INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

Volume X, Number 2 Summer 1986 $6.00 a copy

Pope John Paul II and *Humanae Vitae*

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POPE JOHN PAUL II has made teaching about human sexuality a major part of his pontificate; on nearly every visit to countries around the world, he has taken care to reiterate the Church's opposition to artificial means of birth control. Many who have read the writings of John Paul II say that they are difficult to read, that he has a rather impenetrable style. That may be true for some of his works, but I am among those who find his works not only challenging, but at the same time lucid and illuminating. Those I know who, in particular, are familiar with his writings on family life and sexuality all say the same thing: These views are exciting.

Some may ask, when one is referring to papal teachings, what can one possibly mean by the word "exciting"? Now, since I am from the University of Notre Dame, you will not be surprised to find me using football examples to clarify my points. We have a definite understanding of excitement at Notre Dame—it generally means a last minute winning field goal in the Notre Dame stadium—but this is not the way that I am using the word here. It is more like the excitement one finds in the works of St. Thomas, for instance. Fewer people find excitement there than in football—but seekers after truth will know what I mean. St. Thomas and the

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pope have had profound insights into the nature of man and the world in which man lives; it is a privilege to be able to learn from them the truths which they have grasped. Thomas' method was appropriate in his time, and John Paul II has found interesting and captivating ways of conveying to our age the truths he sees.

And it is not just people of arcane or unusual tastes—people like myself, who think possession of an encyclical more exciting than season tickets to the Notre Dame football games—who find the pope's views exciting. It will please you to know that many young people, indeed, even students at Notre Dame, upon being introduced to the pope's views and arguments, find them extremely provocative and illuminating. He is a thinker whose views, because of their philosophic rigor and because of the challenge which they present to the modern age, simply must be taken seriously.

In fact, I am going to say something which I hesitate to say, because it will undoubtedly seem extravagant and sound like I am a cheerleader for the quarterback at the Vatican: I believe the pope's book *Love and Responsibility* deserves placement on any list of the Great Books of the Western World. At this point I would like to mention that I teach in a Great Books Program at Notre Dame. We spend a fair amount of time in that program determining what qualifies as a Great Book; there is little quarrel that books such as Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Augustine's *Confessions*, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* belong on such a list; these books qualify if only because they have held the interest of every generation since they were written. We conjecture that they have had such an enduring appeal since they address the great questions which plague all men, questions which help us determine what sense we can make of the world around us and our place in it. I maintain that the pope's book belongs in this group, since I think generations to come will read his book—they certainly should do so, for if they do they will find that it boldly confronts questions we all have about life and offers a way of viewing human relationships which, if accepted, would radically alter the way in which we conduct

our lives.

Love and Responsibility is the first of the pope's major works on human sexuality. Paul Johnson, in his fine biography of Pope John Paul II, tells us that Pope Paul VI was reading this work as he wrote *Humanae Vitae* and that he was greatly influenced by it.[1] Since he has assumed the pontificate, John Paul II has energetically tried to put before the public the truth about human sexuality; he has given three series of talks on human sexuality. The first series focused on a few key passages from *Genesis*, published by the Daughters of St. Paul under the title *Original Unity of Man and Woman*; the second series was a reflection on key passages from Matthew, published under the title *Blessed are the Pure of Heart*; and he recently finished the third series, published under the title *Reflections on Humanae Vitae*. This essay, in three sections, shall draw upon all these writings.

Since many find the pope's method intimidating, I shall try first to make his approach more accessible by trying to explain the ways in which the pope's talks are innovative; I shall try to diminish the intimidating power of such words as "phenomenological" and "personalistic"—terms frequently used to describe the pope's philosophy. I shall try to show how this method and approach are very appropriate for our times.

In the second part of the talk, I shall lay out the main lines of the pope's teaching on sexuality. Again, some of his terms are unusual and in need of explication. The most interesting phrase used by John Paul II is "language of the body." The pope speaks of the body as the "expression of the person"; he teaches that the "language of the body" must express the true meaning of sex. This way of speaking about the body and sex offers a view of sexuality which clarifies the purpose of sexuality and provides us with invaluable guidance on the place of sexuality in our lives.

The third portion of the talk will point out how John Paul II explains why natural means of family planning are morally permissible, whereas artificial contraception is not. Of special interest here will be his claim that "self-mastery" leads not to repression but to freedom, the freedom to express not lust, but love.

The Pope's Approach

John Paul II is so modern that even many devout Catholics, appreciative of his relentless defense of Catholic doctrine, do not seem to know what to make of him. He is regularly described as a "phenomenologist" and what term is more intimidating than "phenomenology"? And what is this "personalism"? Are not all defenders of the truth "scholastics" or "neo-Thomists"? Are not all reliable moral philosophers, natural law ethicists?

Now, although it may be heresy in some circles—and circles that I frequently spin in—it must be said that "scholastic" is not a strict synonym for all true philosophy. The word scholastic, of course, refers to works that are written under the influence of the philosophy of St. Thomas; they are generally recognizable because they follow a certain method and use a certain vocabulary; more importantly, of course, they are committed to a certain metaphysics, a certain world view. Often it is the students of St. Thomas who find the pope's works hard going because he does not explicitly use Thomas' method or his vocabulary. Phenomenology is one of the modern schools of philosophy which is largely distinguished for its method; it does not use the tight definitions of Thomism or any other tradition, but attempts to use common language to analyze human experience and by means of this analysis to unfold basic truths of existence.

I am an expert neither in Thomism nor phenomenology, but I believe I know enough about both approaches to say that the pope has blended the two in a way which enables him to arrive at insights about reality which are fully consonant with the Thomistic and Catholic view of the world, but which also grow out of the experience of a twentieth-century man. Unlike Thomists, the pope does not start with distinctions and definitions, though they often soon follow. He starts with human experiences that we all have had and by asserting values we immediately find attractive. His use of the phenomenological method does not mean a rejection of Thomism—indeed Pope John Paul II has reiterated the teaching of Leo XIII that the philosophy of Thomas is to have primacy of place among Catholics; and the pope himself is thoroughly famil-

iar with the writings of St. Thomas. Yet there is something in his manner of proceeding which is somewhat foreign to Thomists.

Let me make my point in this way. Thomas' discussion of law plays a large part in his moral philosophy: he links eternal law, divine law, natural law, and human law. The writings of the Church often follow such a pattern; for instance, *Humanae Vitae* begins with a few statements about God as the Creator and man's role as Co-creator with God. The document goes on to explain how human behavior must be in accord with the laws of nature, which are the laws of God. Let me be quick to say that I find nothing wrong—and even everything right—with this method of proceeding. But there is more than one way to get to Rome, more than one way to discover and teach the truth.

Phenomenologists are concerned to provide accurate descriptions of the way things are, of the nature of reality—descriptions not predetermined by definitions, but rooted in common experience. The pope shows himself to be a penetrating student of the human person in all that he writes. What makes his writings on human sexuality exciting and appealing is that he is able to take experiences which we all have had and make sense of them. He not only describes them well, he also explains what these experiences mean for us and helps us to reflect how we should respond and act on the basis of these experiences.

The pope concentrates on several fundamental human experiences in his works on sexuality: He speaks of *solitude* as an "original" human experience; he observes that we all long for another to complete us; he describes well the intensity and welcomeness of the *attraction between the sexes*; and he helps us see that we experience love between the sexes as a *gift*. It is through the "language of our bodies" that we express our desire to make this gift of ourselves to another. It is out of such universal human experiences that the pope composes his teaching on human sexuality. The second part of this essay shall provide some elaboration on his descriptions of these experiences.

The pope's "personalism" means that he places the human person at the center of his ethical analysis. When the pope moves

beyond describing human experience to showing what makes for moral or immoral human behavior, he does not begin explicitly with the principles of natural law. The pope's point of entry is different; he starts with a statement of value which he expects all to accept; he starts with the principle that man has an intrinsic value and that it is never right to treat him as a means to an end. His foremost concern is how each and every act we perform conforms with what is in accord with what human dignity demands. Thus, his is called a *personalistic* philosophy; it takes as its main point of departure and has as its main concern the human person.

Our century has been unparalleled in its disregard of the value of the human person; Nazi and Communist atrocities and the holocaust of abortion show that many in our times do not share this value. But perhaps we can say that thinking men have come to realize that one must never compromise the inherent rights of the human person—we should always respect the inherent dignity of man, for we know all too well the consequences of any violation of this value. So, in a sense, the value the pope uses as his starting point is one which the experience of this century has taught us to hold dearly. The rootedness of the pope's teaching in common experience—and particularly twentieth-century experience—begins here and pervades his work.

The pope's personalism can be explained in this way: It is the claim that the inherent dignity of man entitles him to a certain kind of treatment and obligates him to a certain kind of behavior. That is, the pope teaches that man should never be used as a means nor treat others as a means and that this is as true in the realm of human sexuality as it is in any other realm. Moreover, he argues that human acts must respect the nature, not only of the human person, but of reality; he argues that sex has a meaning which must be respected. Shortly we shall see how his phrase "language of the body" reflects the intertwining of this need to respect the inherent meaning of sex and the need to respect the dignity of the human person.

Language of the Body

Since his reflections on *Humanae Vitae* presuppose an under-

standing of his prior teachings on sexuality, let me quickly sketch out these teachings. This is just a sketch. I will not be able to do full justice to the depth and complexity of his argument—indeed, I will be leaving out major as well as minor points—but I would like us to have a few fundamental concepts before us.

Let me again note that the pope constantly stresses the fundamental dignity of man: we are never simply objects to be used; we are persons with an inherent dignity that requires that our personhood always be respected. Ultimately, the only way to respect another fully is to *love* him or her and to work for what is best for the person; it is never to use another for one's own selfish desires. That is the background against which the pope places all his other teachings.

Another foundational observation is that all of us sense ourselves as being fundamentally alone and in need of another to complete us; the pope's skillful and sensitive reading of *Genesis* as a story which captures this poignant human need is in itself a remarkable achievement. The pope tells of Adam's delight at seeing another who is "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh." He describes well how we respond to the attraction to one of the opposite sex, and especially to the shared attraction as a gift, a precious gift which helps us complete our own personhood. Thus, our desire for complete and full union with the other is extremely powerful.

The pope teaches us clearly the difference between this desire as found in man before original sin and this desire after original sin. He observes that, before the Fall, this desire was completely in the control of our progenitors. But now we easily recognize that our desires are disordered, that we are inclined not to use our sexuality to express our love for another person, but that often this desire is simply lust for the body of the other person. This lust tends to see the other person as an object, not as a spiritual being which should never be used as an object, not as a person which deserves to be loved.

So we have here at least four concepts which we should keep in mind: (1) The dignity inherent in the human person means that

he or she is never to be treated as an object, therefore, if we respect the dignity of the other, we shall love him or her, not use him or her; (2) there is a fundamental human need for union with another; (3) this union is experienced as the mutual exchange of the gift of selves; and (4) the desires which draw us to this union are, as the result of original sin, disordered. A fifth important concept is this, that, through the grace made available by Christ's redemptive act, we are able to regain the control of our desires.

In his *Reflections on Humanae Vitae*, John Paul II draws upon these and a few other basic concepts as he attempts to justify the teachings of that document. He does not seek to comment upon the whole document but continues his interest in how using contraception affects the human person; again he does not reject or ignore the arguments from natural law, but incorporates the natural law perspective into his concern for the needs of the human person.

Throughout his writing on love and sexuality, John Paul II distinguishes the subjective emotions allied with love and the need to ground these emotions in an objective appraisal of the beloved and in an objective recognition of universal values. That is, he teaches forcefully that we so much love to be in love that we often deceive ourselves about the true qualities of the beloved; he counsels that lovers must be very careful not to love only the exterior attractiveness of the beloved, but also to love the interior qualities of the beloved. It is only if we truly know who the beloved is that we can truly love. And those who truly love each other, desire to make a complete gift of themselves to the other. This is one of the key arguments for the pope's defense of *Humanae Vitae*; he makes the rather startling claim that the use of contraception, in fact, makes quite impossible that full and complete union which we seek to have with our beloved. This claim derives in great part from the central Catholic doctrine which he reiterates: that man and woman are not just souls within bodies, but that the human person is the union of the soul and the body.

The pope uses an unusual phrase to describe the relation of the soul to the body: He says that the body is the "expression of

the human person," that is, we express who we are through our bodies. The argument in his *Reflections on Humanae Vitae* is that we must use the expressions of the body honestly and that there must be a correspondence between what our bodies do and what we, as true lovers, intend. It is in this context that John Paul II uses the phrase "language of the body"; he wants to teach us what the truth is we should be expressing with our bodies in our sexual relationships.

The following passage gives some of the "flavor" of the pope's approach to this matter:

> As ministers of a sacrament which is constituted by consent and perfected by conjugal union, man and woman are called *to express* that mysterious *"language" of their bodies in all the truth which is proper to it*. By means of gestures and reactions, by means of the whole dynamism, reciprocally conditioned, of tension and enjoyment—whose direct source is the body in its masculinity and its femininity, the body in its action and interaction—by means of all this *man*, the person, "speaks." [my emphases][2]

The pope is claiming that certain of our bodily actions have an inherent meaning which we must respect; for example, that there is an objective truth to the meaning of sex to which we must conform our behavior. This is where the pope has recourse to natural law; he reiterates the claim of *Humanae Vitae* that there is an inseparable connection, established by God, between "the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act." John Paul II argues that these two significances of the marriage act are truly inseparable; they are the truth about sex. The pope maintains that the "language" of the body must express the truth of the marriage act.

The pope denies that this respect for natural law is a recourse to legalism. Again, he roots all his explanation in an argument about what is good for the human person. Thus, he attempts to show us that it is not against man's desires, that is, against the dynamics of a love which desires complete union with another, to conform to the meaning which sex has of both procreation and union. To deny our procreative powers, to withhold deliberately this power from sexual union is to make the union less than what it ought to be; it

is to offer only a part of ourselves, not the whole of ourselves to the beloved. And this reduced offering is particularly serious in that it robs the sex act of what makes it ultimately most unitive; it robs it of the ability for two to become one flesh through the new life they could create. That is, he is saying that the sex act which is not open to procreation is not truly unitive, and since union is what we seek through the sex act, we are working against our own desires when we use contraception.

The pope explains the evil of contraception in this way:

> It can be said that in the case of an artificial separation of these two aspects, there is carried out in the conjugal act a real bodily union, but it does not correspond to the interior truth and to the dignity of personal communion: *communion of persons*. This communion demands in fact that the "language of the body" be expressed reciprocally in the integral truth of its meaning. If this truth be lacking, one cannot speak either of the truth of self-mastery, or of the truth of the reciprocal gift and of the reciprocal acceptance of self on the part of the person. Such a violation of the interior order of conjugal union, which is rooted in the very order of the person, *constitutes the essential evil of the contraceptive act.* [my emphases][3]

The evil of contraception, then, is that it belies the truth which the "language of our bodies" should be expressing: the truth that we are seeking complete union with the beloved.

Let me show the richness of this phrase, "language of the body," a bit further. We have heard the phrase "body language" and that phrase, I think, is not so very different from what the pope means by "language of the body." Our bodies do convey very clear messages in the way that we position them and move them. As I have stated, John Paul II is claiming that certain acts of the body have inherent meaning which should not be violated. What does it mean to say that some acts of the body have inherent meaning?

An example from verbal language should help to clarify this claim. Certain words have fairly unambiguous meanings and carry with them certain obligations. Most everyone has felt betrayed by someone who has said "I love you." Most of us take this to mean "I will care for you," "I will treat you kindly," "I will not hurt you."

Many have learned that some use these words to seduce us into serving them in different ways, perhaps into giving them gifts and even perhaps into having sex with them. When we later learn that these words did not carry the meaning we believed them to have, we feel betrayed; we feel used; we feel lied to.

Is it right to say that certain actions, like certain words, carry inherent meaning? The best example of this, I think, can be found in scripture, when Judas kisses Christ. Is not a kiss a sign of affection, of friendly feeling? But Judas uses a kiss to do an unfriendly thing—to betray Christ. With his kiss he has lied to Christ—he is not expressing affection with this kiss.

John Paul II is saying that the sex act carries with it an inherent meaning: it says among other things "I find you attractive"; "I marvel and rejoice in your existence"; "I am grateful for the gift of yourself and wish to make a gift of myself to you." He also maintains that the act says "I wish to become wholly one with you and to accept the possibility of enjoying the good of procreation with you." In other words, one must accept and mean what sex itself means, that is, one must accept both the unitive and procreative aspects of sex. The pope says that this is what the body expresses when it engages in sex, and that if the person engaging in sex does not intend this meaning, then he is not telling the truth with his body. Thus, contraceptive sex involves the body in a lie. The persons engaging in this type of sex are not communicating openly and honestly with their bodies. They wish to deny one of the inherent meanings of sex: the possibility of procreation. Having sex includes the meaning that we wish to become one with another; denying the power of procreation means that one does not wish for complete union.

I explain this teaching to my students in this way: While we may desire to have sex with many people, it is when we are willing to have children with another that we know we are in the realm of love, not lust. Having a child with another is the most profound sort of union which one can have with another (to whom one is not already bonded by means of blood-ties). One's very genetic structure becomes mingled with another's genetic structure to

create a new human being, for which the parents share a lifetime of responsibility. Raising that child together creates more and more bonds between the two. Thus, the most profound union is possible only for those who wish to unite by having children. (Of course, if a couple for some physiological reason is not able to have children, this does not detract from the fact that their love is the kind that seeks to achieve that depth of union.) To use sex to express only physical desire and not the desire for total union with the other is to belie the nature of sex. To have sex without being open to procreation diminishes the union one is having with one's beloved; the individual treats his partner like one with whom he does not wish to have union—like one with whom he does not wish to have children. An individual demeans his love, he demeans his beloved, by not expressing desire for union of this depth.

In short, the pope is saying that the sex act itself says: "I love you so much, I wish to experience the ultimate union with you, the possibility of having a child." He is saying that if one does not mean this when one has sex, one is telling a lie with one's body.

The pope expands the seriousness of the falsehood told through contraceptive sex when he refers to the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* that God is a silent partner in sex. God is the one who created male and female and made sexuality the most profound way in which their bodies communicate. He wrote into the sex act its meaning of union and procreation. Those practicing contraceptive sex, then, are not only lying with their bodies to one another, they are, in a sense, betraying and misusing a good which God has given to them. And, again, one of the goods they are denying is the good of parenthood, and the good of the union which comes through parenthood. Children are a gift from God, not a punishment, as today's world so often thinks. Children are a gift which brings to true fruition the loving union of a couple. Indeed, a child is a shared creation by God and the lovers; God has chosen to bring new life into this world through the union of lovers and to deny Him the opportunity to work in this fashion is to abuse the meaning which He has written into sex.

Sex without contraception, then, carries with it the opportunity

for the most profound expression of one's gift of oneself to another: one is not holding back one's own fertility—which is an integral part of oneself—nor is one refusing to accept the fertility of one's beloved partner. The couple does not tell God that they are dissatisfied with the way He arranged matters, but work in cooperation with the arrangement God has established.

Clearly, although this doctrine may "sound good," it is not easy to live by. Married couples often find it to be a responsible and loving decision to limit their family size. They do not wish to have the language of their bodies tell a lie, but they, perhaps for reasons of health or finances, may decide that it would not be good to have more children at a certain time. The Church does not teach that couples must have as many children as biologically possible. The Church sees as one of the chief purposes of marriage the formation of children to be citizens of the Kingdom of God. Any parent will tell you that supplying such formation requires an enormous amount of learning, time, and energy and there are limits to how many children one can do this for, given the other obligations one has in life. The Church recognizes that responsible parents often will wish to limit their family size; it teaches that there is a way to do this which maintains respect for human dignity and for the nature of sex.

Natural Family Planning and Self-Mastery

Recently I have read arguments in the press that the pope shows lack of concern for women, who, if they do not use artificial contraception may be burdened by too many children. Yet, throughout his writings, the pope makes clear that it is women more often than not who are the greater victims in a disorderedness in the sexual realm. In several places in his writings, he reaffirms Pope Paul VI's prediction that contraception is not a liberator of women, but is more likely to be used as a means to exploit women. Many of my conversations with women have borne out the pope's teaching. Many women I know have been exploited or have allowed themselves to be exploited by contraception. But even further, many of them feel degraded by the use of contraceptives; they do sense that it is a blow to their human dignity and

integrity to be taking chemicals or using artificial devices which work against their fertility. Women using natural family planning (NFP) nearly always feel revered and treasured by their husbands, for they sense that their husbands respect them as persons. An analysis of the difference between NFP and contraception should help explain why many women discern such a difference between the two.

There are many ways to explain the difference between artificial contraception and NFP. The most-straightforward explanation goes like this: (a) there is nothing wrong with wanting, for good reasons, to limit one's family size and (b) there is nothing wrong with married couples either having sex or not having sex; thus, since it is not wrong to want to limit your family size and there is nothing wrong with not having sex, it follows quite smoothly that there is nothing wrong with not having sex because you want to limit your family size.

I think that line of reasoning is unassailable but it does not usually serve to answer all the objections of those who, at least at first, have trouble understanding the difference between NFP and artificial contraception. They think that both couples using contraception and those using NFP do not want children, so what is the big difference about how they achieve this end? They wonder how a couple who is using NFP can truly be open to procreation, to having children.

The difficulty here arises from too narrow an understanding of the word "open." "Open" does not mean wanting a child *now*; it means having done nothing to *close out* the possibility of having children. There is an odd phrase used currently to describe sex without contraception: such sex is called "unprotected" sex. This phrase may help us here. Those using NFP are having "unprotected" sex; though the couple may be quite certain that they cannot conceive at this point, they have done nothing to close out the possibility of a child. A woman does not make herself periodically infertile, nature does; thus, in having sex during the infertile periods, she has not done anything to close out the possibility of having children; nature closes that possibility. And, since she has no obli-

gation to have sex, in not having sex during her fertile period, she also does no wrong in abstaining. To use the phrase of the pope, the couple using NFP are not telling a lie with their bodies; they are still allowing sex its full, natural meaning. In short, the naturalness of NFP is obvious: It recognizes fertility as a good and does nothing to deny this good; it operates fully in accord with the laws of nature, which are the laws of God.

This, though, is not quite the pope's line of reasoning. In line with his personalistic philosophy, he emphasizes the positive effects of NFP for the human person. John Paul II puts great stress on the power of responsible use of periods of abstinence to aid man in regaining the mastery of himself which was his before original sin. He argues that the use of artificial or technological means allows him to avoid this mastery, and thus diminish the dignity of man. Man relies upon technology to do for him, what he cannot—or will not—do for himself. Self-restraint or continence is not a means of birth control in the same way that artificial means are, for continence does not require artificial devices; it requires strengthening the powers and virtues of the human person. John Paul II tells us that "mastery of the self" is indispensable for the human person. He insists that NFP helps us learn to control our desires; it helps us acquire virtue and strength. On the other hand, artificial means of birth control do not help us develop interior strength.

The pope continues to develop the theme of "language of the body" along with this theme of "self-mastery." Those who do not have self-mastery are not able to use their bodies to express exactly what they wish to express. They are unable to perceive or express the profounder values of love. These are the pope's words:

> Concupiscence of the flesh itself, insofar as it seeks above all carnal and sensual satisfaction, makes man in a certain sense blind and insensitive to the most profound values that spring from love and which at the same time constitute love in the interior truth that is proper to it.[4]

The pope argues that sexual union should be the product of the desire to express love for another, not the outcome of ungovern-

able passion. If an individual is driven by his desires to have sex rather than by love, he risks treating the beloved as an object to satisfy those desires, not as a person with whom to share love. Thus, the control of the passions gained through periodic abstinence is not a negation of passion. It is a means of affirming respect for one's partner. The control enables individuals to respect each other, for those who have control are able to use sexual union to express their love, not to use their beloved solely as a means of satisfying their physical desire.

The pope does not underestimate the effort that will need to be made to learn to respect one's beloved fully and to gain self-mastery. He counsels us to have regular recourse to the graces to be gained through prayer and especially the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist, for these are the means that Christ instituted to heal our weaknesses and make us whole.

The value of the product of such an effort also ought not to be underestimated. Self-mastery not only "enhances man's dignity" it also "confers benefits on human society." The pope cites a passage from *Humanae Vitae* which speaks of the goods of self-control:

> This self-discipline . . . brings to family life abundant fruits of tranquility and peace. It helps in solving difficulties of other kinds. It fosters in husband and wife thoughtfulness and loving consideration for each other. It helps them to repel the excessive self-love which is the opposite of charity. It arouses in them a consciousness of their responsibilities. And finally, it confers upon parents a deeper and more effective influence in the education of their children. For these latter, both in childhood and in youth, as years go by, develop a right sense of values as regards the true blessings of life and achieve a serene and harmonious use of their mental and physical powers.[5]

The pope tells us that use of NFP will make us better spouses and parents; our self-control in matters of sex will permeate other areas of our lives where we need self-control in order to deal with our marriages and our children. And also of great importance is the excellent example we will be for our children when we attempt to convince them of the proper place for sex in their lives.

This connection between the proper use of sexuality, the

strength of marriage, and the healthiness of children and consequently of society as well is, I think, the reason why the pope has made human sexuality a constant theme of his pontificate. Mother Teresa constantly reminds us that love and peace must begin at home, and, if we establish loving and peaceful relationships there, they will spread to the rest of the world. The pope is spreading a similar message when he implores us to be true to our human dignity in sexual matters; he maintains that integrity in sexual matters will permeate the rest of our lives.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this talk, I spoke of the pope's book *Love and Responsibility* as a Great Book, because it addressed fundamental questions facing man and because I thought that, if we were to live by its message, our lives would change radically. His message, a message which promises to liberate us from the sexual permissiveness of our times and from the heartbreak which follows from this permissiveness, is truly exciting. Consider how much happier many will be if they can escape the emotional trauma which results from sexual license. Think of the prospect of fewer "unwanted" pregnancies and the reduction of poverty and dislocated lives which follow "unwanted" pregnancy. Think of the happiness which will result from wives and husbands who love and respect each other. Ponder the joyful ramifications of fewer broken homes. The Church has been accused of being obsessed with sex and sexual sins, but those who understand how close is the nexus between sex, love, family, and human happiness will realize the importance of the pope's message.

With this essay, I hope I have made somewhat clearer the pope's impressively thorough teachings on sexuality. When I told a friend that I was going to talk on the pope's phenomenological method and his personalistic approach, he responded that he understood those terms very simply: The pope is a phenomenal person. Well, I agree. His is a voice which our age desperately needs to hear; let us open our ears and be glad.

Notes

1 Paul Johnson, *Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Restoration* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Publications, 1981), 32-33.

2 John Paul II, *Reflections on Humanae Vitae* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1984), 32.

3 Ibid., 33.

4 Ibid., 63.

5 Ibid., 46.