imbalance between the biological participation of man and woman in the sexual act and its effects: the act takes

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<sup>4</sup> Janne Haaland Matlary, *Nowy feminizm. Kobieta i świat wartości*, trans. Małgorzata Ratajczak (Poznań: „W drodze,” 2000), 23. Trans. of this fragment A.G.

place in a woman and both pregnancy and birth of a child encumber her, not the man. This basic difference connected with this imbalance, together with the cyclical dynamic of female fertility, which allows its observation and self-controlled adaptation to it, put important duties on the side of a man. Otherwise, equality in dignity between men and women will not be safeguarded. Therefore, contraception is not contributing to the woman's rights. Instead, it rather exacerbates the imbalance and sanctions the man's irresponsible and hedonistic attitude towards a woman.<sup>5</sup> Simply speaking, the responsible parenthood means taking responsibility for one's sexual acts and their possible effects. *Memorial krakowski* contained a very broad perspective on this responsibility because it also considered the possible effects of contraception on the already born children and the emotional-educational climate within the family. Fathers Juliusz Turowicz and Stanisław Smoleński claim that contracepted sexual acts cannot create the necessary atmosphere of love based on overcoming egoistic attitudes. Parents who cannot practice self-control will not present unselfishness to their children. Their attitude will be full of unrest, nervousness, and only conditional loving, seeking only joy and pleasure, expected in contracepted acts. Turowicz and Smoleński seem to rightly anticipate that such parents may be likely to pamper and spoil their children, teach them to be too soft and comfortable, while in the long run contribute to their neurosis caused by not being loved unconditionally and by being raised in an atmosphere where the parents did not love each other in an unconditional way.<sup>6</sup>

The two above-quoted arguments from *Memorial krakowski* confirm the thesis that using contraception is in a deep sense anti-ecological. It is both disrespectful of the nature of woman's fertility and destructive of relations within the family. That is why a new feminist Michele M. Schumacher writes about the "prophetic value of *Humanae Vitae*" in defending the "human ecology" and the good of nature.<sup>7</sup> Some other quotes from new feminists' writings further confirm the truth of anticipations made in *Memorial* and in *Humanae Vitae*. Janne Haaland Matlary writes that nowadays sexual activity is widely treated as an individual's right to sexual pleasure rather than what it meant earlier, namely giving oneself in relations of love. The contemporary view does not really see a person, because the person is treated instrumentally, while children and abortions are treated as unwanted side-effects. Matlary further complains

<sup>5</sup> Jerzy Bajda, "Zagadnienie równości mężczyzny i kobiety w dziedzinie małżeństwa," in *Memorial krakowski*, ed. Jerzy Bajda, Karol Meissner OSB, Stanisław Podgórski CSSR, Stanisław Smoleński, Tadeusz Ślipko TJ, and Juliusz Turowicz (Poznań: Inicjatywa Wydawnicza Jerozolima, 2012), 28–29.

<sup>6</sup> Juliusz Turowicz and Stanisław Smoleński, "Miłość małżeńska i dobro rodziny," in *Memorial krakowski*, 26–27.

<sup>7</sup> Michele M. Schumacher, "Human Ecology and the Prophetic Value of *Humanae Vitae*," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, vol. 16 (4) (2018): 1227–1260.

that sex is now a “trivial race” without the context of responsibility and commitment, while “women are presented like sexual objects more than ever before.”<sup>8</sup> Another new feminist, Mary Ann Glendon claims that despite a long history of formal equality of men and women, it is the women who bear a larger burden of consequences of divorces, abortions, or lonely fulfillment of house and family duties.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, they are not appreciated in their roles as mothers or in their differences as women. These exemplary arguments not only show the proper social diagnosis and prognosis made by Catholic ethicists at the end of the 1960s but they also explain why many women who can observe long-distance trends of thought and social actions, accept the Catholic teaching on sexual ethics and contraception.

Now let us look at some of the reflections on *Humanae Vitae* collected in a book published in 1993, that is, twenty-five years after the encyclical has been issued. The book had a significant title *Why Humanae Vitae Was Right* and it embraced articles by both men and women of outstanding academic position. John Finnis made the pivotal claim that the contracepted sexual intercourse is just a simulation of the conjugal intercourse, not the real act.<sup>10</sup> Looking from a sharp philosophical point of view, he actually concisely summarized the gist of the papal document which argued that contraception destroys the unity of the couple in the sexual act. Another interesting point raised by Finnis concerns the status of the child created as an effect of the real conjugal acts: in a sense they promote the equality of the child, who is not produced but received by the couple ready to submit to contingencies.<sup>11</sup> Production of a child would seriously lower the child's status compared to parents, making the child unjustly dependent on the will of the parents. Of course, one might say that it deprives the parents of their exercise of free will concerning the planning of their child. However, openness to the unbidden in this case is the standard which humanity should keep rather than give up, because it concerns our relations to another human being, not to a mechanical product. Generally speaking, we may notice that *Humanae Vitae* continued the trend of keeping up with the high moral standards developed within the Judeo-Christian tradition rather than going with the worldly tendency of lowering ambitions and challenges of humanity. This topic was developed by another renowned philosopher G. E. M. Anscombe, who noticed that “Christianity taught that men ought to be as chaste as pagans thought

<sup>8</sup> Matlary, *Nowy feminizm*, 146–147.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Ann Glendon, “Women's Identity, Women's Rights and the Civilization of Life,” in *Evangelium Vitae and Law* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 70; “Feminism and the Family,” *Commonweal*, vol. 124 (3) (1997): 11–15.

<sup>10</sup> John Finnis, “Personal Integrity, Sexual Morality and Responsible Parenthood,” in *Why Humanae Vitae Was Right: A Reader*, ed. Janet E. Smith (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 188.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 190–191.



honest women ought to be; the contraceptive morality teaches that women need to be as little chaste as pagans thought men need be.”<sup>12</sup> But, in order to keep up the standard, the cultural perspective needs the framework within which the sexual act is recognized as having a natural *telos*. Otherwise, Anscombe warns about nothing less but purely logical consequences of the contraceptive activity: “If you can turn intercourse into something other than the reproductive type of act (I do not mean of course that every act is reproductive any more that every acorn leads to an oak-tree but it is the reproductive *type* of act) then why, if you can change it, should it be restricted to the married? Restricted, that is, to partners bound in a formal, legal, union whose fundamental purpose is the bringing up of children? For if that is not its fundamental purpose there is no reason why for example ‘marriage’ should have to be between people of opposite sexes.”<sup>13</sup> It is really impressive how penetrating and wise was Anscombe’s argument made as early as in 1993. Only recently do we see the sociological truth of her diagnosis and the wisdom of the encyclical defending the link between the unitive and the procreative meaning of the sexual act. However, in 1968, and even in 1993, it was really difficult to envision the contemporary scale of social changes leading to the so-called gay marriage, whose real basis was established by breaking the link noticed in *Humanae Vitae*. In fact, there is no limit to possible sexual configurations (other than maybe self-destruction), once this link is disrespected by humans. As Anscombe claimed, “if contraceptive intercourse is all right then so are all forms of sexual activity.”<sup>14</sup> Finally, she persuaded the readers that human beings are able to live up to the moral standards rather than give up on them: “we have got not to be the servants of our sensuality but to bring it into subjection.”<sup>15</sup> Janet E. Smith in the same collection of essays made an appraisal of the natural family planning methods, basing it on the arguments similar to those formulated at the *Memorial krakowski*: “There is rarely ‘mutuality’ in the use of contraception. Most often the woman bears the responsibility for it and she must suffer most of the unpleasant ‘side-effects’ of its use. Natural family planning (NFP), on the other hand, needs the cooperation of both spouses to succeed. Whereas men who engage in contracepted sexual intercourse often come to view women as objects and desire to have them always at their disposal, men using natural family planning learn self-mastery and begin to appreciate the woman and her cycles and needs. Natural family planning is based on respect for both female and male fertility and requires a loving and respectful relationship for successful use.”<sup>16</sup> Her arguments sound persuasive and one may

<sup>12</sup> Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, “Contraception and Chastity,” in *Why Humanae Vitae Was Right: A Reader*, 123.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–137.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>16</sup> Janet E. Smith, “Paul VI as Prophet,” in *Why Humanae Vitae Was Right: A Reader*, 526.



wonder why not all women but just some of them stand on the side of the teaching of the Catholic Church.

A superficial look on the question of contraception makes it look like an effective instrument serving women to take control of their bodily mechanism. However, a lot of empirical data collected by, for example, Mary Shivanandan confirm that contraception alienates women from their femininity and exacerbates the relations of couples, without raising the level of control of one's body (!), while using natural family planning improves the communication of couples and raises the levels of satisfaction with marital life and the level of knowledge about functioning of one's body.<sup>17</sup> Thus, it seems that overcoming alienation is possible through using ecological means of recognizing fertility, accepting it, and acting according to free as well as rational methods of cooperation with nature, while learning seriously how to control oneself. What is very interesting in Shivanandan's book is the evidence that natural methods require a lot of discipline *from men*, which is good for them and for women, and for society, as it teaches them to consider themselves always within relations with others.<sup>18</sup> Similar conclusions about positive effects of using NFP methods are collected in the book by Polish authors involved in promoting the theology of the body and new feminism, Katarzyna and Mariusz Marcinkowscy.<sup>19</sup> What is common to women and men inspired by the papal teaching on sexuality (present in *Humanae Vitae* and the theology of the body) is the positive vision on nature as a gift full of meaning worth discovering by rational means and worth adapting to by disciplined self-control. Consequently, women's natural fertility is viewed positively, while both women and men are treated as rational and free, able to use reason for the recognition of fertile days and able to freely control one's activities. The contrary view recommending contraception is, on the other hand, based on the mechanistic view of nature deprived of inner value (including downgraded view of female fertility) and on the pessimistic view of human nature unable to be rationally controlled.

So generally speaking, as we can see from the above considerations, contraception does not serve women. It only deepens the modern problematic alienation from the body, while the papal theology of the body is a way to overcome this problem by pointing the humanity's attention to the value of the body as an expression of the person as well as to the feminine fertility as a value to be cherished rather than despised and repressed. A woman's right to live her full identity involves her right to be fully accepted by her husband, who should

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Shivanandan, *Crossing the Threshold of Love. A New Vision of Marriage in the Light of John Paul II's Anthropology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 244–250, 259, 261.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 264–266.

<sup>19</sup> Katarzyna and Mariusz Marcinkowscy, *NPR jest O.K.! Nowy styl życia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Rubikon, 2012).

be ready to adapt to her cycle, wait for her, if that is considered necessary by the couple in their particular situation, and accept also the unplanned children, should they happen. Such a view of women's rights consequently leads to the view of responsible parenthood based on mutual and total self-gift of a loving couple. Luke Gormally claims that the faithful commitment of the married couple united in mind and body is a special kind of friendship which

can be realized only through a self-giving love on the part of each spouse. A marriage relationship shaped by that kind of commitment provides what one might call the "moral ecology" which the child needs. A man and woman who treat each other in their sexual relationship as irreplaceable, and to be accepted and loved for just the persons they are, convey to the child a sense of his own dignity as an irreplaceable human being who is cherished for just the person he is.<sup>20</sup>

Such acceptance of a person is connected with accepting the nature of person; nature which is viewed not as a hindrance but as a value linked with this person. Consequently, this nature is not treated as opposed to freedom because freedom is not defined here as license or arbitrariness. Freedom is possible only within the perspective of truth about the good, so any arbitrary activity contrary to nature (connected with the objective moral order) places one beyond the space of freedom. *Humanae Vitae* operates within this perspective which Hans Urs von Balthasar summarized when he wrote that power is given together with "a norm according to which that power is to be exercised."<sup>21</sup> In his text commenting on the encyclical he claims that for Christians the norm is theological (to love one's loved as Christ loves the church—by totally giving oneself to her, though it is impossible to do it exactly the way Christ did it) and it is also the norm for non-Christians but they do not know this norm. I would rather say that the norm of the total self-gift in love is already written down in nature, that is, the nature of the person, so it can be discovered by non-believers, too, though it has been fully uncovered and realized by Christ, so that humans could follow the example and make it happen with the help of the Savior.

Let us now follow carefully the argumentation of von Balthasar, making his point about the structural link between the two meanings of the conjugal act:

The union of husband and wife means more than merely physical fruitfulness, the begetting of children; it means spiritual fruitfulness as well, total surrender to each other. Now, the conjunction in man of the physical and the spiritual

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<sup>20</sup> Luke Gormally, "Marriage and the Prophylactic Use of Condoms," *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* (Winter 2005) vol. 5 (4): 739.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Retrieving the Tradition. A Word on *Humanae Vitae*," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20 (Summer 1993): 445.

involves an inherent ambiguity, for these two aspects of his life are altogether inseparable. Man is at once body and spirit. He is a member of an animal species in which procreation, birth and death are interdependent; and at the same time he is person and spirit, superior to all other species. [...] Therefore, he cannot divert a species-oriented function from its inherent purpose solely in order to satisfy his own personal desires. Or rather, he *can* do so, but not without schizophrenically splitting his own organic unity. For when he acts in this way, he sets his own personal limits on a function of the human species, a function with its own inner finality. Ostensibly, he limits his fertility in this manner so that he can give fuller emphasis to the limitless, personal side of his being. But in doing so he obviously introduces an element of calculation and limitation into an act that is meant to be the symbolic expression of an unconditional love between man and woman.<sup>22</sup>

Acting against the very nature of the act and excluding fertility automatically causes the exclusion of also spiritual fertility: making love calculable, one makes love impossible. In a sense, the nature of love strikes against those who want to redefine it. It defends itself by requiring us to be non-calculating. The opposite example, according to von Balthasar, is the couple using infertile days rather than artificial contraception: “in using the infertile days they are not setting bounds to their love.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, just because a human being is expressing himself/herself through the body, he/she cannot arbitrarily decide on the meaning of the body. They need to respect the meanings given by nature and they need to respect the unlimited nature of love.

Thus, as we have seen, by defending the nature of love, the nature of human beings, and the nature of the objective moral order, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, together with its commentaries and explanations provided in other documents quoted above, defends women by defending their nature against the arbitrariness of men, society, and even themselves. It safeguards them and puts them strongly in a position which cannot be liberally taken away from them. The men have to adapt to women's nature rather than make women adapt to men's pleasure. Men and women are motivated to work on themselves, control themselves rather than use the other for one's pleasure. In a sense it claims that the most fundamental right of woman is the right to be loved totally rather than partly; the right to be accepted in their integral nature and with all their differences contributing to the fullness of humanity.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 447–448.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 449.

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## *Humanae Vitae*, droits des femmes et parentalité responsable

### Résumé

Le but de l'article est une analyse des arguments présents dans *Humanae Vitae*, qui ont trouvé un écho positif dans les écrits des femmes en ce qui concerne l'enseignement de Paul VI sur la nature de la sexualité humaine et sur l'éthique sexuelle. Selon certaines femmes, en particulier certaines des nouvelles féministes, la logique de l'enseignement papal sur la contraception contribue à la promotion de la dignité et des droits des femmes ainsi qu'à une parentalité responsable. À leur avis, la contraception n'apporte rien de positif aux droits des femmes. Au contraire, elle aggrave le déséquilibre entre les hommes et les femmes et autorise l'attitude irresponsable et hédoniste des hommes envers les femmes. L'utilisation de moyens contraceptifs est profondément anti-écologique. Cette attitude exprime le manque de respect pour la nature de la fertilité féminine et nuit aux relations au sein de la famille. La parentalité responsable, telle qu'elle a été définie par l'enseignement papal et par ses commentateurs (hommes et femmes cités dans l'article) signifie assumer la responsabilité des relations sexuelles et de leurs résultats possibles. Ces auteurs affirment qu'en défendant la nature de l'amour, la nature des êtres humains et la nature de l'ordre moral objectif, l'encyclique *Humanae Vitae* défend les femmes, notamment leur nature contre l'autoritarisme des hommes et de la société.

Mots-clés: *Humanae Vitae*, droits des femmes, nouveau féminisme, parentalité responsable

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## *Humanae Vitae*, diritti delle donne e genitorialità responsabile

### Sommario

Lo scopo dell'articolo è quello di analizzare gli argomenti presenti in *Humanae Vitae*, che hanno trovato una risonanza positiva negli scritti delle donne in quanto all'insegnamento papale sulla natura della sessualità umana e dell'etica sessuale. Secondo alcune donne, in particolare alcune nuove femministe, la logica dell'insegnamento papale sulla contraccezione contribuisce alla promozione della dignità e dei diritti delle donne nonché alla genitorialità responsabile. A loro avviso, la contraccezione non porta nulla di positivo ai diritti delle donne. Al contrario, approfondisce lo squilibrio tra uomini e donne e sanziona l'atteggiamento irresponsabile ed edonistico degli uomini verso le donne. L'uso dei metodi contraccettivi è profondamente antiecológico. Esprime la mancanza di rispetto per la natura della fertilità della donna e danneggia i rapporti all'interno della famiglia. La genitorialità responsabile definita dall'insegnamento del papa e dai suoi commentatori (sia uomini che donne citati nell'articolo) significa assumere la responsabilità per quanto riguarda le relazioni sessuali e i loro possibili esiti. Gli autori analizzati sostengono che difendendo la natura dell'amore, la natura degli esseri umani e la natura dell'ordine morale obiettivo, l'enciclica *Humanae Vitae* difende le donne, in particolare la loro natura dall'autoritarismo degli uomini e della società.

Parole chiave: *Humanae Vitae*, diritti delle donne, nuovo femminismo, genitorialità responsabile