

***Humanae Vitae* as an Aid to Pastoral Practise and Clinical Discernment**

- 1) denial / negation of the essential meaning of sexual intercourse
- 2) conditionality of relationship
- 3) concentration on pleasure
- 4) concentration on self
- 5) instrumentalization of a person
- 6) exemption from effort
- 7) practical conclusions

In discussing the help which *Humanae Vitae* provides in pastoral care, broadly understood, I want to particularly concentrate on the influence contraception exerts on the quality of marital relations and not on its social or health consequences. For it is always necessary to see contraception as a matter concerning two people, and the relationship between them, as it is precisely on this relationship that it leaves its greatest destructive mark. Excuse me for my bluntness, but no onanist needs contraceptives until there are ‘two of them’¹. Therefore to say that contraception is the problem of the woman who should ‘safeguard’ herself is hurtful and cynical. The more so because it is proposed that the woman, whose dominant need in relationships is a sense of security, more readily see the pill or the condom - rather than her husband – the man of her life - in the role of a ‘safeguard’. Thus the germs of a potential crisis are introduced into the relationship at the very outset. So let us carefully examine particular aspects of the influence of contraception on the quality of marital relationships. However it is necessary to emphasise at the very beginning \ that the consequences of contraception have such destructive effects on a relationship because they strike at its interpersonal structure. It seems that this our common ground – the priest’s and the doctor’s, and perhaps the doctor’s before the priest’s, when he meets a person – most often a woman – asking for contraceptives. She may find her way to a priest later – if at all. Therefore I shall refer liberally to the reflections of another priest, who was very close to doctors and married couples throughout his priesthood – the future Pope, the Servant of God, John Paul II .

1) Denial of the Essential Significance of Sexual Intercourse

Karol Wojtyla, reflecting on the truths of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, wrote that “human love is rich in experiences and emotions. But its essential richness inheres in the community of persons, man and woman, who give themselves to each other. Marital love is so rich and profound in its being an authentic gift of one person to another person. This gift, this giving of ones very self, must not be falsified. If the authentic love of persons is to be fulfilled in marriage through the giving of one’s body, through the ‘oneness in body’ of a man and a woman – then, on account of the very value of love, one must not falsify this reciprocal gift at any level of this interpersonal act.”²

¹ Cf. Karol Wojtyla, *A Personalistic Conception of Man*, in: *Specialistic Aspects of the Contraception Problem*, Krakow 1980, pp. 27-28: “This act (marital) is simultaneously an action in which each of the spouses – as consciously acting subjects – refer their actions to each other as subjects. So the ‘other’ becomes the object of the acting subject, at the same time ‘the other’ is both a woman for the man as well as, reciprocally, a man for the woman. This reciprocal action in relation to the subject, which is the ‘other’, becomes at the same time a defined form of cooperation, while the man and the woman are to some extent ‘co-subjects’ of this action.”

² Karol Wojtyla, *Truths of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, Catholic Family No. 77-79, Family Pastoral Care Department, Krakow 1988, p. 15.

Contraception quite simply falsifies sexual intercourse. Let us consider an analogy: when one wants to greet someone, one holds out one’s hand. It is a normal greeting gesture. We thus show respect for someone, we welcome someone. But if we squeeze someone’s hand so as to inflict pain, an observer would probably not notice any difference in this external gesture. One’s intention changes the meaning of the gesture though its form remains the same. *Hence we can conclude that the truth of an action demands that the intention with which an act is performed be conformed with the objective meaning of the act.*

When a married couple engages in the marital act there are two meanings in it. The essence of this act can first be expressed in the words: “I desire to be with you, I give myself to you and at the same time I accept you as a gift”. A case where there is a lack of a voluntary self-giving is one of rape. But the marital act, apart from uniting a man and a woman, also has a second meaning, “I may be a father / I may be a mother”. Aware of what the marital act is, a man and a woman, as personal subjects of this act, must impart to it solely this and no other meaning when engaging in it; they can only, and they should, express this meaning and no other by it. The marital act is of its nature an expression of unity and of possible fertility. Sexual intercourse is always inwardly directed to the conception of a child, even though it might not come to this in a specific case on account of the cyclical fertility of a woman. Paul VI teaches that “the marriage act, while uniting husband and wife in the closest intimacy, also renders them capable of generating new life – and this as a result of laws written into the actual nature of man and of woman. And if each of these essential qualities, the unitive and the procreative, is preserved, the use of marriage fully retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to which man is called” (HV12). Therefore in the marital act a married couple ought to express that which it signifies of its very nature, as otherwise they will be perverting it.

“Why must the marital act signify, mean, that which it objectively is?” – asks Karol Wojtyla. And he replies: “Because the human person is ordered to truth, obligated by truth, and truth constitutes the fundamental *raison d’être* of a person’s existence (the *raison d’être* of being a person). The whole sense of both sign and signification comes from this. Like speech, that is verbal signs, [this sign] should serve truth, should express it – only then does it correspond to the personal dignity of man, so, too, actions, bodily gestures – particularly in that special exchange of personal self-giving which is marital intercourse – should correspond to truth. They must not and should not lie. (...) For there is no love beyond truth. This dependence is deeply written into the spiritual structure of a person, and it also constitutes a prerequisite and a demand for man’s self-realization as a person, and for love as an authentic “*communio personarum*”.”³

The human person is a being which, “in all its activities, in its acts, is connected with, and, at the same time, most personally obligated to an inner and objective truth. If this concrete act, marital intercourse (...), in its objective structure and essence, is directed “in potential” to parenthood, then persons, in the marital act, must not deprive it of this inner and objective truth, which inheres in it. For in the light of objective truth the said act remains in an inner relationship to parenthood (though not necessarily – physically understood, for it is only ‘in potential’). Hence if it is to be engaged in in truth it must correspond, in the consciousness and the attitude of the participants, with both a sense of the possibility of parenthood and – what is essential – a certain parental readiness (‘I may be a father, I may be a mother’). Such is the objective structure of the said act to which the inner truth of the participants’ experiences and consciences ought to correspond.”⁴

³ Karol Wojtyla, *A Personalistic Conception of Man*, in: *Specialistic Aspects of the Contraception Problem*, Krakow 1980, pp. 33-34.

⁴ Karol Wojtyla, *A Personalistic Conception of Man*, in: *Specialistic Aspects of the Contraception Problem*, Krakow 1980, p. 32.

3

2) A Conditional Relationship

Contraception introduces conditions, conditionality to the gift realized in the sexual act. We can express this condition thus: “I shall be with you only on condition that you do not make me a mother/father”. This attitude is far, far removed from a reciprocal, disinterested and total gift of oneself which is the basis of lasting, happy relationships. In the long term the rejection of one of the essential elements of a given person usually leads to frustration in one of the spouses, frustration with the impossibility of a total self-fulfillment.

A husband demanding that his wife use contraceptives thereby informs her that: “of the whole truth about you as a wife – only your body interests me, not your motherhood, and even ‘your’ child would just be an obstacle to me in <<using life>>. Or a woman, by her attitude, says to a man: “You do not interest me as a whole man, you do not interest me as a potential father of our children, only the bodily / physical / superficial dimension of our encounter is of interest to me.” Owing to such an egoistical approach the husband and wife are not in a position to build a lasting marriage nor bring up their children appropriately; much less can there be any question of mutual sanctification.

A complete and disinterested gift of themselves in their coming together in the marital act, as husband (as a potential father), and as wife (as a potential mother), is the road to building a special community, which in theology we call a communion of persons. It is a cooperation wherein a husband and wife are mutually focused on each other, and on a collective spiritual growth. A communion of persons is built on the quality of reciprocal relations, when persons carry out their tasks together (for example in bringing up their children, in deciding on building a house, in moving house, in starting a new job and the like), and not on the realization of tasks divorced from solicitude about the persons concerned. When a husband and wife are together, this enhances the quality of their mutual existence. It is an orientation to mutual perfection. A gift of oneself is not only to make for one person's happiness, but the happiness of both in a happy marriage.

Karol Wojtyla explained that "parenthood belongs to the nature of this specific love, marital love, and it constitutes its essential feature, shapes it in the sphere of objectives and intentions and finally leaves a stamp of a special fulfilment on it. Marital love is realized through parenthood. Responsibility for this love is at the same time, as it were, from beginning to end, a responsibility for parenthood. One participates in the other, and one decides the other. Parenthood is a gift that comes to people, to a man and a woman, together with love, creates its perspective within the dimension of a mutual life-long self-giving, and makes for a gradual realization of this perspective by life and activity. In connexion with this parenthood – the gift, is also of deep significance, the undertaking of which, and successive undertakings, is synonymous with accepting a gift. Yes: with the acceptance of a gift, which persons become for each other in marriage: a woman for a man, and he for her. Their giving of themselves to each other in marriage, with what they are as a man and a woman – achieves its proper and full sense through parenthood, through the fact that as husband and wife they become a father and a mother." ⁵

⁵ Karol Wojtyla, *Responsible Fertile Love*, Catholic Family No. 77-79, Family Pastoral Care Department, Krakow 1988, p. 90.

3) Concentration on Pleasure

Hand in hand with a selective acceptance of one's spouse, the exclusion of his or her procreational capacity is linked with seeking the greatest amount of pleasure in sexual intercourse. One can express such an attitude thus: "I am opting for contraception as I want to obtain pleasure from sexual intercourse without the fear of having a child". We can see a certain ethical reduction at the basis of this attitude. Good becomes that which guarantees pleasure, and evil – a lack of pleasure or an unpleasant experience. Such a reduction results in taking a decision on the basis of feelings. It seems to us that feelings, by virtue of being immaterial, belong to some inner sphere of a person's life. But in accord with the structure of a human being as a person we must identify feelings as elements from the bodily sphere. Emotions, which arise in a man, are not connected with the spiritual powers, but with the sensory, bodily part. So when people identify good on an emotional level, they are then deciding on drawing motives for action not from all the information about a person in his or her spiritual – bodily dimension, but they exclusively highlight the external dimension.

So understood, pleasure becomes the most important or even the sole norm of action. Meanwhile, we are very often certain that we are taking the right decisions, even when they entail hardship. Sometimes the experience of hardship in an action is a testimony of our commitment to a matter, which is worth sacrificing ourselves for. Moreover, pleasure is something only incidentally, not essentially, connected with action, and it appears when we do something creative, satisfying. Choices based on pleasure highlight that which of its nature is incidental, not essential.

And again Karol Wojtyla taught his students that "the real mistake is to see pleasure as the sole or at any rate the greatest good in itself to which everything else in the activity of an individual or a society should be subordinated. Whereas pleasure in itself is not the sole good, nor is it the proper aim of a man's activity (...). Pleasure is essentially incidental, contingent, something which may occur in the course of action. Naturally, then, to organize your actions with pleasure itself as the exclusive or primary aim is in contradiction with the proper structure of human action. I may want or do that which is accompanied by pleasure and I may not want or not do that which is accompanied by pain. I may even want or not want, do or not do, this or that because of the pleasure or pain entailed. All this is true. But pleasure (as opposed to pain) cannot be the only factor affecting my decision to act or not to act, still less the criterion by which I pronounce judgement on

what is good and what is bad in my own or another person's actions. Quite obviously, that which is truly good, that which morality and conscience bid me do, often involves some measure of pain and requires the renunciation of some pleasure. The pain involved, or the pleasure which I must forgo, is not the decisive consideration if I am to act rationally. What is more, it is not fully identifiable beforehand. Pleasure and pain are always connected with a concrete action, so that it is not possible to anticipate them precisely, let alone to plan for them or, as the utilitarians would have us do, even compute them in advance. Pleasure is, after all, a somewhat elusive thing.”⁶

⁶ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, London 1982, p. 36.

5

4) Concentration on Oneself

Let us repeat this once again, “pleasure is of its nature a good for the moment and only for a particular subject, it is not a super-subjective or trans-subjective good. And so, as long as that good is recognized as the entire basis of the moral norm, there can be no possibility of my transcending that which is good for me alone.”⁷

Karol Wojtyla taught that if the sole value, as to the attitude of a man to a woman as well as a woman to man, is only pleasure, then “there can be no question of reciprocity or of the union of persons. The fixation on pleasure as their purpose restricts each of them to the confines of his or her ‘I’. There can therefore be no reciprocity, but only ‘bilateralism’: there exists a quantum of pleasure deriving from the association of two persons of different sex which must be so skilfully shared between them that each obtains as much as possible. Egoism excludes love, but permits calculation and compromise – even though there is no love there can be a bilateral accommodation between egoisms.”⁸

When we build a relationship on the basis of the reciprocal satisfaction of pleasure or other needs, which occurs in the case of contraception, then we can only harmonize two egoisms. We then lose the possibility of building a relationship based on a personal union, which of two “I’s” forms one “We”. An orientation solely and exclusively on pleasure leads to a concentration on oneself, as pleasure is an absolutely subjective thing. That which is pleasant for one person is not always pleasant for another. The building of unity in a relationship is based on a person's free will, which chooses a good that has been identified by reason as the source of a person's self-determination. We can use a violin as a comparison. When we remove the bottom part of the sound box, the violin will not emit sound. When a relationship is solely and exclusively superficial, when we build solely and exclusively on our emotional and sensual sphere, we can then compare it to violin strings stretched across a board. But if we take into account the whole truth of a person in a relationship, when we are orientated on inner development, then the sound box will emit rich sounds. So, as we see, action according to pleasure leaves a person on the surface of a relationship, and, as a consequence, it deprives the marriage of a future. For one can express the principle of ‘stability’ of a relationship based on the use of contraception thus: “I am opting for contraception because I want to preserve my independence, and to be able to change my partner at an arbitrary moment for one who will realize my needs more”.

“Is it possible to harmonize different egoisms? Is it possible, for instance, to achieve harmony, in the sexual context, between the egoism of a man and that of a woman? This certainly can be done according to the principle ‘greatest possible pleasure for each of the two persons’ – but the practical application of this principle can never deliver us from egoism. Egoism will remain egoism in this type of harmony, the only difference being that these two egoisms, the man's and the woman's, will match each other and be mutually advantageous. The moment they cease to match and to be of advantage to each other, nothing at all is left of the harmony. Love will be no more, in either of the persons or between them, it will not be an objective reality, for there is no objective good to ensure its existence. ‘Love’ in this utilitarian conception is a union of egoisms, which can hold together only on condition that they confront each other with nothing unpleasant, nothing to conflict with their mutual pleasure. Therefore love so understood is self-evidently merely a pretence which has to be carefully cultivated to keep the underlying reality hidden: the reality of egoism, and the greediest kind of egoism at that, exploiting another person to obtain for itself its own ‘maximum pleasure’. In such circumstances the other person is and remains only a means to an end...”⁹

⁷ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, London 1982, pp. 37-38.

⁸ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, London 1982, pp. 156-157.

⁹ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, London 1982, pp. 38-39.

5) Subjective Treatment of Man

A concentration on one's own pleasure in sexual intercourse, which is one of the reasons of, and, at the same time, a result of contraception, leads to a subjective treatment of man. A fixation on pleasure alone signifies that "pleasure is the end, and all else – the 'person', that person's, 'femininity' or 'masculinity' – is only a means to it."¹⁰ If we make pleasure the main criterion, or the main way way of treating another person, if we make pleasure the end of intercourse, then the other person automatically becomes but a 'gratifier' of the desired pleasure. A person is used as a means to an end, a pleasure bereft of the fear of possible parenthood. Meanwhile a person's dignity demands one not to be availed of as an object of use, particularly sexual.

Vatican II, in chapter 24 of the *Pastoral Constitution Gaudium Et Spes*, to which John Paul II so readily referred, says that "man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself" (GS 24). This was clarified in his book, *Love and Responsibility*, as a personalistic norm, defined thus: "the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love" as well as "the person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end".¹¹ The reduction of a person to an objective of sexual use is unworthy of a person. The degradation of a person's dignity is not even justified if a used person consents to such treatment. "A person must not be *merely* the means to an end for another person. This is precluded by the very nature of personhood, by what any person is. For a person is a thinking subject, and capable of taking decisions: these, most notably, are the attributes we find in the inner self of a person. This being so, every person is by nature capable of determining his or her aims. Anyone who treats a person as the means to an end does violence to the very essence of the other, to what constitutes its natural right."¹²

Paul VI strongly emphasised this: "Another effect that gives cause for alarm is 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, reduces 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." (HV 17).

6) Exemption From Effort

Contraception exempts one from self-control. The choice of contraception occasions that it is conducive to the increase of the influence of the sexual urge in decision making. And this is the level on which animals function, it is precisely their sexual behaviour which is determined by urges. Whilst in the case of man the urge is not a power that completely determines

¹⁰ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, London 1982, p. 155.

¹¹ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, London 1982, p. 41.

¹² Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, London 1982, pp. 26-27.

action, for it leaves room for the action of free will. A man's task, by virtue of being a rational being, is to filter impulsive urges through the value of person as person. That is why human relationships demand the action of reason, and not only of an urge, as in the case of animals. Animals instinctively recognize the time for mating, whereas a man, in preserving his species, must act to the measure of what he is as a person.

The use of contraception signifies a lack of fortitude in such difficulties which an illness or a long journey may well bring about. In such a case a contraceptive mentality simply favours mutual infidelity. Unfortunately, statistics clearly show that as soon as contraceptives are used, the break-up of relationships is a result. For if one can have sexual intercourse without consequences, there ceases to be any barrier to the actualization of the sexual urge. In our time one can observe this particularly during company integration

courses on which one absolutely cannot take one's husband or wife. Integration, with large amounts of alcohol and the possibility of using contraceptives, signifies a weekend or holiday fling.

At such a time it would be worth recalling the teaching of Paul VI "...with regard to man's innate drives and emotions, responsible parenthood means that man's reason and will must exert control over them." (HV 10) and also "the right and lawful ordering of birth demands, first of all, that spouses fully recognize and value the true blessings of family life and that they acquire complete mastery over themselves and their emotions. For if with the aid of reason and of free will they are to control their natural drives, there can be no doubt at all of the need for self-denial. Only then will the expression of love, essential to married life, conform to right order. This is especially clear in the practice of periodic continence. Self-discipline of this kind is a shining witness to the chastity of husband and wife and, far from being a hindrance to their love of one another, transforms it by giving it a more truly human character. And if this self-discipline does demand that they persevere in their purpose and efforts, it has at the same time the salutary effect of enabling husband and wife to develop to their personalities and to be enriched with spiritual blessings. For it brings to family life abundant fruits of tranquillity and peace. It helps in solving difficulties of other kinds. It fosters in husband and wife thoughtfulness and loving consideration for one another. It helps them to repel inordinate self-love, which is the opposite of charity. It arouses in them a consciousness of their responsibilities. And finally, it confers upon parents a deeper and more effective influence in the education of their children. As their children grow up, they develop a right sense of values and achieve a serene and harmonious use of their mental and physical powers." (HV 21).

"The experience of sexual values must be pervaded by an intense awareness of the value of a person. It is precisely this value which explains the need of self-control, which is also proper to a person, for personality is expressed in a peculiar self-possession as well as self-control. Without this man would not be capable of self-giving or of accepting a gift according to that value by which reciprocity itself ought to be signified." ¹³ And that is also why the Church's ethical teaching "...is contributing to the creation of a truly human civilization. It urges man not to betray his personal responsibilities by putting all his faith in technical expedients. In this way it defends the dignity of husband and wife" (HV 18).

Practical Conclusions

When a married couple opts for contraception we have a situation which can be called the "tip of the iceberg syndrome". The decision to use contraceptives is a symptom of marital problems – abuse problems - or the possibility of them emerging in the near future.

It would be worthwhile for a specialist, particularly a doctor, in a family life advisory

¹³ Karol Wojtyła, *Truths of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, Catholic Family No. 77-79, Family Pastoral Care Department, Krakow 1988, p. 16.

8

centre to be aware of this, or a priest in the confessional, in order to be able to give the appropriate assistance - not just concentrating solely on the use of contraceptives by a given married couple. I also call for a pro-marital approach by persons supporting marriage, that is, favouring the preservation of a concrete relationship or justice as, in practice, so called "neutral" therapists often bring about the break-up of a relationship or end up complicit, compounding abuse.

- staying neutral in marital problems is conducive to the break-up of families or continuation of abuse

- our society lacks the attitude of "my marriage is unhealthy, so I am looking for the help of a specialist"

- hence it is worthwhile for every doctor to know to whom he can direct married couples who are experiencing problems in their relationships

Neutral therapists are continually bringing about divorces amongst those who come to them for counselling, for advice, for marriage therapy. There is no such thing as neutrality. One is either committed to rescuing a marriage, a family, or one is solely and exclusively harmonizing egoisms. Are you unhappy with him? Okay you have the right to leave him. Everybody has the right to feel happy, and since HE is not making

you happy you have the right to get divorced. So they advise. There is no such thing as a doctor who is 'neutral-objective'. If the patient is a woman, then she is by nature called to spousal love and to motherhood. Irrespective of whether she going to be a nun, a maiden or a spouse, spousal love and motherhood are always assigned to a woman. But also to a man. So in meeting a woman we are meeting a mother and a spouse at the same time. One must not question any of these dimensions. They are the dimensions and dignities of a person. And here we must be continually solicitous about this new mentality – if my marriage is unhealthy, then I shall seek help, the help of a specialist. A for that I thank all of you present here with all my heart. For the fact that you are not neutral, that you resist the dictates of the world which wants to reduce man to the role of a consumer of numerous goods. When Paul VI wrote *Humanae Vitae* worldly experts had a vision of an overpopulated world, so they demanded that the Church approve contraceptives. Today worldly experts are frightening us with dying out – so the Church should approve of in vitro. The Church does not preach its own teaching, but she solely, humbly and consequently preaches, explains and faithfully transmits God's teaching, truth. We are the servants of God's plan, we are witnesses to the civilization of life and love. I thank you for being witnesses. Often the first, hidden, discreet witnesses. But thanks to you and your attitude we can daily thank God for the gift, that "the transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator. It has always been a source of great joy to them, even though it sometimes entails many difficulties and hardships" (HV 1). Who knows this better than you? You, who as doctors are first invited – just after the parents – to be with a new human person – protecting a person's life and dignity.
