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After Humanae Vitae: Contraception and Abortion

Gerald W. Healy, S.J.

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After *Humanae Vitae*: Contraception and Abortion*

GERALD W. HEALY, S.J.

The scope, the urgency, the immediacy of the Population Problem, especially in Asia, will be taken for granted at this point in the Conference. The complexity of the problem must also be acknowledged, involving as it does every aspect of human life — social, economic, cultural, political, and religious. The concern of the Churches of the World with the population problem has been manifested on more than one occasion especially in the past decade. This concern has not always lead to action and involvement but that could be corrected by Conferences such as this in preparation for World Population Year 1974.

In this paper, of the many thorny moral aspects of the population problem, only the morality of the means for regulating births will be considered but against the background of abortion as a *de facto* means of controlling population.

THE MORALITY OF THE MEANS OF REGULATING BIRTH

More than five years have passed since Pope Paul VI gave the world his encyclical on the regulation of births, *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968). On the occasion of this fifth anniversary, Richard A. McCormick, S.J., presented a thought-provoking

*Paper read at at the Conference held in Baguio Dec. 10—17, 1973, in preparation for World Population Year 1974 delegates from Asia and Oceania of UNDA, the international Catholic organization of broadcast media (radio and TV); and the Asian organizations of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and the Agency for Christian Literature Development (ACLD), both international, interdenominational associations.

article in *AMERICA* (July 21, 1973) entitled: "The Silence Since *Humanae Vitae*." "... Shock and/or solace, suspension, silence — pretty much in that order" are given as the reactions to the encyclical. The silence is then explained as a growing conviction that the choice of the means, natural or artificial, is a *moral non-issue*.

This growing indifference of U.S. Catholics to the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* on the morality of the means, was aided and abetted by the reaction and writings of many theologians, but especially by the statements issued by various National Conferences of Bishops shortly after the appearance of the encyclical. The Bishops varied in their reaction to the Papal teaching concerning the choice of means, but "a careful reader will detect in some of the hierarchical statements tonal divergences, a kind of pastoral contextualizing of the papal teaching, that is not without its neutralizing influence."¹ McCormick endorses the summary of William Shannon: "The (Episcopal) statements, in fact, range from a total endorsement of the Encyclical that left little or no room for dissent to a positive justification of those who feel it their right and duty to depart from the teaching of the encyclical; in between there is an emphasis on the guiltlessness, the lessened responsibility, or at least on the good will, of those who dissent."²

What is especially interesting in the article by McCormick is the fact of *growing* dissent from the Papal teaching in theory and in practice. The number of *young* married women and *young* priests who refuse to consider artificial contraception a sin continues to rise. Between 1955–1970 the number of Catholic women using artificial methods of contraception increased from 30% to 68%. In the lower age groups (ages 20–24) the percentage of non-conforming Catholic women was paralleled by that of the young priests. The percentage of *all* priests in the U.S. who believed that artificial means were immoral was 51 percent *before Humanae Vitae*. Three years later

¹ Richard A. McCormick, S.J., "The Silence Since *Humanae Vitae*," *America*, 129 (July 21, 1973), p. 30.

² *Ibid.*

only 40 percent retained their conviction. *Before* the encyclical 38 percent did not regard contraception as a moral problem in their confessional or counseling practice. The percentage has risen to 54 percent *after* the encyclical.

A striking fact about the Catholic women surveyed is that the dissent is most pronounced among those who receive Communion at least once a month.

In 1970, then, two-thirds of all U.S. Catholic women used artificial means of contraception. Considering only the women under 30 the proportion becomes three-fourth. The conclusion is obvious: "... It seems abundantly clear that U.S. Catholics have rejected the 1968 papal encyclical's statement on birth control and that there exists a wide gulf between the behavior of most Catholic women on the one hand and the position of the more conservative clergy and the official stand of the Church itself on the other."³

The 1972 Pastoral Statement of the Indonesian Hierarchy serves to sharpen the focus on this aspect of the problem. In 1968 the National Conference of Bishops of Indonesia issued their pastoral statement concerning *Humanae Vitae*. It was classified with the pastorals which upheld the encyclical and would not approve of exceptions even though some ambiguity was noted in their words: "Even if Pope Paul's pronouncement in the Encyclical does not represent the final decision in the matter . . . we are to receive it as a guide which we must obey with wholehearted sincerity." But in 1972 the Indonesian Hierarchy issued another pastoral clarifying their 1968 statement: "There are parents who are troubled because from the one side they feel the obligation to regulate births, but from the other they are not able to fulfill this obligation by temporary or absolute sexual abstinence. In these circumstances, they decide responsibly and do not need to feel that they have sinned, if they employ other methods, provided that the human dignity of wife or husband is not diminished or provided that the means employed do not go against human life (i.e., abortion and

³ *Ibid.*

permanent sterilization) and provided the medical responsibility is upheld."

Thus the intervening years of pastoral experience did *not* move the Indonesian Bishops closer to the official teaching of *Humanae Vitae* but further away inasmuch as they allow exceptions which are explicitly forbidden by the "intrinsically evil" approach of *Humanae Vitae*.

On December 12, 1972 in another part of the Third World, the 80 members of the Mexican Bishops Conference issued a pastoral letter on Responsible Parenthood "from a sense of our pastoral duty, in view of what is a very real and excruciating emergency for most Mexican families: the population explosion, which results in very many instances from irresponsible child-bearing, aggravated by the existence of socio-economic injustice."⁴

The same Conference of Mexican Bishops had issued a pastoral letter in 1969 concerning *Humanae Vitae*. At that time they allowed for the possibility of a sincere man becoming "invincibly sure that God does not forbid artificial contraception"⁵ and they stressed the factors that might lessen the guilt of sincere couples who would use artificial means of contraception and they cautioned the confessor against inquiring about "this sin or that . . . except in special circumstances."⁶

But in the 1972 pastoral the Mexican Bishops are more explicit in spelling out all the factors that go into the formation of conscience by the sincere couple concerning the means to fulfill their obligation of responsible parenthood. "The most important decision for married people — to have, or not to have, more children — carries with it the right and responsibility of deciding on the means."⁷ The Bishops note that the formation of conscience supposes that the couple have reflected on (1) the

⁴"Pastoral Letter to the Mexican People on Responsible Parenthood," *Catholic Mind*, LXXI (June 1973), p. 45.

⁵John Horgan, ed. *Humanae Vitae and the Bishops* (Ireland: Irish University Press, 1972), p. 184.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷"Pastoral Letter," *op. cit.*, p. 50.

voice of God speaking in each one's heart; (2) the concrete circumstances of each individual; (3) the community which complements the individual.

With regard to the community aspect of conscience formulation, the Bishops state that "The feeling of the people of God is an important clue for forming a moral conscience. In fact, for many Christians it can be a decisive element. This feeling normally manifests itself in the interior of the Church community where they live."⁸

The Bishops conclude concerning the means to be used: "Bearing in mind the guidance that this magisterium provides, spouses should analyze it, as well as the data of their concrete situation, to find God's will. The decision on the means they are to take, loyally following the dictates of their conscience, ought to leave them at peace, inasmuch as they have no reason for feeling cut off from God's friendship."⁹

Thus, the Mexican Bishops do *not* demand a simple obedience to the Papal teaching but a finely nuanced formation of conscience after analyzing the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. They allow for a sincere couple reaching a conclusion in favor of artificial means of contraception otherwise there would be no need to tell them that they should feel at peace and "have no reason to feel cut off from God's friendship."

On the Philippine scene the spread of Government-sponsored Family Planning Centers under Martial Law, Presidential Decree No. 79, revising the Population Act of 1971 has endorsed all means excluding abortion. Two incentives have been provided by law: tax exemption is limited to the fourth existing child, and maternity leave with pay is granted only up to and including the fourth child.

The new emphasis of the Martial Law regime on population control is bound to have its effect. The number of acceptors of artificial means of birth prevention shown in the 1972 statistics of the Population Commission of the Philippines increased in spite of the terrible floods and droughts that marked

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

the year 1972. The Population Report of August, 1973¹⁰ shows that there has been a steady increase in acceptors of artificial means of contraception in the Philippines since 1965. In 1964 there were two family planning organizations and 2,288 acceptors; in 1971 there were 24 organizations and 388,969 acceptors.¹¹ In the populous and very Catholic province of Laguna the number of acceptors increased from 665 to 8,212 in three years, from 1968 to 1971.¹² Even allowing for some inaccuracy in the statistics there is no reason to doubt the over-all increase in the number of acceptors, and no reason to expect any reversal of the trend.

Thus in the Philippines, the most Catholic country in Asia, the number of Catholic women ignoring the Papal teaching on birth control increases annually. There is no reason to believe that this trend will change through the women being convinced to follow the official teaching of the Church which allows only periodic continence. The influence of the Church on people's attitudes towards family planning here in the Philippines has been shown to be less than that exerted by folk tradition and cultural attitudes and behavioral patterns. "The main obstacles to the acceptance of family planning in the Philippines are the traditional cultural attitudes of the majority of Filipino families, especially in the barrios and rural areas . . . The average Filipino family still considers the large family as their only wealth; children are real assets on the farm and in the household; children are a built-in security for old age."¹³

The change in attitude towards birth regulation that is slowly taking place in the Philippines seems due to urbanization, a world-wide phenomenon that appears irreversible, with real impact on all aspects of Philippine life. In the urban areas the

¹⁰ "Family Planning Programs," *Population Report*, Series J No. 1 (Aug. 1973), pp. 5-14.

¹¹ "Studies in Family Planning," *The Population Council*, IV (July 1973), p. 192.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Vitaliano R. Gorospe, S.J., "Moral Philosophy in a Philippine Context," 3rd rev. ed., mimeo. ed. (Manila: Jesuit Educational Association, 1973), pp. 252-53.

harsh economic realities usually force the couple to reconsider their attitudes inherited in a rural-agricultural society. Impoverished slum dwellers seem to retain their old cultural attitudes favoring many children for security.

Thus, it would seem that the socio-economic factor is basically the main motivator in the Philippine setting as in most countries. The official teaching of the Church does not appear to weigh heavily except perhaps with an elitist few who have had the privilege of Catholic education in the big urban centers. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church in the Philippines has been associated more with the negative, prohibitory aspects of the problem of means than with any positive approach to the overall problem.¹⁴ The most recent statement of the Philippine Hierarchy (Dec. 8, 1973) has a positive approach to the problem

Instruction in the practice of rhythm as officially endorsed by the Church is made available in the Government Family Planning Centers in the Philippine, and 1972 showed an increase in acceptors over the previous year but a decrease in relation to total acceptors of all means.

Incidentally, the Population Commission report for 1972 notes a decline in the number of acceptors of anovulant pills due to "widespread complaints regarding side effects of a certain brand of program pill. The increasing incidence of complaints possibly accounts for the decreasing popularity of the pill."

Likewise the same 1972 report notes that the IUD acceptance rate dropped by 5.6% from the previous year. "The lack of skilled physicians who can and are willing to insert an IUD" is offered as an explanation. Likewise the physicians are apprehensive concerning "the possible complication that may be brought about by the IUD acceptor since its mechanism is not yet established; they are also wary of facing the administrative problem which may be involved should such cases arise."

These disclosures concerning the fear of the pill and the IUD on the Philippine scene serve as reminders that the scientists have not yet produced the perfect contraceptive any-

¹⁴"The Philippines," *Pro Mundi Vita*, xxx (1970), p. 11.

more than have they fulfilled the Papal desire for reliable rhythm.

It is interesting to note that when a new or an improved method of artificial contraception appears on the market the brochures stress the virtue of the new and the previously glossed-over defects of the old. With regard to rhythm the same thing is true. We had available calendar rhythm, temperature rhythm, and the ovulation method which relies on mucous texture change. When Dr. Harold M. Groden developed his method (Secure Rhythm) which is based on the use of a pill to trigger ovulation, he expressed the belief that the other methods of practising rhythm are *never* certain! Lest his method be confused with the contraceptive anovulant pill officially condemned by the Church the followers of Dr. Groden prefer to call his pill "a tablet." Nomenclature aside, the Groden method requires the additional sophistication of knowing exactly when to take the pill (tablet).

What does all of this add up to? The official teaching of the Church is being ignored more and more in theory and in practice both in highly industrialized nations such as the U.S., and in this developing nation in the Third World, the Catholic Philippines. The Catholic Hierarchy of Indonesia in 1972 feels the need to clarify their position by spelling out more carefully the conditions under which the Catholic Indonesians may feel free to use artificial means of contraception without being guilty of sin, in spite of the clear teaching of *Humanae Vitae*.

This is truly a cause of confusion, perhaps of scandal, and a threat to the authority of the teaching Church. How can a divided Church survive in Asia with its teeming millions of non-Catholics? How can it give the leadership it is so capable of giving and which the world so desperately needs if the Church's official teaching is gradually being ignored and/or rejected by its own members, and Papal teaching is being modified by Episcopal conferences?

"The truth shall make you free." If anyone talks about the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on contraceptives and does not face this great difference in theory and practice he is

not being honest. We demand honesty and integrity from all involved in Population Control; we must be no less sincere and honest to retain credibility. We must tell what is being said and done by the *whole Church*, not just the official Papal teaching. And this brings us to the central thought of our paper.

The *whole Church* should now enter into some kind of communal discernment to see what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us through the divergences that have appeared among Catholics in the past five years since the appearance of *Humanae Vitae*. Father McCormick calls for such a communal effort and is theologically sound.

Such a call for a new communal discernment would not offend nor surprise Pope Paul because he expressly said in his letter to the Congress of German Catholics, Aug. 30, 1968: "May the lively debate aroused by our Encyclical lead to a better knowledge of God's will"

We need not be more cautious than the Vatican spokesman, Msgr. (now Archbishop) Fernando Lambruschini. After presenting *Humanae Vitae* to the press in 1968, he said that "the rule (against artificial birth control) is not unreformable. It is up to theologians to debate and expound all moral aspects involved. And if, for instance, some principle should become overwhelmingly accepted in the Church, contraception may even be launched." Certainly, the experience and discussions of the past five years would seem to indicate that the time has come to take to heart the words of Msgr. Lambruschini. The evidence of the past five years seems to show an irreversible trend. Whoever would deny this has the full burden of proof.

The evidence is not merely statistical; it is not a question of counting heads. The theological arguments favoring a reformulation are very impressive. The natural law argument on which the negative teaching of *Humanae Vitae* relies is not favored today by theologians, is not favored by Vatican II¹⁵ which based its moral reflection on the law of the Gospel, and the new personal-

¹⁵ Robert Hardowiryo, S.J., "Asian Population Problems: A Challenge to the Church." Paper read at the Asian Bishops Conference, Ateneo University, Quezon City, June 18-21, 1973, p. 51.

istic view of conjugal love. "Vatican II tries to rehabilitate conjugal love and to prove that it finds its justification in itself, not at an erotic level but as a development of the human person, whereas *Humanae Vitae* falls back upon Augustinian views and only justifies love by finalizing it towards procreation."¹⁶ The *biological laws* imprinted by nature are heavily emphasized in *Humanae Vitae* passing over the very much more complex criteria of marital fertility and birth control presented in *Gaudium Et Spes* and omitting the mention which it makes of the danger to marriage when the intimacy of married life is broken off, namely, that "it is not rare for its faithfulness to be imperilled and its quality of fruitfulness ruined" because then "the upbringing of the children and the courage to accept new ones are both endangered." Vatican II approaches the problem, not from the purely biological level, but at the level of interpersonal relationships and of the persons themselves.

As one commentator pointed out St. Augustine was cited ten times by Pius XI in his encyclical on Christian marriage, including his 1,500 year-old interpretation of the sin of Onan as told in Genesis 38. Pope Paul VI did not quote St. Augustine even once and did not cite his interpretation of the sin of Onan, for biblical scholars no longer honor the age-old Augustinian interpretation. But with no clear guidance from Revelation, the encyclical fell back upon Augustine's views so heavily influenced by Stoicism with its very restricted vision of man.¹⁷

Another theological argument to justify a call for communal discernment is based on the "Sensus Fidelium" as a "Locus theologicus." The Mexican Bishops in their 1972 pastoral noted that "the feeling of the people of God is an important clue for forming a moral conscience." Vatican II, *Gaudium Et Spes*, states that when it comes to promoting the values of marriage and the family "the Christian instincts of the faithful, the upright moral consciences of men, and the wisdom and experience of persons versed in the sacred sciences will have much to

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

contribute." (*Gaudium Et Spes*, No. 52) *Lumen Gentium* spoke of the responsibilities of the laity whose "services and charismatic gifts" should be recognized so "that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart." (No. 30) For it is generally the function of the layman's well-formed Christian conscience to see that the Divine Law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city (No. 31).

Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, teaches clearly that "the Church requires special help, particularly in our day, when things are changing very rapidly and the ways of thinking are exceedingly various. She must rely on those who live in the world, are versed in different institutions and specialties and grasp their innermost significance in the eyes of both believers and unbelievers. With the help of the Holy Spirit, *it is the task of the entire People of God* (emphasis added), especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the Divine Word. In this way revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and set forth to greater advantage." (No. 44) The fact that the Church has profited in the past from what seemed to be purely human developments is also acknowledged: "Thanks to the experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened. These benefits profit the Church too."

THE ABORTION CRISIS

While the Catholic Church has been divided over contraception, a far more serious problem has arisen — that of abortion. We might speak, without too much exaggeration, of a tidal wave of abortions that has recently reached the shores of the various Anglo-Saxon nations and will soon, no doubt, be threatening the Philippines. In fact, the first call to legalize abortion was sounded here in the Philippines, in Quezon City, two months ago by a doctor addressing a group of doctors on the legal aspects of abortion in current Philippine law.

With regard to abortion for population control, the teaching of the Catholic Church is clear and firm. There is no dissent and no division in the ranks. Not one Bishop would speak in favor of it. In fact every statement of Bishops that would justify contraception in any way is careful to exclude abortion.

This is the war that we should be fighting. This is where basic human rights are most threatened today, the rights of the unborn child and the very right of hospitals or doctors or personnel to follow their conscience and refuse to perform abortions or cooperate with those who do.¹⁸

The most articulate advocates of artificial contraception used as one of their main arguments the desire to put an end to the terrible evil of abortion. But the countries with the most liberal contraception policies soon witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number of abortions: *Sweden*, 703 abortions in 1943; 6,328 in 1951; *Switzerland*, by 1955 abortions were alleged to equal or outnumber live births.¹⁹

The *communist* countries differ little from the capitalistic nations, and centuries of Catholicism seemed to have little effect on the abortion rate. In *Poland* abortions rose from 1,400 in 1955 to 140,400 in 1962. In *Hungary* they arose from 1,600 in 1949 to 163,700 in 1962, with legal abortions exceeding the number of live births.

Some *Asian* nations have readily embraced the abortion solution to their population problem. In *Japan* legal abortions from 1949 to 1970 are reported to total 19,620,000. Many believe that illegal abortions still continue in Japan as Prof. Shiden Inoue affirmed in his paper read at the Asian Bishops Conference in June 1973 in Quezon City.²⁰ Since illegal abortions

¹⁸ K. D. Whitehead, *Respectable Killing: The New Abortion Imperative* (New York: Catholics United for the Faith, Inc., 1972), p. 157.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ See also Dr. Yokochi Hayasaka, Dr. Hideo Toda, Fr. Anthony Zimmerman, S.V.D., Dr. Tasuke Ueno, Dr. Meneko Ishizaki, "Japan's 22 Year Experience with a Liberal Abortion Law," *Proceedings XII International Congress of Catholic Physicians*. The International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC), October 11-14, 1970, Washington,

still continue in Japan, Prof. Inoue believes that 40,000,000 (the present population of the Philippines!) is a low estimate of the total abortions since 1949. He also cites a 1969 Government Survey reporting that about half of the married women experienced abortions.

In *India* the total number of abortions in a year is estimated to be around 5,000,000 with most of these women (more than 90 percent) married due to the relatively young age at which most Indian girls get married.²¹ Abortion is now legal in India.

Red China currently has "an effective, multi-method family program supported by the State and applied with firm social pressure and back-stopped by pregnancy interruption in case of method failure. Pregnancy interruption (P.I.) is a euphemism for abortion. This is done in hospitals and all the way down to production brigade clinics by vacuum aspiration. In two hospitals visited there were twice as many abortions as deliveries."²² Using the suction method permits the mothers to be treated on an out-patient basis and to go home after two hours and report for work in a few days.

In *Red China*, with the greatest population in the world, not more than two children are socially acceptable. (In the West, it is called Zero Population Growth.) The message in Red China is: "Two children are enough, three too much, four is a mistake."²³ Surgical sterilization is recommended for couples who have two or more children.

In *Taiwan* abortion is forbidden by law but widely practised mostly after an unwanted pregnancy occurred when contraceptives failed.²⁴

D.C., U.S.A., pp. 24-29. The authors cite the Japanese Press concerning "the 50,000,000 fetuses which have been aborted in the last two decades."

²¹ Robert Hall, *Abortion in a Changing World*, Vol. I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 245.

²² Jesus de la Paz, M.D. "Medical Education and Delivery of Health Service in the People's Republic of China." An unpublished report of what he observed while visiting Red China in September 1972 with a group of doctors from the Philippines, P. 8.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

Russia is ambivalent in its attitude towards population control. With Red China and its teeming millions ever in mind, the Russians believe that, all other things being equal, a country's position in the world is determined by the size of the population. The aging population of Russia worries Soviet leaders. In Moscow over 2 million out of 7 million people are over 50. They worry over lagging productivity and a falling birth rate.²⁵ In Russia abortions are 3 times higher for working women than for housewives.

In the *Moslem* world similar patterns exist. In *Iran* it is estimated that one third of the pregnancies are aborted.²⁶ In *Turkey* the number of abortions was estimated to be about 500,000 in 1968.²⁷ In *Tunisia* abortion is allowed for medical and social reasons since 1965.²⁸ In *Jordan* the 1964 teaching of the Grand Mufti permits abortion "so long as the embryo is unformed in human shape," which is said to be 120 days.²⁹

Russian and Japanese experience confirm the fact that illegal abortions still continue after legalization.³⁰

The *South American* example: Induced abortion continues even in areas with high contraceptive use, probably because of contraceptive failure. Incidence of induced abortion was lower among Catholic women (in Rio de Janeiro and Santiago) although *not significantly* so, than among women without religion. Formal adherence to the Catholic religion is *not* the decisive factor *but* the degree of meaningful religiosity.³¹

This seems to be confirmed by a recent Population Council study: "The predominant religion of a country does not necessarily determine the level of abortion activity. Catholic Ireland has an extremely low abortion rate whereas Catholic

²⁵ Helen Desfosses Cohn, "Population Policy in the USSR," *Problems of Communism*, XXII (July-Aug. 1973), p. 44.

²⁶ "The Desperate Dilemma of Abortion," *Time*, 90 (Oct. 13, 1967), p. 22.

²⁷ Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

Chile has a very high one; Poland and Columbia, both Catholic, have higher reported rates than Protestant England."³²

At the *United Nations World Population Conference* in 1965 experts estimated 30,000,000 induced abortions each year. Present changes in the laws, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, will probably make *abortion* the most common means of birth control, if it is not already such.

"Reports on Population and Family Planning" states that "The expert consensus is that abortion may be the most widely used method of birth control in the world."³³ Various authors are cited who support this conclusion: Freedman, 1966:819; Tretz and Lewis, 1969:21; and Klinger, 1971:1153 who affirms that "it is more and more commonly accepted that abortion is the most widely practised form of birth control even including all methods of contraception control."³⁴

An interesting aspect of the abortion problem is the documented move away from abortion to contraception after the initial high incidence of abortion. Where there has been a low use of contraception, abortion rates tend to be initially high as in Romania and Hungary. Then with the number of live births remaining stable, the number of abortions drop and contraception practice increases notably.³⁵ Even in Japan the balance has shifted somewhat in recent years from abortion to contraception.³⁶

It is not ideology, then, nor religion, nor state of development, nor being in the East or West, nor north or south of the equator that explains the spread of abortion. Among traditionally Catholic people the acceptance of abortion once it is legalized may be the most telling condemnation of our past centuries of teaching moral theology. The over-emphasis on law and external conformity without the corresponding stress on the interioriza-

³² "Reports on Population and Family Planning," *Population Council* (Oct. 1972), p. 38.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

tion of the values involved may be the reason Catholics can identify the legal and the moral even with regard to abortion.

CONCLUSION

Against this grim world picture of abortion, almost certainly the most common form of population control today, the Church of Christ must exert its almost unlimited influence to fight for the protection of the most basic human rights involved in the practice of abortion. But first it must heal the wound caused by the *Humanae Vitae* dissension with its weakening of Papal authority and leadership at a time of great crisis.

A communal discernment of all the people of God has been called for to try to discover just what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell the Church through the more than five years of growing dissent of the theologians and Bishops, including some Cardinals, and through the non-conformity of pious Catholic married couples. Just how this communal discernment would take place is an open question. The Parish councils, Priests' Senates, Synods of Bishops are all by-products of the open Church, the "democratic" church, the church of the people of God of Vatican II. These channels are available now in the Church. The Holy Spirit could easily speak through them.

Since your apostolate is mass communications you would find many opportunities for working effectively for such a communal discernment if you were convinced of its importance. This paper was meant to convince you. Until the problem is resolved some local churches will withdraw from all associations and government-sponsored programs to control population. To do this today in the light of the evidence of recent history, is to yield the field to those who will sooner or later advocate abortion. It is to leave the flock at the mercy of those who often are unscrupulous and unprincipled where population control is concerned. With so many nations today under totalitarian or martial law regimes, the Church should welcome any and every opportunity to exert its moral leadership and extend its Christian guidance.

The problem is crucial; the hour is late. Five years and more after *Humanae Vitae* is a long time at this moment in the Twentieth Century. A decade may be too late. In the spirit of Pope John XXIII we should strive *now* to read the signs of the times.