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John Paul II on *Humanae Vitae* and the Priority of Ethics over Technology

Abstract: We examine how John Paul II's lifelong work on the issues surrounding family and human life as expressed in Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* (1968) are an exemplification of his principles for cultural renewal as stated in *Redemptor Hominis* (1979). The triad of principles, the primacy of persons over things, the priority of ethics over technology, and the superiority of spirit over matter provide a set of interlocking principles for discerning the true progress of modern culture. Contrary to the dominant view that artificial contraception represents an opportunity for great progress for women and for society, we argue that the ambivalent character of modern technology as established by Yves René Simon and Clive Staples Lewis points to a large downside of artificial contraception, namely, a real opportunity for the degradation of the marriage bond and the full flourishing of the human person. The substitution of technology as a way to regulate birth for personal choice and habit or virtue inverts the principle of ethics over technology and opens the door for the manipulation of women as predicted by Pope Paul VI which is a clear failure to place the primacy of the person over things. The fundamental error lies in the materialistic philosophy of life which refuses to acknowledge the superiority of spirit over matter. The battle over the issues at the heart of *Humane Vitae* constitutes a battle over the ultimate meaning of human existence as theistic or anti-theistic, Gospel or anti-Gospel, and thus it will always stand as a "sign of contradiction."

Keywords: Pope John Paul II, Pope Paul VI, ethics, *Humanae Vitae*, NFP, artificial contraception, technology, *Redemptor Hominis*, C. S. Lewis, Y. R. Simon, *Sign of Contradiction*

Much of the pastoral and intellectual work of Pope John Paul II centers on responsible parenthood and issues pertaining to the encyclical of Pope Paul VI *On Human Life (Humane Vitae, 1968)*.¹ Evidence for his long-standing interest in promoting authentic human love include his work with *Środowisko (Una vita con Karol, 2007)*, his philosophical writing on *Love and Responsibility* (first published by KUL in 1960), and his play, *The Jeweler's Shop* (written in 1960). His contributions at Vatican II, the synod for Kraków Sources of Renewal, and numerous other articles and letters on married love also show his profound explorations in this area of human life.² He sums up his interest in a brief passage found in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (first published by KUL in 1994):

Responsible parenthood is the necessary condition for human love, and it is also the necessary condition for authentic conjugal love, because love cannot be irresponsible. Its beauty is the fruit of responsibility. When love is truly responsible, it is also truly free. This is precisely the teaching I learned from the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* written by my venerable predecessor Paul VI, and that I had learned even earlier from my young friends, married and soon to be married, while I was writing *Love and Responsibility*. As I have said, they themselves were my teachers in this area. It was they, men and women alike, who made a creative contribution to the pastoral care of family, to pastoral efforts on behalf of responsible parenthood, to the foundation of counseling programs, which subsequently flourished. The principal activity and primary commitment of these programs is to foster human love. In them, responsibility for human love has been and continues to be lived out.³

In order to better appreciate lifelong concern of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II for responsibility for human love, I propose to consider how his first encyclical, *Redeemer of Man*, provides a context for understanding the strategy as well as the ardor for his account of responsible parenthood as articulated in *Humanae Vitae*. *Redeemer of Man* is a pivotal work and reveals the man and his work in an exemplary way. It was published on March 4, 1979, soon after his election as pope (October 22, 1978). It also shows us the man and his heritage. It is pivotal because it gathers together the core of his experience and thoughts as Polish priest, bishop and intellectual and spiritual leader. John Paul II said:

¹ See Janet Smith, "Pope John Paul II and *Humane Vitae*," *International Review of Natural Family Planning* 10, no. 2 (summer 1986): 95–112. Reprinted in Smith, *Why Humanae Vitae was Right: A Reader* (Ignatius, 1993), 229–249. See also George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (Harper Perennial, 2004), 206–210.

² Lumiła Grygiel, Stanisław Grygiel, and Przemysław Kwiatkowski, eds., *Bellezza e spiritualità dell'amore coniugale* (Siena: Edizione Cantagalli, 2009). Also John Crosby, "The Personalism of John Paul II as the Basis of His Approach to the Teaching of *Humanae Vitae*," in *Why Humanae Vitae Was Right* (Città Nuova Editrice, 1989), 193–227.

³ John Paul II and Vittorio Messori, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 208.

“Everything in *Redeemer of Man* I brought with me from Poland.” In his last work on memory and identity, he said the following: “To summon a Pope from Poland, from Kraków, could serve as an eloquent symbol. It was not simply the summons of an individual, but of the entire church to which he belongs since birth; indirectly it was also a call to his nation.”⁴ And he explained his purpose in writing the encyclical this way:

I tried to express in it what has animated and continually animates my thoughts and heart from the beginning of the pontificate; these thoughts were maturing within me as priest and bishop. [...] If Christ called me with such thoughts and sentiments it was because He wanted these calls of the intellect and of the heart, these expressions of faith, hope and charity to ring out in my new and universal ministry, right from its beginning.⁵

So this little work is truly a pivotal piece of writing. In it we see Karol Wojtyła, the Polish bishop and cardinal carrying through the heritage and the background thinking and it serves Pope John Paul II as a remarkable seed, principle, and basis for his work and witness as pope for twenty-seven years. The massive set of writings he left from his papacy (fourteen encyclicals, fifteen apostolic exhortations, eleven apostolic constitutions, and forty-four apostolic letters, eighty-four letters in all) all trace in some key back to the key ideas set forth in *Redemptor Hominis*.

The encyclical as a whole provides the context for gauging the importance of his defense of *Humanae Vitae*, particularly in his Wednesday audiences on the theology of the body.⁶

In section §16 of *Redemptor Hominis*, entitled *Progress or Threat?*, John Paul II considers the many challenges to human flourishing, for we are in an era which “shows itself a time of great progress, it is also seen as a time of threat in many forms for man.” True progress will demand a participation in the office of Christ’s kingship as expressed by Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium*:

The essential meaning of this “kingship” and “dominion” of man over the visible world, which the Creator himself gave man for his task, consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter. (*Lumen Gentium* §§ 10, 36)

⁴ John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 141.

⁵ John Paul II, *The Story of My Life; Collected Memories* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2011), 106. Found in his *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 5; Angelus, March 11, 1979, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 12 (March 19, 1979): 2, cited in J. Michael Miller, *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), 31.

⁶ John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).

In *Lumen Gentium* the three-fold office of Christ of priest, prophet, and king is richly developed. John Paul II references section 10 on the priestly office of Christ—lay faithful share in the priestly sacrifice of praise to God the Father through their “witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity.” In other words, human life in its various dimensions should shine forth in a witness to the goodness of God. In section 36 of *Lumen Gentium*, the kingly office of Christ is fulfilled by the lay faithful by their own interior ordering of virtue and also by ordering the whole of creation to the praise of God. They will build a civilization of love: “They will impregnate culture and human works with a moral value” (§ 10). The three principles, (i) the priority of ethics over technology; (ii) the primacy of the person over things; and (iii) the superiority of spirit over matter, are interconnected and they together lay out a program for personal and cultural development. The priority of ethics over technology must be understood as something more than the application of moral norms, whether deontological or utilitarian, to technological projects. We must look especially to the subject of action and the perfection of the person in act. A vertical transcendence towards the true good must influence the ultimate personal quality of the agent. Ethics is about a way of life, an ethos, a development of character within a community. The whole modern project comes forth from the notion that technology can substitute for morality or ethics. It emphasizes techne and human art above ethos or character. Technology is more a way of life than a set of tools and instruments. John Paul II study of *Humanae Vitae* would reflect this very issue. Artificial birth control is precisely the substitution of technological solutions for what is primarily a moral or ethical issue. Responsible parenthood demands mutual self-giving, self-control, and generous readiness to receive children. Artificial birth control places the burden of responsible parenthood on method effectiveness and external devices. The priority of ethics over technology is intrinsically connected with the priority of the person over things. Technology can degrade the world to the status of a thing to be used, including the human person. And the priority of the spiritual over the material is perhaps the fundamental underlying principle of cultural development. This will be clear in the following paragraph. But, generally, we can say that modern culture emphasizes the material over the spiritual. The Marxist/Communist ideology is explicitly and dogmatically materialistic, denying all spirituality and goods beyond the temporal. The liberal ideology of the west emphasizes productivity of material goods and emphasizes the comfortable self-preservation of the individual. God is left out of the picture entirely. The integral vision of human flourishing is a stake in the issue of responsible family planning. It is a matter of culture, ultimately a defense of the culture of life versus a culture of death.

It is through culture that man grows towards perfection and self-fulfillment.⁷ The ultimate business of culture is education. And education must integrate and convey the whole truth about man; it must offer an “integral humanism.” John Paul II said:

Culture must cultivate man and each man along the extension of an *integral and full-fledged humanism*, through which *the whole man and all men* are promoted *in the fullness of every human dimension*. Culture’s essential purpose is that of promoting the being of man, and of providing him with the goods needed for the development of his individual and social being.⁸

Thus, the threefold set of priorities for overcoming the threats to mankind in the modern world are essentially priorities of culture.

Cultural Priorities in the Theology of the Body

We can find these cultural priorities addressed by John Paul II throughout the Wednesday audiences on the theology of the body and we find them explicitly mentioned in the very last set of audiences in his reflections on *Humanae Vitae*.⁹

(i) *On the priority of person over things:*

In his concluding remarks, given on November 28, 1984, John Paul II says that all his reflections about the sacrament of marriage were explorations of two fundamental dimensions: the dimension of covenant and grace and the dimension of “the sign.”¹⁰ These two dimensions return us to the theology of the body and the very teaching or words of Christ. John Paul II says further that the reflections on the theology of the body in light of “the redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage” constitute “an extensive commentary on the doctrine contained precisely in *Humanae Vitae*.”¹¹ But the provision of such a commentary at the very end of the very long work is not just by way of convenience or by an afterthought. To the contrary, the questions raised by *Humanae Vitae* “run in some way through the whole of our reflections.”¹²

⁷ Alberto Freere, quoted in *Apostolate of Culture*, 62–63.

⁸ John Paul II “In the Work of Culture God has Made an Alliance with Man.” Rio de Janeiro, 1 July 1980.

⁹ See: John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, §§ 118–133, pp. 617–663. I also use the Vatican English edition found in John Paul II, *Reflections on Humanae Vitae* (Boston: Daughters of St Paul, 1984).

¹⁰ John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 660.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 660.

¹² *Ibid.*, 662.

Indeed, the part located at the end (see *Humanae Vitae*) is “at the same found at the beginning of the whole.” The very structure and method of his work springs from the fundamental issues raised by *Humanae Vitae*. His work is the progressive deepening or development of doctrine. It is well known that Pope Paul VI sought to address the questions of human life in our day given the new opportunities and challenges afforded by technology, economics, and social conditions. He deployed the natural law account of marriage, procreation and family in a very thoughtful and compelling way. But this in turn raised additional questions and concerns, and John Paul II recognized that a richer biblical understanding as well as focused personalistic perspective would provide a more decisive way to “find answers to the questions of conscience of men and women and also the difficult questions of our contemporary world concerning marriage and procreation.”¹³ The biblical understanding roots this teaching much deeper in the tradition. The personalistic perspective does so as well, but also opens the way to “use those instruments most in keeping with modern science and today’s culture.”¹⁴ Although significant scientific developments in the study of fertility were already under way, *Humanae Vitae* helped to launch many initiatives in the understanding and applications of the science of fertility, as for example found in the work of Thomas Hilgers among many others.¹⁵ The personalist perspective for its part contains a very insightful and compelling account of marriage and family as a communion of persons. Modern culture by many accounts suffers precisely from a deficit of support and sympathy for the concrete life of the human person. And so, it is no surprise to find here at the end of the *Theology of the Body* a use of the notion of the priority of persons over things, and associated with it in previous audiences, the priority of ethics over technology and the priority of spirit over matter. The key passage in this conclusion points out the following:

The analysis of the personalistic aspects contained in this document has an existential meaning for establishing what true progress consist in, that is, the development of the human person. In contemporary civilization as a whole—especially in Western civilization—there exists, in fact, a hidden and at the same time rather explicit tendency to measure this progress with the measure of “things,” that is, of material goods.¹⁶

John Paul II commends his predecessor for his “resolute appeal to measure man’s progress with the measure of the Person.” Such a personalistic measure is open to “that which is a good man as man, which corresponds to his essential

¹³ Ibid., 663.

¹⁴ Ibid., 661.

¹⁵ Thomas W. Hilgers, MD, *The NaProTechnology Revolution: Unleashing the Power in a Woman’s Cycle* (New York: Beaufort Books, 2010).

¹⁶ John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 662.

dignity.” The broader context for understanding *Humanae Vitae* is the viewpoint of “authentic development of the human person.”¹⁷ No doubt this statement is an allusion to the fifth encyclical of Pope Paul VI, the provocative *Populorum Progressio* (1967).¹⁸ In this extraordinary document, he examines the various means and programs for international development and argues that the true measure for international development must be an “integral humanism.” Pushing back against the exclusively economic and financial programs for aid and development, Paul VI recalls the international community to a consideration of the full flourishing of the human person, encompassing the family, the dignity of work, and especially educational and cultural goods, culminating in a respect for religious values and contemplation. “If development calls for an ever-growing number of technical experts, even more necessary still is the deep thought and reflection of wise men in search of a new humanism, one which will enable our contemporaries to enjoy the higher values of love and friendship, of prayer and contemplation, and thus find themselves anew. This is what will guarantee man’s authentic development—his transition from less than human conditions to truly human ones.”¹⁹ Reiterating the notion of an integral humanism, Pope Paul VI, references both Jacques Maritain and Henri DeLubac: The ultimate goal is a full-bodied humanism. And does this not mean the fulfillment of the whole man and of every man? A narrow humanism, closed in on itself and not open to the values of the spirit and to God who is their source, could achieve apparent success, for man can set about organizing terrestrial realities without God. But “closed off from God, they will end up being directed against man. A humanism closed off from other realities becomes inhuman.”²⁰ Both Pope Paul VI as well as Pope John Paul II learned much from the personalism of Maritain and DeLubac. The perspective of an integral humanism, a Christian personalism, forms the proper context for the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, but this perspective is often neglected by the secular critics, of course, but very often by the Church dissenters who attacked the teaching from the perspective of utilitarian or proportionalist thinking, or even a narrower form of Kantian autonomy. This is why the personalism of *Humanae Vitae* enters into the “strategy and method” of the discourse on the theology of the body. If we look back to the conclusion of part one of the theology of the body, the audience of April 2, 1980, John Paul II links the words of Christ concerning divorce, namely, that “in the beginning it was not so,” to the mystery of creation and the mystery of redemption. And that mystery of human love is the “integral vision of man.” Speaking boldly, John Paul II declares that Christ “laid out before his interlocuters this ‘integral

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Pope Paul VI, *On the Development of Peoples* (Washington DC: U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1967).

¹⁹ Ibid., § 20.

²⁰ Ibid., § 42.

vision of man,' without which no adequate answer can be given to the questions connected with marriage and procreation."²¹ So too, Pope Paul VI appealed to the "integral vision of man" in *Humanae Vitae* (see § 7). It falls to John Paul II to build the "integral vision of man," in the form of a theology of the body, "from the beginning." He creatively unites the streams of natural law, theological ethics, and Thomistic anthropology with a profound biblical theology and a more robust phenomenology of the person and the world of values. In his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (§ 10), John Paul II spoke of the danger of the person in contemporary society using "immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being." It is love that is often lost, love as self-giving that is neglected in contemporary quest for freedom. And in the theology of the body he declares that:

We are, in fact, the children of an age in which, due to the development of various disciplines, this integral vision of man can easily be rejected and replaced by many partial conceptions that dwell on one or another aspect of the *compositum humanum* but do not reach man's *integrum* or leave it outside their field of vision.²²

John Paul II speaks therefore of "cultural tendencies" influenced by these partial truths such as the consideration of the human person as an object of technologies rather than the "responsible subject of his own action." Through reproductive technologies the medical profession treats the human person as an object of technologies, and while appealing to freedom of choice, utterly neglects the call to responsible love and parenthood, insofar as that requires character, self-denial, and heroic self-giving. And the same technologies allow men and women to objectify each other as well, pushing to the side communion of persons, common vocation to parenthood, and respect for the personal modality of each. Theology of the body, using both biblical and personalist perspectives, does much to provoke a deep wonder at the beauty of love and the mystery of personal life, both in its peaks and valleys. Again, we recall the theme of the person in *Redemptor Hominis*: "the name for that deep amazement at man's worth and dignity is the Gospel. [...] [and] this amazement determines the Church's mission [most of all] in the modern world." This amazement or wonder at the human person, "in a hidden and mysterious way" vivifies every aspect of "authentic humanism" and it is closely connected with Christ (§ 10). This is especially true in the personal dimension of sexuality, marriage and responsible parenthood, leading John Paul II to exclaim "on the road of this vocation, how indispensable is a deepened consciousness of the meaning of the body in its masculinity and femininity [...] [and] a consciousness of the spousal

²¹ John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 220.

²² *Ibid.*

meaning of the body.”²³ But such an amazement before the person is neglected when an exclusively utilitarian mode of thinking seeks to reduce questions of value and right to uniform material measures such as sensual satisfactions and economic cost or to an absolutizing of the individual’s freedom of choice. All of these considerations pertain to the priority of persons over things, and the related cultural principles of ethics over technology, and spirit over matter.

Thus, returning to the conclusion of the book, and the general audience of November 28, 1984, John Paul II rounds out his commendation of Pope Paul VI for articulating the personalistic aspects the issues pertaining to human life in our day; the notion of an authentic development of the human person not only advocates the priority of the person over things but also the priority of ethics over technology. The meaning to this principle is explained in light of the theology of the body, that is, the biblical and personalistic dimensions as well.

(ii) *On the priority of ethics over technology:*

In the twentieth century, there have been many thinkers who have voiced the concern about a technology unfettered by moral rule, particularly following the discovery of nuclear power. Albert Einstein, Robert Oppenheimer, Andrej Sakharov are names that come readily to mind. Medical technology is also a field in which prominent thinkers have spoken about the need to develop a robust bio-medical ethics. These concerns are often expressed in terms of either beneficent utilitarian outcomes or deontological principles of fairness and respect for autonomy and personal consent. John Paul II, while aware of the important dimensions of ethics in the fields impacted by modern technology, actually has a more fundamental concern in view. From the perspective of the development of the person, as indicated by Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*, John Paul II turns to consider the development of character and the formation of attitudes concerning the person. Michael Waldstein notes that the term “ethos” is used 163 times in the audiences to which he treated the theology of the body.²⁴ Ethos designates a conscious attitude taken up with respect to the good. “Ethos is the interior form, the soul, as it were, of human morality. It is an inner perception of values.”²⁵ In *Sources of Renewal*, Cardinal Wojtyła would speak about ethos as a fundamental attitude or disposition of the Christian in the world.²⁶ The renewal of Vatican II depends upon the deepening awareness of faith and the corresponding formation of basic attitudes. The deepening understanding of faith brings in its train a renewal of “attitudes.” He says that an attitude is an active relationship, not yet an action, and it follows upon cogni-

²³ Ibid, 222.

²⁴ John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, Index, 694.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 99.

tion and enriched awareness. It is “taking up a position” and a readiness to act. Attitude is a lot like “habitus.”²⁷ Respect for the dignity of the person and the value of communion among human beings are linked to the “whole Christian ethos.”²⁸ He speaks about an attitude of responsibility presupposes an awareness of creation and redemption, and this forms the “Christian ethos.”²⁹ So too in his theology of the body, ethos pertains to a fundamental attitude about creation and redemption.³⁰ The concern that arises from the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is that an ethos of responsibility and respect for the dignity of the person particularly in masculine and feminine dimensions, the gift of the child, and for the divine order. Technology easily obscures or altars attitudes towards the other and the dimension of the gift of fertility. It most of all substitutes an external reliance upon a technique for personal self-mastery from purity of heart. In his audience of August 22, 1984, John Paul II explains that Pope Paul VI expressed a concern that a proper balance be established between domination of the forces of nature and self-mastery.³¹ Paul VI further notes that contemporary cultural trends reinforce the tendency of transferring the methods proper to the first sphere to those of the second. But this extension of the means to “master nature” or seek domination of the forces of nature brings under external control man’s total being—Pope Paul VI speaks about control over the body, psychical life, social life and now even procreative and family life. This threatens the life of the person because “self-mastery” is and remains specific to human beings. The person, therefore, not only loses a dimension of character, but becomes subject in turn to the external forces of technology. This transposition of artificial means “breaks the constituents of dimension of the person, deprives man of the subjectivity proper to him and turns him into an object of manipulation.”³² Self-mastery corresponds to the “fundamental constitution of the person,” it is a virtue, a qualitative perfection of the person as a person. Therefore, he refers to self-mastery as a perfectly natural method. It is not really a method at this point, but a mode of being in the world, a readiness to act flowing from personal integrity of wholeness. The use of artificial methods nullifies the dynamism of character and hollows out the core of the person with respect to the sphere of sexuality and procreation. It is to treat one’s body as a machine, separable from the whole person. But in addition, John Paul II explains that man is a person “precisely because he possesses himself and has dominion over himself.”³³

²⁷ Ibid., 205.

²⁸ Ibid., 279

²⁹ Ibid., 293.

³⁰ Jarosław Kupczak, *Gift and Communion: John Paul II’s Theology of the Body* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 2014), 62–71

³¹ John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 630.

³² Ibid., 631.

³³ John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 632.

The exercise of self-mastery is an exercise of freedom, and it makes possible the freedom of the gift. Here he develops the theology of the body in terms of the “language of the body” in which man and woman “express themselves reciprocally in conjugal union.”³⁴ This gift, mutual self-giving constitutes the truth of the good of conjugal relationships. So too the conjugal act means not only love but also potential fruitfulness. The reliance upon artificial means deprives the relationship of its inner truth, the dynamic interplay of the unitive and procreative dimensions. The subordination of the cultivation and exercise of personal ethos to the technological control of the “forces” of nature is an evil because it hollows the ethos of love and degrades the person. The conjugal communion of husband and wife, he says, “plunges its roots into the very order of persons.”³⁵ The language of the body signifies something more than sexual reactivity and an invitation to mutual satisfaction; it signifies a personal act of love and a reciprocal expression in “the fullest and most profound way” of their masculinity and femininity and the whole truth of the human being as called to fatherhood and motherhood. So, to act in a way to obviate the full dimension of conjugal personal communion is “the essential evil of the conjugal act.”³⁶ John Paul II obviously accepts the derivation of the moral norm from natural law, as propounded in the tradition and reiterated by Pope Paul VI. But he deepens that personalistic dimension already indicated by Pope Paul VI; the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) more deeply explicated the integral vision of the human person surrounding the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. The priority of ethics over technology requires the ethos of respect for the gift of fertility and for the divine order of human life. The use of technology to sunder the unitive and procreative meanings destroys the ethics of marriage by acting as the “arbiter” of the divine plan (disregarding the gift of fertility) and by a degradation of human sexuality in its dimension of total self-giving.³⁷

In the subsequent audience, August 29, 1984, John Paul II continues to underscore the importance of ethos in the achievement of self-mastery, for which technology cannot provide a substitute. The way of self-mastery is truly responsible as it is the attitude and act of the person in respect of the inner truth of the conjugal communion. He would deny the term “responsible” in its proper meaning as a personal ethos to the reliance upon artificial contraception. And alternately, he would not use the term “technique” to describe natural family planning or periodic abstinence. “The encyclical underlines rather clearly that here it is not merely a question of a certain *technique* but of *ethics* in the strict

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 633.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio: The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* (Boston: Daughters of St Paul, 1981), § 32.

sense of the term.”³⁸ The reason is that natural family planning is defined by an inner attitude, an ethos, that requires an inner act of the person in order to be accomplished, whatever details of planning or charting must also be compiled. The behavior is formed by “reverence for the order established by the creator” and a “motivation of an ethical character.” It strikes me that “fertility awareness” is the best phrase to use to describe natural family planning, for this bespeaks the fundamental attitude of respect. Pope Paul VI argued that such a way of living ennobles human love because the couple strives to acquire perfect self-mastery and to form and witness to the true values of life and the family.³⁹ In the context of an integral vision of human love, an integral humanism, the married couple learns to live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), indicating the third principle the priority of spirit over matter. The ethos is formed by the conviction that natural law is an expression of “the Creator’s plan for the human person.”⁴⁰ The person lives not for an abstract or impersonal natural law, but out of fidelity to a personal Creator and understands nature as a providential order.

In the final audience on the “ethical problem” of birth control and fertility awareness (September 5, 1984), Paul VI returns to the principle of the priority of ethics over technology. A common objection to the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* stems from the confusion of “methods”—artificial contraception and natural family, because each may seek the same end of the spacing of births or even an avoidance of pregnancy. There is a calculative dimension to natural family planning, using the scientific knowledge of the conditions for fertility. But this happens only if one separates the “natural method” from the ethical dimension and applies the scientific knowledge in a “merely functional and even utilitarian way.”⁴¹ He stresses the importance of presenting the method rightly in emphasizing a deep grasp of the ethical dimension. The “method” is deemed honorable or noble when gives rise to the fruits of serenity and peace, generosity, and responsibility, and service. John Paul II wisely concludes that the way of regulation of births proposed by the Church is not only a way of behaving in a certain field, but “an attitude that builds on integral moral maturity of the persons and at the same time completes that maturity.”⁴² Thus, the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* provides the exemplary case for understanding the meaning of the priority of ethics over technology.

In his *Theology of the Body*, we see that John Paul II uses the perspective of an integral vision of the human person, an integral humanism, in order to open up the whole truth about the embodied human person and sexuality. In this light

³⁸ John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 635 (emphasis original).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 634.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 636.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 638.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 639.

we are tracing the way that his theology of the body may be better understood through the cultural principles that which he laid out in a crisp fashion in his encyclical, *Redeemer of Man*, namely, that there should always be a priority of persons over things, a priority of ethics over technology, and a priority of spirit over matter. We now turn to the third of those principles, the priority of spirit over matter. This principle brings into very sharp focus the two penultimate chapters of the entire work, on the spirit of reverence (§ 131, § 132). It is a fitting culmination of the work because it speaks directly about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit as the ultimate source for the life of love. There are many times throughout the work in which this principle is at play, of course. He references, for example, Galatians to “live by the spirit” (5:25). But now in section 131 he lines up many key biblical passages concerning the priority of spirit over matter: (Galatians 5:25) “live by the spirit,” (Rom. 5.5) “the love of God is poured into our hearts,” (2 Corinthians 3:6) “it is the spirit who gives life,” and (John 6:63) “It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail.” It is this passage from the Gospel of John that provides the most decisive orientation. In *Redemptor Hominis* (§ 18), John Paul II says that “we intend and are trying to fathom ever more deeply the language of the truth that man’s redeemer enshrined in the phrase ‘It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail’” (John 6:63) (§ 18). These words, he says, express the “highest affirmation of man—the affirmation of the body given life by the Spirit” (§ 18). Of the three principles for a renewal of culture, priority of ethics over technology, person over things, and the priority of the spirit over matter—it is clear that this last principle is the most crucial. The respect for persons and the development of a fully human ethos often come to grief when faced with the *mysterium inequitatis*—the reality of concupiscence and sin, and other human limitations that hamper and subvert the human good. In his apostolic exhortation, penance and reconciliation, John Paul II explained that the Church’s call to be perfect “is not a mission which consists merely of a few theoretical statements and the putting forward of an ethical ideal unaccompanied by the energy with which to carry it out.”⁴³ Ethical idealism, as a wish or an aspiration, is easy; but from whence comes the energy to do good and the energy to overcome evil? We must look to the *mysterium pietatis*—Christ—who “though he was innocent chose the path of poverty, patience, austerity and one can say the penitential life.”⁴⁴ The way of Christ is the true summons to life of love. So too in these culminating sections of the theology of the body John Paul II speaks of a *donum pietatis*—a gift of reverence for what comes from God He then states explicitly that human beings cannot rise to this vocation to the communion of persons “except through

⁴³ Pope John Paul II, *Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope John Paul II on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today: Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* 1984 (Boston: Pauline Books & Media), § 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, § 26.

the powers that come from the spirit, and precisely from the Holy Spirit, who purifies, enlivens, strengthens, and perfects the powers of the human spirit.⁴⁵ He follows this statement with the reference to John 6:63. John Paul II, following Pope Paul VI, then mentions the need for a life of prayer, penance, and Eucharistic communion. Living in the Spirit, the spouses receive from the Holy Spirit the gift of reverence for what is sacred; such reverence sustains and develops in the spouses “the singular sensibility for all that in their vocation and shared life carries the sign of the mystery of creation and redemption.” This gift of the Holy Spirit will initiate “man and woman particularly deeply into reverence for the two inseparable meanings of the conjugal act.”⁴⁶ The man and woman become habitually orientated towards the dignity of each person as masculine or feminine and towards the personal dignity of new life. John Paul II interprets Ephesians 5:21, “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ,” as an indication of this gift of piety and a sensibility full of veneration for “the essential values of conjugal union.” He concludes that the notion of “the practice of the honorable regulation of birth,” invoked by Paul VI, is part of Christian conjugal and family spirituality; it is interiorly true and authentic only if one lives according to the Spirit. Conjugal spirituality and the practice of the honorable regulation of birth is an exemplary case showing the significance of the principle of “the priority of spirit over matter.”

In the very last section of the book John Paul II briefly discusses the anti-thesis of conjugal spirituality in the anti-conceptive practices and mentality. The contraceptive mentality and the practice of separating the unitive and procreative dimensions of the marriage act evinces the “subjective lack of such understanding” of the integral meaning and value of marriage and reflects a lack of reverence for God’s work. This mentality and practice causes an “enormous harm from the point of view of the inner culture of the human person.”⁴⁷ The dignity of human sexuality, the interiority of conjugal life, the enlargement of mutual freedom are all at stake in this confrontation. It is through reverence for the work of God, stirred up by the Spirit, that the affective manifestations of married love deepen in the capacity for admiration for the beauty of masculinity and femininity and an appreciation of the gift of the other. It is the human and supernatural climate of virtues and the life of the spirit, sustained by the *donum pietatis*, that will thus form the inner harmony of marriage.

The principle that we respect the priority of spirit over matter is primarily a call for human receptivity to the Spirit of God, whereas the other two principles, persons over things and ethics over technology, are about human choice and habit. For a good reason then does John Paul II frequently cite Romans 5:5

⁴⁵ John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 653–654.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 654.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 656.

—“the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” This is precisely the passage used repeatedly by St. Augustine and St. Thomas to explain the priority of grace and to correct the error of Pelagianism. The biographer of Augustine, Peter Brown, notes that Augustine’s battle with Pelagianism led him to conclude that “an act of choice is not just a matter of knowing what to choose: it is a matter in which loving and feeling are involved. [...] Men choose because they love.”⁴⁸ And yet we cannot generate our own healing—“the vital capacity to unite feeling and knowledge comes from an area outside man’s power of self-determination. ‘From a depth that we do not see, comes everything you can see.’”⁴⁹ Augustine also frequently cited Romans 5:5 to this effect.⁵⁰ That “area outside man’s power of self-determination,” that depth we do not see, is precisely the mystery of piety. The ultimate object of piety is Christ himself, and the reverence for the creation and redemption point to the work of God in Jesus Christ. John Paul II explained in his exhortation on penance, that piety becomes a “force for conversion and reconciliation” and enables the Christian to confront iniquity and sin through the mystery of Christ. “The Christian accepts the mystery, contemplates it and draws from it the spiritual strength necessary for living according to the Gospel.”⁵¹ This is an echo of John Paul II’s first proclamation in *Redeemer of Man* that “the Church lives this mystery, draws unwearingly from it and continually seeks ways of bringing this mystery of her Master and Lord to humanity—to the peoples, the nations, the succeeding generations, and every individual human being” (§ 7) and “the mystery of Christ, in revealing the divine dimension and also the human dimension of the Redemption, and in struggling with unwearingly perseverance for the dignity that each human being has reached and can continually reach in Christ, namely, the dignity of both the grace of divine adoption and the inner truth of humanity” (§ 11). It is through the work of the Holy Spirit “convincing the world about sin, righteousness and judgment” that the focus upon the paschal mystery of Christ will bear fruit in conversion and the attraction to the mystery of piety.⁵² This gift of piety, inspired by the Holy Spirit, will evoke that deep amazement at the worth and

⁴⁸ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 373.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Augustine’s *Spirit and Letter* § 5: “A man’s free-will, indeed, avails for nothing except to sin, if he knows not the way of truth; and even after his duty and his proper aim shall begin to become known to him, unless he also takes delight in and feel a love for it, he neither does his duty, nor sets about it, nor lives rightly. Now, in order that such a course may engage our affections, God’s love is shed abroad in our hearts, not through the free-will which arise from ourselves, but through the Holy Ghost, which is given to us” (Romans 5:5).

⁵¹ *Reconciliation and Penance*, § 21.

⁵² Pope John Paul II. 1986. *The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World: Dominum et Vivificantem: Encyclical Letter of John Paul II* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media), §§ 32, 33, 38.

dignity of the human person in the vocation to marriage and family and this gift sustains the love by which it is practiced and lived.

C. S. Lewis and Y. R. Simon on Technology

Other philosophers have explored this theme of the threat of technology to human dignity, noteworthy are Clive Staples Lewis and Yves René Simon. Their work can help shed some light on the work of John Paul II.

In the concluding chapter of his masterpiece entitled *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis takes up the theme of the “conquest of nature.”⁵³ This phrase derives from Rene Descartes (1596–1650) in his *Discourse on Method*. Rejecting the ancient philosophy for its lack of effective control, Descartes says that he wished to found a new practical philosophy; by “knowing the force and actions of the fire, water, air and stars, the heavens, and all other bodies that surround us, just as we understand the various skills of our craftsmen, we could make ourselves the masters and possessors of nature.”⁵⁴ Descartes promised as the fruit of his new philosophy, “an infinity of devices that would enable us to enjoy without pain the fruits of the earth and all the goods one finds in it, but also principally the maintenance of health.”⁵⁵ But after a three-hundred-year development of technological society, Lewis wisely judges that “man’s mastery of nature turns out to be mean man’s mastery of man with the help of nature as an instrument.”⁵⁶ And it is very interesting that the Anglican Lewis chose five technological inventions to make his point: airplane, electronic communication (radio), artificial contraceptives, modern drugs or pharmaceuticals and atomic power. The benefits may be many, but the dangers are present as well. The planes are used to destroy cities with bombs, the radio is used for mass propaganda for the rule of tyrants, artificial contraception may be used for eugenics and the suppression of an en-

⁵³ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 80–91. See Michael D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

⁵⁴ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985). See Richard Kennington, “Descartes and the Mastery of Nature,” in *Organism, Medicine, and Metaphysics*, ed. S. F. Spicker (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1978), 212. Reprinted in Richard Kennington, *Modern Origins*, ed. Frank Hunt and Pamela Krauss (Lexington Books, 2004), 198–203. See also “On the Catholic Audience of Leo Strauss,” in *Leo Strauss and His Catholic Readers*, ed. Geoffrey M. Vaughn, 167–189 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2018).

⁵⁵ Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, part 6.

⁵⁶ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 69.

tire generation or population, pharmaceuticals. Can be used to control the mind and emotion or lead to serious addictions, and atomic has unleashed a weapon of mass destruction. Therefore, Lewis argues that we must understand the use of these devices and also understand that private persons through private choice can lord it over others, as also nation may dominate other nations, governments over people, or one generation over another generation. We must understand that progress is ambivalent and that human beings get weaker as well as stronger.

Lewis expresses his concern that the final stage of mastery of nature must come to the project to master human nature. And that could well mean that some men make others what they please, or make themselves what they please. The former is a possibility because scientific technique and state power have grown together. Lewis provides in this book a philosophical rationale for the principle of the “priority of people over things.”

However, more troubling is the cultural degradation of the human context of speech and symbolic deeds. The moral meaning of action is reduced to a utilitarian calculus or a private whim. Modern culture presents the spectacle of relativism and so the standard for action becomes filled by an impulse “What I want” and offers no ground for choice. This irrational will to power could give rise to a quest for the good of the group and constitute a new totalitarianism.

The deep philosophical error, according to Lewis, is reductionism: man is reduced to matter and becomes a material to be used. In order to master nature we must first reduce nature to the empirical and quantifiable. This allows it to be manipulated. Technology strives for efficiency, predictability, and repeatability. We lose a sense of mystery and the qualities of nature. Lewis asks whether we can be human without freedom, responsibility, and adventure. The human person is shorn of intrinsic worth, or dignity as a person to be respected as an end in himself.

Lewis pleads for a new respect for human integrity with personal dignity (intrinsic teleology), freedom and responsibility (capable of living a moral meaning), and also physical integrity. He concludes that only objective value, natural law, or what he calls the Way (Tao) in a previous chapter, can save us from slavery and tyranny.⁵⁷

The last chapter of *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, by Yves R. Simon, discusses technology and its implications for democracy.⁵⁸ The book as a whole contains a thoughtful and spirited defense of liberal democratic government.⁵⁹ In a later work, Simon considers confidence in human ability to achieve

⁵⁷ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁸ Yves R. Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government* (University of Chicago Press, 1951).

⁵⁹ For an overview of his political philosophy, see my articles: “Approaches to Democratic Equality,” in *Freedom in the Modern World*, ed. Michael Torre (Notre Dame Press, 1989), 237–252; and “Maritain and Simon’s Use of Thomas Aquinas in the Justification of Democracy,”

good in this life, including the use of technology, essentially a humanistic position.⁶⁰ But in chapter five, entitled Democracy and Technology, he explains how technology brings a lust for power, extreme and stultifying division of labor, urban anomie and loneliness, and a fluidity and mobility that may well destroy family life. As it is, democracy demands little, welcomes soft characters, prefers the easy way: in fact, Simon thinks that “democracy increases enormously the demand for heroism.”⁶¹ Yet technological power combined with demand for freedom yields precisely the conditions for hedonistic excess. His argument highlights the importance of a heroic conception of marriage and family for the long term vitality of democracy.

We must first begin with Simon’s definition of technique as a rational discipline designed to assure the mastery of man over physical nature through the application of scientifically determined laws.⁶² Technology is not the assemblage of things and equipment. It is a rational discipline, which may well entail external things; but technique, as rational discipline, may also involve the use of the body, cognitive powers, the will, and sense appetite. Simon says that dominion over nature is part of man’s “vocation”—this is a rational truth reasserted by revelation (Gen 1:28). It is presumably a rational truth because it is normal for man to proceed from empirical to scientific procedures and the acknowledgement that human beings live by “art and reasoning.”⁶³ In *Philosophy of Democratic Government* he points out that “the disciplines meant to assure the mastery of man over physical nature appeal to human interests and have aroused such historic forces that their falling into disuse or their failing to achieve progress are extremely unlikely.”⁶⁴ In other words, the communicability of modern science and its applicability to use combined with human interests (“the products of technique are in countless circumstances the only means to survival and freedom from pain and drudgery”) are conditions for its permanent progress. The first law of technological society is therefore a “tendency to remain technological.” Technological society is a society in which certain effects

in *The Legacy of Aquinas*, ed. David Gallagher (Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 149–172.

⁶⁰ Yves R. Simon, *Practical Knowledge* (Fordham 1991), 139: (Humanism) “As an attitude it is characterized by respect for all men and confidence in the ability of mankind to accomplish good things in this world.”

⁶¹ Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, 17, 19.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 267.

⁶³ “Hominum genus [vivunt] arte et rationibus.” See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book I, chap. 1 (980a28). Found in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* (Chicago, 1961), 5. Aquinas comments “Men have as their chief power a universal reason by means of which they live [...]. Man is ruled perfectly by reason perfected by art.” 11. “Perfectum hominis regimen est per rationem arte perfectum.” For Latin edition, S. Thomae Aquinatis, *In Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Exposition* (Marietti, 1950), 5, 8.

⁶⁴ Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, 272.

of technique come to radically and permanently change the conditions and expectations of human life. Simon describes six categories of significant change concerning: time, nature, life, reason, labor, and leadership.⁶⁵ First, technology has speeded the time frame in which projects can be accomplished, thereby weakening “our sense of dependence upon the past and future of society”⁶⁶ and increasing a sense of loneliness. Second, there is an increased ratio of artificial things over natural things; third, an increased ratio of the nonliving to the living things in our environment. By changing these ratios “technology threatens to impair the communion of man with universal nature.”⁶⁷ Fourth, a technological society raises the expectation of a “greater amount of rationality in the arrangement of things.”⁶⁸ The ratios of danger and security are altered; great confidence is placed in human power to control chance. But, as a result, the world of man becomes “irritatingly unintelligible.” The “untrustworthiness of man” is a scandal as we come to “trust physical processes controlled by techniques.” As Simon puts it, technology is not only a material cause of modern society, but also its exemplary cause—a model for how life is to be approached. All of these effects of technology permeate modern culture and they help to explain why a technological approach to the regulation of birth so easily displaces the approached based upon ethos and ultimately upon a conjugal spirituality.

Simon provides a philosophical rationale for the principle of “the priority of ethics over technology.” Ethics itself is a matter of the “good human use both of things and of one’s powers in relation to oneself as well as other people.”⁶⁹ Good use of things and one’s powers requires knowledge of human finalities, that is, a respect for and nurturing of an integral human good. One needs a knowledge of human nature and human perfection. Once we can attain a proper understanding of nature (derived from Aristotelian philosophy and doctrine of creation) the contours of natural law ethics are readily discernable.⁷⁰ Simon uses the classic Thomistic text concerning the three levels of human good and finality—first, the good of life and preservation of being, shared with all things; second, the good of marriage, procreation and family life shared to some degree with other forms of animal life; and third, the distinctively human quest for friendly association, truth and ultimately God himself.

But natural law, as a law or rule for behavior, is still on the level of universal precept; human action requires attention to particularities; it requires prudence and virtue. The virtuous man is in a state of existential readiness to act; this is the result of years of education and formation, but it is a readiness to know what

⁶⁵ Ibid., 274ff.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 275.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 276.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Yves R. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue* (Fordham University Press, 1986), 47.

⁷⁰ Yves R. Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law* (Fordham University Press, 1992), chap. 3.

to do and a facility to do what is good. It requires a disposition of the soul; an ordering of its parts—moderation of appetites, striving for what is a noble good. Ethics is guided by the ancient virtue of prudence.

In a technological society, the process of calculation of utility is substituted for prudence. There is a rise to prominence of technical experts and their instrumental reason, displacing authentic leaders, “men of virtue and human experience.” The experts focus on new techniques and they provide a knowledge of how to control behavior. Their schemes to achieve infallibly certain outcomes must come to grief against human freedom and the contingency of human affairs. Simon remarks that “the mystery characteristic of human affairs becomes more and more bewildering and uncongenial.”⁷¹ The contraceptive mentality nurtures the dreams of perfect control and readily abandons the mystery of the human person in his or her freedom and vocation. Yves Simon warns us of the danger of the mentality of instrumental reason: the “rationalism born of technological pride hates human liberty both on account of its excellence and its wretchedness.”⁷² It is, he says, the least reconcilable enemy of democracy and liberty. The most “efficient” technology and the right technical knowledge will not automatically produce good and virtuous outcomes or dependable behavior. Only virtue and the disposition of character can provide the modicum of stability or dependability in human affairs, and only the gift of piety can provide a decent respect for the mystery of human existence and the dignity of the human person.

John Paul II on Technology in *Redemptor Hominis*

Pope John Paul II shares similar concerns to Lewis Yves Simon, and other philosophers of our day on the challenge of technology. He not only provides a comprehensive set of principles and priorities for the development of a personalistic culture, he also provides a sharpened analysis of the underlying dynamism as a turning back upon the person who produces or uses technology. In *Redeemer of Man*, he wrote: “Man therefore lives increasingly in fear. He is afraid that what he produces—not all of it, of course, or even most of it, but *part of it and precisely that part that contains a special share of his genius and initiative—can radically turn against himself*; he is afraid that it can become the means and instrument for an unimaginable self-destruction, compared with which all the cataclysms and catastrophes of history known to us seem to fade away.”⁷³ We face threats today as we always have, from the envi-

⁷¹ Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, 277.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 278.

⁷³ *Redeemer of Man*, § 15 (emphasis added).

ronment, from diseases, from violence and war and so on. But a sign of modern life is a sense of threat from the very things that we have made or produced.⁷⁴ The object of this fear or the source of this threat includes the actual products or the processes by which they are made and the technology itself—such as cars, trains, electronic devices, tools, forms of energy, buildings, foods, medicines, and also weapons. But the threat is not simply, nor exclusively, nor even primarily the products and the tools; John Paul II interestingly says that it includes, “even more so,” the “work of his intellect” and the “tendencies of his will.” It is a threat and a corresponding fear concerning our own human activity of intellect and will because of the concentration of a tremendous power in these activities and products. Of course it is the concentration of power that enables individuals and groups to accomplish greater tasks and projects. But these very products, activities, and concentrations of power can “turn against man himself” (Lat. *contra ipsum hominem vertitur*). John Paul II repeats three times the notion that there is a *recoil* or *turning back* of what is the result precisely of human genius and initiative on or against the individual person, human associations, or even mankind as a whole. Technology can be directly turned back upon the human, as C. S. Lewis explains, or indirectly turned back at the human person in ways more hidden or more long term.

John Paul II says that this recoil of technology is “the main chapter of the drama of present-day human existence in its broadest and universal dimension.” In other words, the “crisis of our times” is generally the question of how we can live with the very things and activities that have gained us such a tremendous progress and betterment of human existence. In a way, it is about the ambivalence of human power, that it can be used for good or for evil. More fundamentally, the crisis is about how we choose to live as human persons, indeed whether we continue to understand ourselves, or rather, how we come to understand ourselves, as human persons. It is a crisis of humanism, a crisis of spirit. The human crisis is about, he said, the “work of his intellect” and the “tendencies of his will.” What is or what shall be the main work of the intellect? What are or what shall be deemed the noble tendencies of will? Must we seek wisdom and love as the perfections of intellect and will? Do wisdom and love even count anymore as essentially human and the distinctly human? Or are they considered now otiose and among the ideals of old that must be jettisoned for the

⁷⁴ The man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces, that is to say, from the result of the work of his hands and, even more so, of the work of his intellect and the tendencies of his will. All too soon, and often in an unforeseeable way, what this manifold activity of man yields is not only subjected to “alienation,” in the sense that it is simply taken away from the person who produces it, but rather it turns against man himself, at least in part, through the indirect consequences of its effects returning on himself. It is or can be directed against him. This seems to make up the main chapter of the drama of present-day human existence in its broadest and universal dimension. *Ibid.*

ongoing freedom and progress of mankind? What then would be the measures of freedom and progress?

It is very interesting that John Paul II uses the term *alienation* to describe this process of the recoil of the human against the human. This is a term that he first heard among the Marxists, but as a pastor and philosopher he developed it along personalist lines. Alienation is the condition whereby a person finds what properly belongs to him assigned to another person or object, or a condition in which one is estranged from the world and society. It was the experience of life in a communist society that led Pope John Paul II to rework the notion of alienation, especially in an important essay "Participation or Alienation."⁷⁵ In that work he states emphatically, "The central problem of life for humanity in our times, perhaps in all times, is this: participation or alienation?"⁷⁶ He says specifically, "civilization itself and its so-called progress must be evaluated in light of this basic criterion: do they create conditions for the development of participation? Do they enable us to experience other human beings as other I's? Or do they do just the opposite? Do they obstruct participation and ravage and destroy this basic fabric of human existence and activity which must be realized in common with others?"⁷⁷ Thus, he reorients the problem of "alienation" to the fulfillment of the person in love and community. He also reorients the question of human progress and development: "the development of technology and the development of contemporary civilization, which is marked by the ascendancy of technology, demand a proportional development of morals and ethics."⁷⁸ The essential and fundamental question we must ask is the following: "Does this progress make human life on earth "more human" and more "worthy of man"? In some aspects it no doubt has done so. But we must make a stand on the notion of humanity, what is it to be "more human" or more "worthy of human life"? It is an existential question more than it is a theoretical question. In *Redeemer of Man* John Paul II sets some markers. For "man, as man, to become truly better" we should ask: "Are we more mature spiritually? Are we more aware of the dignity of our humanity? Are we more responsible? Are we more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all?"

With these questions about alienation and authentic human development, John Paul II approaches the problem of technology, the crisis of our time and the mission of the Church with the three principles we have now reviewed: the priority of persons over things, the priority of ethics over technology, and the priority of spirit over matter. His Theology of the Body, a re-reading of *Humanae Vitae* in the perspective of personalism and a more expansive biblical theology, emerges

⁷⁵ Karol Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?," in *Person and Community* (New York 1993), 197–207. See also Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht 1979), chap. 7, 261–298.

⁷⁶ Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation," 206.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Redeemer of Man*, § 15.4.

as a key to his pontificate and the new evangelization. It is in the very heart of marriage and the family that the “recoil” of technology and the alienation of persons has such a devastating effect. The tendencies of human intelligence and volition are stymied and disordered by the mentality and practice of contraception. The human person is alienated from nature, the spousal “other,” the generational links, and from God himself. Renewal and reformation must therefore begin here at the most fundamental level and origin of life and society. The family is the basic cell or foundation of society.⁷⁹ In *Humanae Vitae* St. Pope Paul VI laid out the solid argument and teaching about marriage and family and he voiced a prophetic warning. Lewis, by sounding the alarm about the potential for the “abolition of man,” had hoped to expose the ideology to awaken people to resist the reductivism of the new civilization. It has progressed now to a more ominous form and Lewis has little to offer beyond the prophetic warning. Lewis, nevertheless, was a consummate apologist who brought many to a renewed understanding of the faith. So too, Yves R. Simon had little to propose to counter the negative trends of technology in modern democracies other than the rural ideal because of its closeness to nature and the revival of natural law. Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II stands out in his distinctive witness to hope. I think that this is due to his personalism and his awareness of the subjectivity of the person and the lived experience of freedom and love. He was hopeful that the very distortion of the technological pressures would arouse the human person to seek a better way of life. He develops this idea in section 18 of *Redeemer of Man*. We can catch a glimpse of this attitude in his remarks in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* on why he thinks the young respond positively to the theology of the body:

It is this vocation to love that naturally allows us to draw close to the young. As a priest I realized this very early. I felt almost an inner call in this direction. It is necessary to prepare young people for marriage, it is necessary to teach them love. Love is not something that is learned, and yet there is nothing else as important to learn! As a young priest I learned to love human love. This has been one of the fundamental themes of my priesthood—my ministry in the pulpit, in the confessional, and also in my writing. If one loves human love, there naturally arises the need to commit oneself completely to the service of “fair love,” because love is fair, it is beautiful. After all, young people are always searching for the beauty in love. They want their love to be beautiful. If they give in to weakness, following models of behavior that can rightly be considered a “scandal in the contemporary world,” in the depths of their hearts they still desire a beautiful and pure love [and] they know that only God can give them this love.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ “Thus the family, in which various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the foundation of society.” *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), § 52.

⁸⁰ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 122–123.

In section 18 of *Redeemer of Man*, John Paul II remarks that these efforts of proclamation in the encyclical are an attempt “to fathom ever more deeply” the phrase “it is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail” (John 6:63). In paragraph 18.2 he explains the significance of the phrase, “the spirit gives life.” Spirit refers to the divine being, and the Holy Spirit of course, but it also refers to the human being; the deepest powers and capacities of the human person, intelligence and will, are spiritual powers. He indicates this when he says that the human person may range beyond the limit of the temporal and finite, even in the midst of his care and anxiety about temporal affairs.

John Paul II employs the Augustinian mode of approach to the life of the spirit, through reflection and the awareness of the certitudes of personal existence and the restless of the intellect and will in search of the absolute in truth and goodness: “You stir us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.”⁸¹ John Paul II speaks about the “creative” restlessness of the human person because it ever propels the human person to seek and to search beyond the immediately given and the limits of the surrounding environment. In this creative restlessness, he says, there “beats and pulsates what is most deeply human—the search for truth, the insatiable need for the good, hunger for freedom, nostalgia for the beautiful, and the voice of conscience.”⁸² Here we find the reason for his hope in the young and an expectation for a generous response to vocation to marriage and family. The human person inquires and searches after truth through the cognitive powers; the person must always be evaluating and re-evaluating choice, action, deliberation and art in light of the good; and the person through will is zealous for its own freedom and self-determination; the awareness of the beautiful arouses a longing or “nostalgia” for that which somehow eludes our grasp; and the attention to the “voice” of conscience demands our honest and resolute response. By describing these activities as “pulsating” or knocking indicates the presence in the human person of a dynamism, an active potential that must be developed and actualized. In other contexts, John Paul II spoke about personal existence being a “gift” and “task”—a gift because these aims of personal life such as truth, beauty, and goodness are something that transcend our power, we discover them, receive them with gratitude, and at times with joy and surprise; they are a “task” because we must take responsibility in their cultivation, their activation and protection. In addition, they are described as a “beating” or “palpitating,” because like the heart’s own rhythms and constant exchanges, so too the very life of the person must be

⁸¹ St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, translation by Sr. Maria Boulding, edited by David Vincent Meconi (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 3. “Tu excites, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.” *Confessions* Vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 2.

⁸² *Redeemer of Man*, § 18.

characterized by the daily rhythms and exchanges with other persons and the world that embody a respect for truth, goodness, and beauty. The transcendentals, as they are called—point towards God as their source and their exemplar.

It is a cultural opening for the Church to “appeal to Spirit to obtain the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Love, will respond to such asking, seeking, and knocking. In the face of the materialisms of communism and consumerism, John Paul II confidently proclaims, “the Spirit is the answer to the materialism of our age.”⁸³ This is a critical insight. The materialisms of the modern world are oppressive and depressing. They are behind a culture of death. The Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life. In the modern world, the person is denied any such fulfillment according to its materialist ideologies and its dominant practices of consumerism, sensualism, or workaholicism. The negative signs of the times, the threats to human dignity, such as a technology out of control, a reductive scientism, and political tyranny may all strip away the dignity from the human person and shatter the coherence of the world, but the restlessness of the heart surges against these strictures and assaults. Many may exhaust themselves in futile pursuits, and others may despair of ever finding, still Pope John Paul II holds out the promise of redemption through these first stirrings of the spirit of man. The very denial of the spirit can have the opposite effect—that of stirring up the hunger and longing of the soul for something greater, for the full truth, a fair love, an authentic good, ultimately for God himself. For it is these “materialisms that give birth to so many forms of insatiability in the human heart.”

John Paul II writes, “This invocation addressed to the Spirit to obtain the Spirit is really a constant self-insertion into the full magnitude of the mystery of the Redemption, in which Christ, united with the Father and with each man, continually communicates to us the Spirit who places within us the sentiments of the Son and directs us towards the Father.”⁸⁴ The gift of piety is the infused love of the adopted son for the Father, and a love of all mankind as brothers and sisters made in the image and likeness of God and enveloped by Christ in his redeeming act.⁸⁵ The hunger for the spirit is a hunger for Christ. “This is why the Church of our time—a time particularly hungry for the Spirit, because it is hungry for justice, peace, love, goodness, fortitude, responsibility, and human dignity—must concentrate and gather around that Mystery, finding in it the light and the strength that are indispensable for her mission.”⁸⁶ John Paul II’s defense and explication of *Humanae Vitae*, now called the theology of the body,

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. He cites Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6.

⁸⁵ John P. Hittinger, “Meekness, Piety and Reconciliation.” Doctor Communis Le beatitudini, programma di Cristo per l’evangelizzazione in ogni tempo e cultura / The Beatitudes, Christ’s Programme for Evangelisation for all Time and for Every Culture (2015).

⁸⁶ *Redeemer of Man*, § 18.

is an invocation of the Spirit to obtain the Spirit. His confidence in this teaching derives from the *mysterium pietatis*.

Conclusion: A Sign of Contradiction

Pope Paul VI proclaimed in the encyclical letter that his teaching would be a sign of contradiction:

It is to be anticipated that perhaps not everyone will easily accept this particular teaching. There is too much clamorous outcry against the voice of the Church, and this is intensified by modern means of communication. But it comes as no surprise to the Church that she, no less than her divine Founder, is destined to be a “sign of contradiction.” She does not, because of this, evade the duty imposed on her of proclaiming humbly but firmly the entire moral law, both natural and evangelical. Since the Church did not make either of these laws, she cannot be their arbiter—only their guardian and interpreter. It could never be right for her to declare lawful what is in fact unlawful, since that, by its very nature, is always opposed to the true good of man.⁸⁷

Karol Wojtyła worked closely with and along the side of Paul VI.⁸⁸ After *Humanae Vitae* a firestorm of dissent and scorn poured forth from within the Church⁸⁹ and from the world. In *Redeemer of Man*, John Paul II stated that he admired his faith and his personal sanctity; he expressed his “amazement” at his “profound wisdom and his courage” and “constancy and patience in the difficult post-conciliar period.”⁹⁰ He preserved “a providential tranquility” and “always maintained unhesitating hope in the Church’s solidity.”⁹¹ The solidity of the Church derives from its unity of faith and the fullness of the truth entrusted to her. Paul VI made him a cardinal and he invited him to preach the papal household Lenten retreat in 1976. He chose the passage from St. Luke to unify his talks. “He is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and as a sign of contradiction” (Luke 2:34). He opened the retreat with this introduction:

Don’t these words, spoken at the sight of a little child, bring together in a wonderful synthesis all that has the most profound impact on us and unceasingly perturbs us? Are they not a sign of our own times, or at least the key to un-

⁸⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968), § 18.

⁸⁸ Karol Wojtyła, “Crisis in Morality,” in *Crisis in Morality: The Vatican Speaks Out* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1969), 1–8 and *Fruitful and Responsible Love* (New York, Seabury Press, 1979), 11–35.

⁸⁹ See: Janet Smith, *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 161–193.

⁹⁰ *Redeemer of Man*, § 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

derstanding the various symptoms displayed by modern life, symptoms with which the Second Vatican Council concerned itself, and the Synod of Bishops too, and which are of continual concern to the Holy See and all bishops together with the People of God? Might not these words be a distinctive definition of Christ and his Church? “The sign of contradiction.” [...] May this light give us strength and make us capable of accepting and loving the whole truth of Christ, of loving it all the more as the world all the more contradicts it.⁹²

The sign of contradiction he applies to the entire Church and her mission, as it applied to Jesus Christ. But it also applies with specific relevance to the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, as Cardinal Wojtyła makes very clear. In a section on truth and the mystery of man, he preaches about Christ as a great prophet who, like other prophets, was rejected by his own.

In the section entitled “The Mystery of Man: Truth,” Wojtyła explains why Jesus Christ was a sign of contradiction: his salvific truth is an “extremely demanding one, fraught with difficulties.”⁹³ Accordingly the Church’s activities and the Supreme Pontiff becomes a “sign of contradiction.” He is very aware of the rejection of the Church’s teaching on sexuality and marriage when he declares:

In recent years there has been a striking increase in contradiction, whether one thinks of the organized opposition mounted by the anti-Gospel lobby or of the opposition that springs up in apparently Christian and ‘humanistic’ circles linked with certain Christian traditions. One has only to recall the contestation of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. These examples are enough to bring home the fact that we are in the front line in a lively battle for the dignity of man.⁹⁴

The Church’s fight for the dignity of the human person uplifts freedom and responsibility, but not “an unbridled exercise of freedom” as demanded by the abortion advocates.⁹⁵ The human person exercises such freedom “justly and responsibly” through a choice for service such as marriage or priesthood. The Church must make its efforts by the influence of “men’s hearts and in human conscience.” It is through the mystery of Christ, “a great prophet.”

In 1976, Cardinal Wojtyła visited Orchard Lake Schools in Michigan and gave a very stirring speech, reflecting one of his meditations in *Sign of Contradiction* on the deep conflict between the Word and the “anti-word,” the Gospel and the “anti-Gospel.”⁹⁶ At Orchard Lake, he said:

⁹² Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction*, 7–8.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27–31.

We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church and the anti-Church, of the Gospel and the anti-Gospel. [...] We all realize it is not an easy matter, and a great deal of it depends upon the outcome on the Vistula. I think that Polonia is perhaps the most aware of it, and it seems to me that other layers of American society are less enlightened in this respect and simply eliminate the problem from their sphere of interests. Polonia, which shares Poland's sentiments, feels the significance of the confrontation going on at the banks of the Vistula. It is a trial of not only our nation and Church, but in a sense a test of two thousand years culture and Christian civilization with all of its consequences for human dignity, human rights and the rights of nations.⁹⁷

Wojtyła saw the opposition to Pope Paul VI as part of an on-going spiritual and cultural battle. And yet there are always those in the Church and in positions of political and cultural influence who continue to “eliminate the problem from their sphere of interests”—many politicians, educators, and Church leaders are oblivious to the culture of death and the primacy of the pro-life issues. Many fail to support the mission to promulgate and inculcate the whole truth about man and God and thus plant the seeds of Catholic culture. The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is a prime example. Wojtyła hoped that his visit to the United States to attend the Eucharistic Congress and to meet with Polonia would encourage those leaders to be courageous in their witness to the truth. At the conclusion of the *Sign of Contradiction*, Karol Wojtyła returns to the theme of Christ as the light of the world and the sign of contradiction. He lays out before the Holy Father those things which “distress the soul of the successor to Peter.” These include the great poverty of many peoples, ignored by the rich and powerful of the world, many of whom profess Christianity. Also distressing is the way in which Christians are marginalized in many societies, again professing to respect religious freedom. Others seek to reshape Christianity and adapt its message to “suit mankind in this era of progress” and the program of consumerism, ignoring the eternal and transcendent end of the human person. He saves his last criticism for the totalitarian states (such as the Soviet Union, although not mentioned by name). Here we find a direct opposition to Christ—“an undisguised rejection of the Gospel, a flat denial of the truth about God, man and the world as proclaimed by the Gospel.”⁹⁸ We witness the brutal treatment of religion by the closure of churches and the execution of priests. This program uses a “face saving” means of persecution by claiming to act of sin on behalf of

⁹⁷ Frank Renkiewicz, *For God, Country and Polonia: One Hundred Years of Orchard Lake Schools* (Center for Polish Studies and Culture: Orchard Lake, MI, 1985). For background on Orchard Lake, see: Joseph Swastek, *The Formative Years of the Polish Seminary in the United States* (Center for Polish Studies and Culture: Orchard Lake, MI, 1985).

⁹⁸ Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction*, 200.

the poor and oppressed and by proclaiming it supports freedom of conscience. But this program is “above all against Christ.” Faith in Christ is condemned and banished because by such faith a man’s strength has the strength to resist the “anonymity of the collective.”⁹⁹

In his forward to the Italian edition of the book *Sign of Contradiction*, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński said: “Bishop Karol carried the ‘yes’ from the altar of St. Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr, whose relics are preserved in the historic shrine of Wawel, and brought the good news.”¹⁰⁰ His deep and lively faith “has released in him an apostolic fervor that today more than ever is the indispensable prerequisite for ‘renewing the face of the earth.’”¹⁰¹ For this reason “his gaze is on the ‘sign’ whom the world contradicts, but he views with serenity this contradiction hurled at Christ by the world.”¹⁰² This is really a remarkable passage, refining, perhaps even redefining the more common interpretation of Vatican II and *Gaudium et Spes* concerning “the signs of the times.” For the signs, Wyszyński points to the concluding sentences of the book: “Christ, Sign of Contradiction. And the woman clothed with the sun ‘a great sign in the heaven.’”¹⁰³ The time of great hope is also a time of great trial, for the “same temptation that we know from the third chapter of Genesis” is more deeply rooted than ever. Indeed, Cardinal Wyszyński says, the “human family may wander far from Christ, but then weary of exploring blind alleys, it will come back with renewed hope.” The renewal would come, must come, only from the “sign of contradiction,” and from the woman who held the child in her arms. Cardinal Wyszyński thus says: “The world does battle with the son and his mother. That is why she is ever present in the mystery of Christ and the Church.”¹⁰⁴

In technological modern civilization the contradiction to human dignity stems from the pressures of technological mindset, as we saw above in the thought of C. S. Lewis and the “abolition of man.” In *Sign of Contradiction*, Wojtyła explains it as follows:

Nowadays, there are so many attempts to reduce everything in human life to statistics, to mathematical formulae. In some places, under some political systems, man himself seems lost in a forest of figures which are used as

⁹⁹ Ibid., 201.

¹⁰⁰ Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction*, xiii.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., xiii–xiv.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 206.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., xiv. Concerning the victory of the Church, John Paul II said in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*: “Mary’s participation in the victory of Christ became clear to me above all from the experience of my people. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński told me that his predecessor, Cardinal August Hlond, had spoken these prophetic words as he was dying: ‘The victory, if it comes, will come through Mary.’ During my pastoral ministry in Poland, I saw for myself how those words were coming true,” 220.

tools to regulate his existence. And man cannot remain oblivious of the great threat posed by this gigantic machine at the disposal of material power, or rather the many powers, the veritable imperialisms which vie endlessly with one another but which cannot ultimately claim to have at heart the good or the real happiness of mankind. Indeed, the reverse is true: for those powers, those imperialisms, see in man—in man's freedom and inner and truth—the biggest of all threats to themselves.¹⁰⁵

This passage is very good because it identifies the threat to human existence not simply in one political system, such as communism or capitalism, nor in technology itself, but in the very basis of modern existence. The “machines” of progress indicate not modern equipment or technology as such, but the new attitude towards man—the reduction to an object of manipulation or use. The first line of defense of the dignity of the person is the teaching of the whole truth about man and the appeal to the search for the full truth. For the dignity of man is in knowing and living the truth about the human good. In this retreat to Pope Paul VI, he said, “Christ, the great prophet is the one who proclaims divine truth; and he also shows the dignity of man to be bound up with truth: with truth honestly sought, earnestly pondered, joyfully accepted as the greatest treasure of the human spirit, witnessed to by word and deed in the sight of men.”¹⁰⁶ And yet the suppression of truth and the denial of man's right to the full truth is widespread in the modern world. “Given our society today, in which falsity and hypocrisy reign supreme, public opinion is manipulated, consciences are bludgeoned, apostasy is sometimes imposed by force and there is organized persecution of the faith—the Christ who bore witness to the truth is more than ever the Christ for us—“*Christus propheta magnus*” (Luke 7:16).

The defense of the truth about human life in our day, as faithfully and fearlessly proclaimed by St. Pope Paul VI, stands at the center of the pontificate of St. John Paul II. The remarkable teaching on the theology of the body is one of the great achievements of his pontificate. The reasons for this are proclaimed at the beginning of his pontificate in *Redeemer of Man*.

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¹⁰⁵ Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction*, 50.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

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Jean-Paul II au sujet de l'encyclique *Humanae Vitae* et de la supériorité de l'éthique sur la technologie

Résumé

L'article traite de l'approche holistique des questions liées à la famille et à la vie humaine présentée par Jean-Paul II mais qui avait déjà été formulée par le pape Paul VI dans l'encyclique *Humanae Vitae* (1968). Cette approche est une illustration de ses principes de renouveau culturel contenus dans l'encyclique *Redemptor Hominis* (1979). Une triade de principes étroitement reliés (la primauté de la personne sur les choses, la priorité de l'éthique sur la technologie et la priorité de l'esprit sur la matière) constitue des règles qui aident à discerner le véritable progrès de la culture moderne. Contrairement à l'opinion dominante qui veut que la contraception constitue une occasion de progrès énormes pour les femmes et la société dans son ensemble, l'auteur affirme que la nature ambivalente de la technologie moderne montrée par des auteurs, tels que Yves R. Simon et C.S. Lewis, met en relief un grand inconvénient de la contraception : un réel risque de dégradation de la relation conjugale et une menace pour le plein développement de l'être humain. Considérer la technologie comme un moyen de réguler les naissances en lieu et place du choix personnel et de la vertu renverse le principe de la priorité de l'éthique sur la technique et permet également de manipuler les femmes, comme l'avait déjà prévu le pape Paul VI. Cette question est une négation évidente du principe de la primauté de la personne sur les choses. L'erreur fondamentale réside dans une philosophie matérialiste de la vie qui rejette la reconnaissance de la priorité de l'esprit sur la matière. La lutte pour les questions mentionnées ci-dessus et se trouvant au cœur de l'encyclique *Humane Vitae* est une lutte pour le sens ultime de l'existence humaine perçue de manière théiste ou anti-théiste, évangélique ou anti-évangélique ; c'est pourquoi, elle sera toujours un « signe d'opposition » .

Mots-clés: le Pape Jean-Paul II, le Pape Paul VI, éthique, *Humanae Vitae*, PFN, moyens de contraception, technologie, *Redemptor Hominis*, C. S. Lewis, Yves R. Simon, «Signe d'opposition»

John Hittinger

Giovanni Paolo II sull'enciclica *Humanae Vitae* e sulla superiorità dell'etica sulla tecnologia

Sommario

L'articolo tratta dell'approccio olistico alle questioni relative alla famiglia e alla vita umana presentato da Giovanni Paolo II ma che fu stato già formulato da Paolo VI nell'enciclica *Humanae Vitae* (1968). Questo approccio è un esempio dei suoi principi di rinnovamento culturale contenuti nell'enciclica *Redemptor Hominis* (1979). Una triade dei principi (il primato della persona sulle cose, la priorità dell'etica sulla tecnica e la priorità dello spirito sulla materia) costituisce regole che aiutano a discernere il vero progresso della cultura moderna. Contrariamente alla convinzione dominante che la contraccezione sia un'opportunità di enorme progresso per le donne e anche per la società, l'autore afferma che la natura ambivalente della tecnologia moder-

na dimostrata da autori come Yves R. Simon e C.S. Lewis, indica un grande svantaggio della contraccezione, vale a dire un vero pericolo di degrado delle relazioni coniugali e una minaccia al pieno sviluppo dell'essere umano. Considerare la tecnologia un modo di regolamento delle nascite al posto della scelta personale e della virtù inverte il principio di priorità dell'etica sulla tecnica e offre anche l'opportunità di manipolare le donne, come l'aveva già previsto il papa Paolo VI. Questo problema è un'ovvia negazione del principio del primato della persona sulle cose. L'errore fondamentale risiede nella filosofia materialistica della vita che rifiuta il riconoscimento della priorità dello spirito sulla materia. La lotta per le questioni sopra menzionate e contenute al cuore dell'enciclica *Humane Vitae* è una lotta per l'ultimo significato dell'esistenza umana percepita in modo teistico o anti-teistico, evangelico o anti-evangelico, e perciò sarà sempre un «segno di obiezione».

Parole chiave: il Papa Giovanni Paolo II, il Papa Paolo VI, etica, *Humanae Vitae*, NFP, contraccettivi, tecnologia, *Redemptor Hominis*, C. S. Lewis, Yves R. Simon, «Segno di obiezione»