

7. Reconceptualizing Human Reproduction beyond John Paul II

Simeiqi He

What is human reproduction? Does it only mean the production of individual human offspring and giving birth to children? Or could it have a more expansive meaning? What do the rich resources of magisterial teaching provide us? Are they only unreasonable demands for uncritical obedience? Or are they invitations to further the spirit of inquiry through an ongoing faith seeking understanding that demonstrates a creative fidelity to the tradition? These questions sit at the heart of this chapter as I take a deep dive into the question of reproduction and its evolving conceptualization in the Church's magisterium.

John Paul II played an indispensable and authoritative role in shaping the magisterial teaching on the meaning and ethics of human reproduction. Within the modern papacy, John Paul II provided the most substantial elaboration on the concept of reproduction—which is among the central concerns of his entire pontificate—by first formulating its philosophical and theological foundation in the 1960 book *Love and Responsibility*. During the Second Vatican Council, the then Archbishop Karol Wojtyła participated in the drafting of what would later become *Gaudium et Spes*. He was also instrumental in the formulation and development of *Humanae Vitae* by Paul VI,¹ who was reportedly reading *Love and Responsibility* when writing the 1968 encyclical.² A staunch advocate of *Humanae Vitae*, John Paul II dedicated his most carefully elaborated work, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the*

¹ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999), 207.

² Janet Smith, *Why Humanae Vitae Was Right: A Reader* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2014).

Body to its defense.³ John Paul II's conceptualization of reproduction and its implication for reproductive practices are repeatedly reiterated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, and two documents related to the issue of reproduction published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith—*Donum Vitae* and *Dignitas Personae*.

Underlying the magisterium's rejection of artificial contraception, sterilization, abortion, and assisted reproductive technology is the normative understanding of human reproduction as the birthing of children resulting directly from heterosexual conjugal intercourse. Any deviation from such a narrow norm is considered an offense against justice and morally illicit. With regard to guidelines for human reproductive methods provided by the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, only rejections and condemnations are issued and no positive proposals are substantiated (nos. 233–235). However, as contributors in this volume argue, such a negative assessment with regard to human reproduction is not only inadequate but diminishes flourishing—especially for women⁴—and further instigates injustices in the contexts of unintended pregnancies,⁵ economic constraints,⁶ gender relations,⁷ gender

³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 100.

⁴ In this volume, see Mary Roche, "Rachel Is Weeping for Her Children: Theological Reflections on Reproductive Justice and Maternal Health," 55–89, Karen Peterson-Iyer, "Reproductive Justice and Agricultural Labor Migrants," 257–289, Mary Lilian Akhere Ehidihamhen, "Reclaiming Women's Agency for Reproductive Justice in Nigeria Today: Flourishing for Mother and Child in Situations of Constraints," 310–333, Eric Marcelo O. Genilo, SJ, "Risking Women's Lives, Denying Women's Experiences: CDF Statements on Sterilization in Catholic Hospitals," 334–357, and Virginia Saldanha, "Religio-Cultural Underpinnings of Gender and Reproductive Injustice and Their Impact on Women's Agency in India," 391–410.

⁵ Julie Clague, "Structural Inequality and the Social Determinants of Unintended Pregnancy," 21–54.

⁶ Kate Ward, "Never Just a Choice: Three Theoretical Approaches to Economic Constraints on Family Formation," 55–89.

⁷ Hoon Choi, "Fatherhood, Reproductive Justice, and Strategic Invisibility of Men," 122–127.

violence,⁸ sex education,⁹ and health care.¹⁰

Thus, John Paul II's normative proposal regarding the conceptualization of human reproduction first laid out in *Love and Responsibility* is insufficient in addressing the complex realities of the topic. To grapple with such difficulty requires a re-evaluation and revision of the concept of reproduction beyond the narrow scope propagated by John Paul II. A careful examination of magisterial teaching on human reproduction offers a clue, revealing a rather steady evolution of the concept toward an expansive horizon, where a reconceptualization of reproduction can be attained.

This chapter begins with a close analysis of the concept of reproduction in the seminal text *Love and Responsibility* by the then Archbishop Karol Wojtyła. The first section examines Wojtyła's proposal of "procreation" in conceptualizing human reproduction and the struggle to distinguish the two concepts of "procreation" and "reproduction" while revealing inconsistencies in Wojtyła's argument, along with an anthropocentric outlook. The second section provides a thorough investigation of Wojtyła's notion of justice with regard to human reproduction. It argues that there exists a fundamental tension within Wojtyła's prescription of normative human reproduction. Demonstrating Wojtyła's influence in subsequent magisterial development, I point out that the recent shift of magisterial teaching's attention toward the advancement of social love demands that John Paul II's normative prescription for human reproduction be re-evaluated and revised. The last section proposes that Francis's social doctrine where human reproduction is viewed from the vantage point of love and its fruitfulness provides a novel opening for the reconceptualization of reproduction as the reproduction of love in human

⁸ Suzanne Mulligan, "Thinking about Reproductive Justice in Contexts of Violence," 148–174.

⁹ Stephanie Ann Puen, "Considerations for a Comprehensive Sex Education Grounded in Catholic Social Thought for Reproductive Justice in the Philippines," 237–256.

¹⁰ Emily Reimer-Barry, "Catholic Health Care and Reproductive Justice: Whose Conscience Has Priority When Conscience Claims Collide?," 358–390.

societies through diverse forms, moving away from John Paul II's anthropocentric outlook to conceive an anthropocosmic vision. I conclude the chapter with an overview of my arguments, while presenting an open horizon by reconceptualizing reproduction as the reproduction of love.

Reproduction and Procreation

John Paul II's most extensive conceptualization of reproduction is found in *Love and Responsibility*, where the concept of reproduction is viewed through the varying orders of the supernatural, the personal, the natural, and the biological. The then Archbishop Karol Wojtyła differentiated the two concepts—"reproduction" and "procreation"—by pointing out that the word "procreation" expresses more fully the content and natural finality of human conjugal intercourse than the word "reproduction," given that the meaning of the latter is "purely biological."¹¹ Earlier in the book, Wojtyła expressed a rather negative assessment of what he calls the "biological order" by distinguishing it with the order of nature. He stressed that the two expressions cannot be confused, given that the order of nature "remains in relation to God the Creator,"¹² and together with the supernatural order, is the divine order; while the "biological order" is a "work of the human mind . . . [and] has man as its immediate author."¹³ Though signifying¹⁴ the order of nature, the "biological order" separates

¹¹ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. Grzegorz Ignatik (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013), 211.

¹² Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 40.

¹³ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 41.

¹⁴ Wojtyła's understanding of sign and expression is analogical and eminent. Signifying the order of nature, the "biological order" is considered by Wojtyła as an abstraction of the natural order. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's description seems to speak to Wojtyła's notion of sign and expression. When delineating the difference between eminent and immanent expression, Deleuze points out that abstractions are images and extrinsic signs that are indicative but not expressive of truth. They arise when our capacity for being affected is exceeded and we no longer seek to understand but are instead content with imagining, setting up as an essential trait while disregarding the others. See Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical*

some elements of this order from “what really exists”¹⁵ and denotes the order of nature “only inasmuch as it is accessible for the empirical-descriptive methods of natural sciences, and not as a specific order of existence with a clear relation to the First Cause, to God the Creator.”¹⁶

As a work on sexual ethics, Wojtyła’s treatment of reproduction in *Love and Responsibility* confines itself to the issue of human heterosexual conjugal intercourse. He conceived the human sexual drive as pertaining not only to the “biological order” but also the order of nature, while setting his whole sexual ethics to address the distinction between the two. Wojtyła argued that the confusion of the order of nature with the “biological order” erases the link between the sexual drive with the divine work of creation, where “the sexual drive is only a sum of functions, which from the biological point of view undoubtedly tend to a biological end, to reproduction.”¹⁷ In Wojtyła’s view, the human sexual drive concerns not only the biological order alone but the order of nature, which “constitutes a group of cosmic relations that occur among beings that really exists,” for the latter is the order of existence and “the whole order present in existence finds its basis in the one who is the unceasing source of this existence, in God the Creator.”¹⁸ For Wojtyła, the order of nature is “first and foremost the order of existing and becoming - of procreation.”¹⁹ Human sexual drive is “linked in a particular way with the order of existence,” which according to him, “is the *divine order* inasmuch as it is realized under the continuous influence of God the Creator.”²⁰ Human conjugal intercourse becomes the gateway through which human beings enter into the orbit of the order of nature.²¹

Philosophy (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 45.

¹⁵ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 41.

¹⁶ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 40.

¹⁷ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 41.

¹⁸ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 41.

¹⁹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 211.

²⁰ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 40.

²¹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 211.

That is, in John Paul II's early conceptualization of human reproduction, human heterosexual conjugal intercourse pertains to the order of nature, which is the divine order. It is not to be confused with the "biological order," which is considered as only an abstraction of the natural order resulting from the scientific endeavor of the human mind. To remedy the tendency to collapse the two orders, Wojtyła preferred the term "procreation" instead of "reproduction" in defining human reproduction, stating that "it is evident that in this case the point is not merely the beginning of life in a purely biological sense, but the beginning of the existence of the person; hence it is better to say 'procreation.'"²²

In distinguishing the concept of "procreation" with "reproduction," Wojtyła further introduced the concept of the personal order that differs from both the natural order and the biological order, while viewing human procreation more in the context of the former than the latter. According to Wojtyła, unlike the pure biological meaning of "reproduction," "procreation" as *procreatio* denotes a more profound philosophical and theological significance, as "when a man and a woman within marriage consciously and freely choose sexual intercourse, then together with it they choose at the same time the possibility of procreation; they choose to participate in creating (to apply the proper meaning of *procreatio*)."²³ Such significance pertains to the concept of the person reserved only for human persons, as evident in his writing where he argues,

Reproduction is connected with biological fertility, by the power of which the mature individuals of a given species become parents by bringing into the world their offspring, i.e., new individuals of that species. The case is similar within the species *Homo sapiens*. [Human being], however, is a person, and, therefore, a simple natural fact of becoming a father or a mother possesses a deeper meaning: not only

²² Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 211.

²³ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 213. There lacks a robust discussion in John Paul II of the various situations when the freedom of sexual intercourse and procreation is less attainable, especially for women.

‘biological,’ but also personal.²⁴

Thus, the concept of procreation pertains to the order of the person. It also pertains to the complete objectivity of human conjugal intercourse as it is by its essence a union of persons in relation to *procreatio*—concerning the objective order of nature, in which God the Creator is expressed.

The introduction of the personal order to delineate the distinction between “reproduction” and “procreation” posed a difficulty for Wojtyła as it resulted in the separation between the order of nature and the order of person. To further define the boundary between “reproduction” and “procreation,” while at the same time attempting to establish the relation between the natural order and the personal order, Wojtyła appealed to the supposed difference between animals and human beings, considering the concept of reproduction as only pertaining to the animal world, which he argued is dominated by instinct.²⁵ Wojtyła contended that in the animal world, “There are no persons here, hence there is neither the possibility for nor the demands of the personalistic norm proclaiming love.”²⁶ According to Wojtyła, for human persons, “instinct alone does not solve anything, and the sexual drive, so to speak, enters the gates of consciousness and the will, providing not only the conditions of fertility but at the same time the specific ‘material’ for love.”²⁷ He stressed that if the question of human sexual drive is to be solved on a human level, the two orders—the personal order and the natural order—must be held together.²⁸

Perhaps unintended by Wojtyła himself, conceptualizing reproduction as pertaining to animals and instinct moves away from the view of the “biological order” as an abstraction from the natural order produced by the human mind through scientific endeavors. Reproduction now bears directly upon the order of nature, where both in animals and in humans

²⁴ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 213.

²⁵ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 212.

²⁶ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 212.

²⁷ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 212.

²⁸ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 212.

the role of instinct cannot be completely negated. That is, by considering reproduction as pertaining to animals and instinct, Wojtyła located “reproduction” in the order of nature, which is previously said to be the order of “procreation” that expresses the divine order.

Without re-evaluating the “biological order,” nor further investigating the value of evolving scientific understanding undertaken by the human mind, its meaning as relating to the natural and divine order, Wojtyła hastened to collapse the concepts of “reproduction” and “procreation” into the order of nature, while maintaining its distinction with the personal order and devoting his whole sexual ethics to achieving an integration between the two orders. However, in doing so, Wojtyła introduced a fragmentation in the conceptualization of the natural order as well as that of “procreation.”

While pointing out that the order of nature “aims at reproduction,” Wojtyła argued that the personal order “is expressed in the love of persons and strives to realize this love as fully as possible.”²⁹ As previously mentioned, Wojtyła emphasizes that the two orders cannot be separated, rather “one depends on the other, and particularly the relation to reproduction (*procreatio*) conditions the realization of love.”³⁰ Only when viewed together, “Both, i.e., procreation (reproduction) as well as love, are realized on the basis of the conscious choice of persons.”³¹ That is, by distinguishing the order of nature from the order of person, Wojtyła also removed love from reproduction (procreation), leading to a fragmented understanding of procreation (reproduction) that is non-human and loveless. Though the stress to integrate human reproduction with personal love presents an honest struggle for Wojtyła, the analysis so far has shown that the initial separation between the natural order and the personal order—between reproduction and love—is in fact a direct result of Wojtyła’s own problematic conceptualization.

²⁹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 211.

³⁰ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 212.

³¹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 212–213.

Moreover, Wojtyła's normative argument for human reproduction (procreation) as the process of heterosexual conjugal sexual intercourse leading to the birth of children with no "artificial interference" is defined by what is a fundamentally anthropocentric outlook that separates the reproduction of human beings from that of animals.³² Conceptualizing reproduction as located in the order of nature and directly connected with "the sexual life of animals remaining under the power of instinct," Wojtyła distinguished the process of human reproduction (procreation) from that of animals by considering the former's "conscious share in the work of creation" as transcending animal instinct.³³

Wojtyła's confused conceptualization of human reproduction and his anthropocentric outlook are further reflected in *Gaudium et Spes*. Without explicitly mentioning Wojtyła's language of the personal order and personalistic norm, *Gaudium et Spes* put forward a more personalistic understanding of marriage, where "marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation; rather, its very nature as an unbreakable compact between persons, and the welfare of the children, both demand that the mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a rightly ordered manner" (no. 50). By invoking the concept of procreation, *Gaudium et Spes* did not attend to its nuanced meaning—and its tension with the concept of reproduction—present in the earlier work of Wojtyła. Rather, it emulated Wojtyła's collapse of the two concepts by claiming that human reproduction, intimately connected with human sexual characteristics, is a human faculty that "wonderfully exceed[s] the dispositions of lower forms of life" (no. 51).

By doing so, *Gaudium et Spes* overlooked Wojtyła's struggle to first conceptualize reproduction in the order of nature. Having now insisted that human reproduction is procreation and is situated in the natural order, *Gaudium et Spes* also reproduced Wojtyła's anthropocentric outlook by teaching that human reproduction (procreation) exceeds the function

³² Wojtyła never considered the reproductive processes of plants nor fungi.

³³ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 234.

of the natural order as the domains of animal instinct. Underlying its appeal to mutual spousal love is Wojtyła's personal order and the personalistic norm that exists outside of the natural order. Following Wojtyła's lead, *Gaudium et Spes*—by locating human procreation (reproduction) in the order of nature—removed procreation (reproduction) from the order of person, while arbitrarily inventing two mutually exclusive orders: the “order of person” that transcends the natural order and the “order of nature” that is alien to love and human persons. The former pertains to the “authentic conjugal love,” while the latter pertains to “the transmission of life” (no. 51).

Moreover, *Gaudium et Spes* went further than Wojtyła and hastened to define these two aspects as divine law pertaining to the divine order (no. 51), without serious attention to the unresolved fundamental tension with regard to the conceptualization of the natural order and the personal order and their infinite distance from the divine order found in Wojtyła's own argument. It warns married couples “in their manner of acting . . . should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel” (no. 50).

Nonetheless, *Gaudium et Spes* is not blind to the contradiction between the two proposed aspects, insisting that “a true contradiction cannot exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to authentic conjugal love” (no. 51). Such statement presupposes the existence of a contradiction, one that was first noticed by Wojtyła himself. He was committed to integrate the order of nature and the order of person, insisting that only heterosexual marital intercourse leading to the birth of children—as the norm for human reproduction (procreation)—constitutes the remedy for the contradiction, a point that will be further investigated in the next section.

However, the contradiction was never a logical one, given that following Wojtyła's own conceptualization, where “procreation”—as “reproduction”—pertaining to at once the personal order, the order of

nature, the divine order, and even the “biological order,” there should be no need for integration. The contradiction appears to be a product of Wojtyła’s introduction of the personal order reflecting a transcendental personalism. The assumption that heterosexual conjugal intercourse resulting in the birth of children constitutes the whole norm and the sole defining character for human reproduction (procreation) is predetermined in Wojtyła’s analysis, as both its premise and its conclusion. Such an approach undercuts the legibility of his own conceptualization on human reproduction and procreation. Further, with the magisterium’s presumption that certain reproductive (procreative) practices do not measure up to such a norm, the forced elevation and integration of the two orders by a hasty invocation of the divine law held significant sway in the magisterium’s sanctions regarding sexual ethics and the ethics of human reproduction. The impact of such a confused divine mandatory norm came into full force in light of Paul VI’s publication of the controversial document *Humanae Vitae* as it served as the rationale to denounce all artificial interference with conception.

Regardless, it is worth affirming that Wojtyła and the magisterium’s approach to the issue does indicate an aspiration to arrive at a vision of human reproduction (procreation) that integrates the biological order, the personal order, the natural order, and the divine order. Such aspiration, though holding tremendous moral power, was quickly circumscribed with detrimental ethical implications by a narrow and flawed conceptualization of human reproduction (procreation), a rigid understanding of justice with regard to the matter, and a lack of effort in conceptualizing human reproduction (procreation) beyond the process of heterosexual marital intercourse leading to the birth of children without “artificial” interference. However, with more recent magisterial developments under the leadership of Francis, we are moving closer to reconceptualize reproduction beyond John Paul II that affirms the oneness of God, human, and nature, an argument I will propose in the last section.

Reproduction and Justice

The theoretical foundation underlying the magisterium's approach to justice with regard to sexual ethics and human reproduction was first laid out by Wojtyła in terms of "justice with respect to the Creator" in *Love and Responsibility*. According to Wojtyła, "With respect to the Creator, the rational creature, man, is just by striving in his action toward precisely this human value, by conducting himself as *particeps Creatoris*."³⁴ He argued that given its creatureliness, human beings should *first* remain in conformity with the law of nature, "[*only*] *then* will man be just with respect to the Creator."³⁵ The sequential nature of Wojtyła's argument implies that human beings do not have direct access to the divine law. It is only through their conformity with the law of nature, human beings are able to fulfill the divine law which is justice.

As mentioned in the previous section, Wojtyła—when distinguishing "reproduction" from "procreation"—considered "procreation" both in the order of nature (which differs from the "biological order" concerning "reproduction") and the order of person (as the coming into existence of persons). There, the order of nature is the divine order serving as the source of human moral acts. However, after collapsing the two concepts, Wojtyła reduced the concept of procreation (reproduction)—along with the order of nature—to the domain of animal instinct, while instilling a personal order that transcends it. Inventing a separate personal order governed by reason and will subjected to what is the moral order, Wojtyła erased morality from instinct and the natural order. The latter became alienated from the moral order and the morality of human reproduction (procreation) no longer concerns the order of nature. Instead, it emphasizes the personal order over and against the natural order.

The hierarchal relation between the personal order and the natural

³⁴ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 233.

³⁵ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 233. Italics my own to highlight the sequential nature of the argument.

order underlies Wojtyła's ethical argument regarding human reproduction. While insisting on the conformity of human acts with the law of nature regarding human reproduction, Wojtyła considered justice with respect to the Creator as comprising two elements—"the preservation of the order of nature" and "the manifestation of the value of the person"³⁶—corresponding respectively to the order of nature and the personal order. Only the latter concerns the value of the created person as *particeps Creatoris* through participation in the thought of the Creator.³⁷ Wojtyła argued that it is this personal order—constituting the personalistic norm—that "causes [man] to possess a correct relation to the whole of reality in all its constituent parts, in all elements."³⁸ In emphasizing the significance of the personalistic norm to justice, Wojtyła stated that "[b]y being the Creator of the person, God is the source of the whole personal order, which *rides above* the order of nature thanks precisely to the person's capacity for understanding the latter and for his conscious self-determination within it. Justice with respect to the Creator demands from man *above all* the preservation of the personal order."³⁹ Here, it is apparent that in Wojtyła's treatment of the natural order and the personal order on the issue of justice regarding human reproduction, the two orders do not bear equal weight. Rather, what justice demands pertains to the personal order (not necessarily the natural order) and its superiority over the natural order.

According to Wojtyła, such superiority is precisely manifested and justified through his normative proposal for human reproduction, where the transcending character of human reason over and against animal instinct is carried out through the process of heterosexual conjugal intercourse directly resulting in the birthing of the human offspring. Pointing out that reproduction alone does not fulfill the obligation of

³⁶ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 233.

³⁷ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 233.

³⁸ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 233.

³⁹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 234.

justice in relation to the Creator, Wojtyła explained that “[the] person *transcends* the world of nature, and the personal order is not completely contained in the order of nature. Therefore, a man and a woman who have conjugal relations fulfill their obligations with respect to God the Creator only when they place all these relations on the...level of a truly personal union.”⁴⁰ That is, Wojtyła’s understanding of justice with regard to human reproduction is fundamentally dependent upon the moral distinction between human and animals and the personal order and the order of nature. It demands the transcendence of the personal order over the natural order, human beings over animals, and reason over instinct. For Wojtyła, it is the personal order alone that fulfills the requirement of justice as far as the moral law is concerned. The order of nature is relegated to the world of animals dominated by an amoral (or immoral) instinct.

Underlying Wojtyła’s account of justice with regard to human sexual ethics and reproduction is an anthropocentric moral outlook. It is achieved through the personalistic norm, which fundamentally concerns the personal order distinct from the natural order and in an *indirect* relation to the divine order. Central to the conception of the personalistic norm is “a kind of love” that is “not only a love of the world, but also a love of the Creator.”⁴¹ Wojtyła stressed that the love of the Creator is included in this relation “*only in an indirect way*” and “the man who has a correct relation to the whole created reality by that very fact *indirectly* has a proper relation to the Creator, is simply and fundamentally just with respect to him.”⁴² Wojtyła did not directly address the divine order with regard to human reproduction nor inquire further into the love of the Creator and how it might shed new light into our understanding of human reproduction. Rather, his invocation of the love of the Creator only harks back to the argument for his already determined personalistic norm that “the personalistic norm is a substantiation for the commandment of the Gospel”

⁴⁰ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 234–235.

⁴¹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 233.

⁴² Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 233.

and “the order of justice is more fundamental than the order of love.”⁴³

Given Wojtyła’s own argument that justice with respect to the Creator is ultimately achieved through the conformity with the law of nature (and not the personalistic norm), the order of nature cannot be so easily transcended. As previously mentioned, Wojtyła himself recognized that—with regard to human reproduction (procreation)—the preservation of the natural order together with the manifestation of the personal order constitute the two elements of justice with respect to the Creator. Noticing the contradiction between what justice demands of the two orders, Wojtyła argues that the only remedy is to prescribe heterosexual marital intercourse leading to the birth of children without “artificial” interference as the definite ethical norm for human reproduction. He elaborated this solution in *Love and Responsibility*, writing,

The sexual intercourse of a man and a woman in marriage possesses its full value of a personal union only when it contains the conscious acceptance of the possibility of parenthood. This is a plain result of the synthesis of the two orders: the order of nature and the order of the person. A man and a woman in conjugal intercourse do not remain only and exclusively in a reciprocal relation to each other, but, as a matter of fact, they remain in relation to the new person who can be created (*procreatio*) thanks precisely to their union.⁴⁴

In Wojtyła’s understanding, human heterosexual conjugal intercourse rises to the level of a personal union only when the couple demonstrate the attitude of “I can be a father” and “I can be a mother.” The potential character of the relation with the child—as a “a new property and a new state” in which the husband and wife as father and mother participate⁴⁵—at once justifies the sexual intercourse and enriches the personal communion of the husband and wife, thus fulfilling both the elements of

⁴³ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 26.

⁴⁴ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 213–214.

⁴⁵ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 214n.

justice with regard to the Creator. Wojtyła's solution is intended not only to bring the order of nature and the order of the person together but also to maintain the hierarchy, where "man wins a victory over nature and masters it."⁴⁶

Regardless, by insisting that both elements of justice need to be met and the only way to meet them is through his prescription of a normative human reproduction, Wojtyła moves toward a direction where the hierarchical relation between the personal order and the natural order—and the moral superiority of the former over the latter—is at stake. By claiming that "everywhere man masters nature by adapting to its immanent dynamic," Wojtyła advocates a view where the personal order is said to transcend the natural order by being based on nature, which is also immanent to human persons. This view cannot be logically sustained, for *one cannot transcend something that is immanent to it.*⁴⁷ Considering human sexual drive as nature, Wojtyła argues that man wins a victory over nature only by "adapting it its immanent finality thanks to understanding the laws that govern that drive" and sexual intercourse is based on the drive by engaging with which the moral value of the person is formed.⁴⁸ He claims that all of this is based on "the presupposition according to which there is a close link between the order of nature and the person as well as the realization of human personhood."⁴⁹ Redeeming the natural order from its moral demise, Wojtyła now admits that the power of the order of nature is "constitutive for morality and thus also for the realization of human personhood, inasmuch as behind this order one perceives the personal authority of the Creator."⁵⁰ Wojtyła did not go further to

⁴⁶ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 215.

⁴⁷ An appropriate response could be drawn from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who stresses that sexuality is "continuously present in human life as an atmosphere" and is coexistent with life. Sexuality cannot be transcended. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 172, 174.

⁴⁸ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 216.

⁴⁹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 216.

⁵⁰ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 217.

investigate this renewed relationship between the two orders nor what precisely is the “close link.” Rather, he asserts that “man must reconcile himself to his natural greatness” precisely by not forgetting that he is a person “when he so deeply enters into the order of nature, when he immerses himself, as it were, in the vehement processes of nature.”⁵¹ Wojtyła returns to his previous argument that human sexual life needs to be justified, not by nature, for “instinct alone will not solve anything in him,” but by the personal responsibility for procreation.⁵²

Thus, there exists a fundamental tension within Wojtyła’s proposal of the ethical norm for human reproduction that was not and cannot be easily resolved. The analysis in this section has shown that Wojtyła’s investigation of justice with regard to reproduction is largely based on an anthropocentric distinction between the natural order and the personal order and the moral superiority and transcendence of human intellect over against animal instinct. It demonstrates also that, given Wojtyła’s own argument that justice is achieved through the conformity with the law of nature, such moral hierarchy cannot be maintained. Rather than further investigating his proposition with regard to the two orders and re-assessing his proposal for the ethical norm of human reproduction, Wojtyła exercised a confused integration of the two orders to justify his normative proposal, a move that risks the integrity of his own reasoning.

Such confused reasoning, far from being resolved by subsequent magisterial development up until the pontificate of John Paul II, was further intensified. As I have demonstrated in the previous section, a similar confusion was present in *Gaudium et Spes*, especially through its elevation of normative human procreation (reproduction) as pertaining directly to the divine law, which can only be authentically interpreted by the Church’s magisterium. Its claim that there exist two divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to authentic conjugal love finds its prototype in Wojtyła’s proposition of the two

⁵¹ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 222–223.

⁵² Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 223.

elements mentioned earlier in the section that comprise justice with respect to the Creator—"the manifestation of the value of the person" and "the preservation of the order of nature."⁵³ *Gaudium et Spes* hastened to define these two aspects as divine laws pertaining to the divine order, without attending to Wojtyła's own argument that the moral order is foreign to the order of nature and is only relevant to the order of person, which stands in an *indirect* relation with the divine order.

The tension was further exacerbated through *Humanae Vitae* where the relation between natural law, moral law, and divine law with regard to human reproduction became further confused. Reiterating Vatican II's declaration that the Church magisterium *alone* is entrusted the task to teach the divine law (no. 19), *Humanae Vitae* reminds its audience that the Church magisterium is competent and indisputable in its interpretation of the natural moral law, acting as the "authentic guardians and interpreters of the whole moral law, not only, that is, of the law of the Gospel but also of the natural law" (no. 4). It claims that the natural law "declares the will of God, and its faithful observance is necessary for men's eternal salvation" and the magisterium's moral teaching on marriage is "based on the natural law as illuminated and enriched by divine Revelation" (no. 4). That is, to define and execute the ethical norm for human reproduction concerns the authority of the magisterium to authentically interpret and teach the divine law, the moral law, and the natural law. This authority is confirmed by its doctrinal affirmation of "responsible parenthood" and the denunciation of artificial contraception and its supposed objection to the "natural law of God" (no. 23).

The influence of Wojtyła can be readily observed in *Humanae Vitae* where it says the biological reproductive process must be respected, while at the same time human reason and will must exert control over the human being's innate drives and emotions (no. 10). By stressing that "in the procreative faculty the human mind discerns biological laws that apply to the human person" (*Humanae Vitae*, no. 10), Paul VI follows Wojtyła in

⁵³ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 233.

the latter's distinguishing of procreation from reproduction.

However, Paul VI's doctrinal proposal of responsible parenthood as the ethical norm for human reproduction already signaled a development away from Wojtyła's rigid (and confused) division of reproduction and procreation. Unlike Wojtyła, who considered the biological order as an abstraction of the natural order and an arbitrary product of the human mind, having the human being as its immediate author, Paul VI spoke of a "biological law" that is integral to the natural law. Not only did he call spouses to discern the biological law as they observe the natural law in carrying out responsible parenthood, Paul VI also entrusted such task to scientists. He explicitly acknowledged "the inherent difficulties of the divine law" (*Humanae Vitae*, no. 17). Paul VI affirmed the value of scientific discovery regarding the biological process of human reproduction and its role not only in furthering human knowledge of the order of nature and the divine order but also in providing moral insights into the procreative process (*Humanae Vitae*, no. 24). However, in keeping with the ethical conclusion of Wojtyła and *Gaudium et Spes*, Paul VI, when speaking of medical science, only considered the study of natural rhythms as an observation of the natural law without acknowledging that underlying any medical advancement, including artificial contraception, abortion, and assisted technology, is the inherent function of the biological law integral to the natural law. Regardless, Paul VI, by acknowledging the difficulties with regard to the two divine laws and appealing to scientists, already implies a revision of Wojtyła's sharp moral distinction of the divine order, the natural order, and the personal order.

What can also be readily observed in *Humanae Vitae* is Paul VI's expansion of the discussion of human reproduction far beyond the narrow scope of sexual ethics prescribed by Wojtyła and found in *Gaudium et Spes* to consider it as a social concern. Paul VI addressed the issue of human reproduction and the regulation of birth as pertaining to the creation and advancement of a truly human civilization (*Humanae Vitae*, nos. 18, 22). He made appeals to not only married couples themselves but also public

authorities, scientists, doctors and nurses, priests and bishops, and ultimately all people of good will, calling it the “great work” of education, progress and charity.

During the papacy of John Paul II, the social dimension of “responsible parenthood” was further elaborated. In *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II approached the issue of responsible procreation as a part of his appeal to offer the world “new signs of hope, and work to ensure that justice and solidarity will increase and that a new culture of human life will be affirmed, for the building of an authentic civilization of truth and love” (no. 6). The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* states that the unified aspect of procreation’s physical and spiritual dimensions pertains to the “communion of generations” and provides “essential and irreplaceable support for the development of society” (no. 237).

The intimate connection between human reproduction, integral human development, and the creation of a new civilization was well established by Benedict XVI. In *Caritas in Veritate*, he points out that Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* forged a strong link between life ethics and social ethics, “ushering in a new area of magisterial teaching” (no. 15), one that is further carried out by John Paul II’s *Evangelium Vitae*. Benedict XVI affirmed that responsible procreation “has a positive contribution to make to integral human development” (no. 44). Capturing the central message of Paul VI, Benedict XVI considered his social teaching as pointing to “the indispensable importance of the Gospel for building a society according to freedom and justice, in the ideal and historical perspective of a civilization animated by love” (*Caritas in Veritate*, no. 13).

However, in spite of the magisterium’s expansion of social vision with regard to human reproduction, the earlier work of John Paul II continues to serve as the functioning apparatus for conceptualizing reproduction and the primary rationale for upholding heterosexual conjugal sexual intercourse directly resulting in the birth of human offsprings as the exclusive ethical norm. The tension and incoherency existing within John Paul II’s argument for normative human reproduction and his understanding of the natural order, the personal order, and the divine

order remain unresolved. Further, the recent shift of magisterial teaching's attention toward the advancement of social love demands that John Paul II's framework for understanding human reproduction and justice be re-evaluated and revised. Such revision, though already present during John Paul II's papacy, is reaching the height of its promise through Francis's vision of universal love and its fruitfulness.

Reproduction and Love

Unlike John Paul II, who started the conceptualization of human reproduction from the process of heterosexual conjugal sexual intercourse leading to the birth of children and eventually arrived at the conclusion that defined it as the exclusive ethical norm for human reproduction, Francis opened a new beginning by envisioning human reproduction from the openness and fruitfulness of love itself.

Though appealing to Paul VI and John Paul II in speaking of marriage and parenthood, the regulation of birth, and gender differences, Francis through *Amoris Laetitia* put forward a much more expansive vision of fruitfulness, one that is centered upon love and not limited to the rigid understanding as having children resulting directly from heterosexual conjugal sexual intercourse. In chapter five, "Love Made Fruitful," Francis stresses that it is love that gives life (no. 165). For Francis, the discussion of fruitfulness reflects "the primacy of the love of God" (no. 166). While acknowledging that having children is an expression of the fruitfulness of love (nos. 166, 167), Francis does not consider it as the only expression nor a superior one for marriage. Exalting the joy of motherhood, he nonetheless cites the General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops to emphasize that "motherhood is not a solely biological reality, but is expressed in diverse ways" (no. 178) and "the maternal vocation is fulfilled through many kinds of love, comprehension, and

service to others.”⁵⁴ Francis envisioned “an expanding fruitfulness,” where fruitfulness finds its expression in many ways, through adoption (nos. 179, 180), foster care (no. 180), and ultimately through “[binding] the wounds of the outcast, [fostering] a culture of encounter and [fighting] for justice” (no. 183).

Thus, Francis conceptualizes the expression of fruitfulness through human reproduction from the vantage point of social love, a framework he further developed in his two social encyclicals, *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*. In *Laudato Si'*, Francis notes that social love “is the key to authentic development” and “moves us to . . . encourage a ‘culture of care’ which permeates all of society” (no. 231). He continues in *Fratelli Tutti* to consider that social love “makes it possible to advance towards a civilization of love” and is a “force capable of inspiring new ways of approaching the problems of today’s world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organizations and legal systems from within” (no. 183).

Such renewed attention to love, with a civilization of love as its horizon, has been developing steadily since the Second Vatican Council and is now central to Catholic social teaching. John Paul II noted in the 1991 social encyclical *Centesimus Annus* that Paul VI had expanded the previous concepts of Leo XIII’s “friendship” and Pius XI’s “social charity” to speak of a civilization of love in addressing questions confronted by modern society (no. 10). In the 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II repeatedly called for the effort to build an authentic civilization of love. The entire *Compendium*—much of it is a reiteration of what was previously articulated by John Paul II—concluded on this call, while exalting the primacy of love as shedding light on the fundamental principles of the Christian view of social and political organization (no. 580). It made clear that the full truth of the human identity “makes it possible to...open up...for justice the new horizon of solidarity and love,” stressing that justice alone is not enough but must “open to that deeper

⁵⁴ Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, no. 457.

power which is love” (no. 203). The *Compendium* called for the reconsideration of love “in its authentic values as the *highest and universal criterion* of the whole of social ethics” (no. 204) and urged that “in every sphere of interpersonal relationships justice must...be *corrected to a considerable extent by that love* which . . . possesses the characteristics of that merciful love which is so much of the essence of the Gospel and Christianity” (no. 206). That is, the *Compendium* put forward love as a more fundamental ethical norm and provided the opening for the re-evaluation and revision of previous concepts of justice in light of love.

Such primacy of love was further developed by Benedict XVI in the context of the global society and radically universalized by Francis. In the 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI spoke of the new and creative challenge brought by love, which urges a broadening of “the scope of reason and making it capable of knowing and directing these powerful new forces [of globalization], animating them within the perspective of that ‘civilization of love’ whose seed God has planted in every people, in every culture” (no. 33). He considered a kind of “ethical convergence” among diverse cultural traditions as the natural law (no. 59). Calling it the “universal moral law,” Benedict XVI states that it provides “a sound basis for all cultural, religious and political dialogue” and ensures “a wonderful opportunity for encounter between cultures and peoples” (no. 59). He notes that “every culture has burdens from which it must be freed and shadows from which it must emerge” (no. 59).

Francis’s reconceptualization of human reproduction from the fruitfulness and openness of love is conceived within this tradition of Catholic social teaching, its primacy of love and its vision for a civilization of love. Rather than narrowing its scope to prescribe an exclusive form, Francis breaks open the conceptual bonds of human reproduction to expand toward a new universal horizon. Exalting the family, Francis looks not to the rigid form of the heterosexual nuclear family, but the human family and the entire creation as a whole, urging us to recognize the wisdom of creation and the vocation of family to “domesticating” the

world in helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 183). He stresses that the current transition in civilization demands a new covenant of love that “should ...guide politics, the economy and civil coexistence” and “decides the habitability of the earth, the transmission of love for life, the bonds of memory and hope.”⁵⁵ Francis explains that the Church set before the world the ideal of a civilization of love because love is at once civic and political, personal and social (*Laudato Si'*, no. 231). It impels us towards universal communion (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 95). While evoking this universal vision, Francis in *Laudato Si'* appealed to the mystery of the universe where creation is a gift and a reality illuminated by love (no. 76). He points out that such love calls us into a deep communion with all creation, where everything is connected (*Laudato Si'*, nos. 91–92). In *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis advanced a universal horizon where each particular group belongs in the fabric of universal communion (no. 149). He called for “the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending . . . differences and divisions” (no. 215). Such encounter is again fostered through love (no. 190), which, with its impulse to universality, is capable of building a new world (no. 183).

Such a new culture and new world is given the name of “open societies” by Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*. Evoking the concept of “open society,” Francis’s approach to situating human reproduction in the context of love also implies a new direction towards a convergence of the biological order, the natural order, the moral order, the personal order, and the divine order that is to remedy the previous confusions inherent in John Paul II’s conceptualization. Francis called for the realization of open societies that integrate everyone with a universal openness in love (no. 97). He declared that “charity is at the heart of every healthy and open society” (no. 184) and all our acts of love “encircle our world like a vital force” (no. 195). It is the fruitfulness of this love that Francis calls us to actualize in all our micro- and macro- relationships (nos. 193–197). Human reproduction

⁵⁵ Pope Francis, “General Audience,” September 16, 2015, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150916_udienza-generale.html.

reconceptualized beyond the narrow scope of heterosexual conjugal sexual intercourse leading to the birth of children with no “artificial” interference now concerns “the hidden power of the seeds of goodness we sow” and the initiation of processes “whose fruits will be reaped by others” (no. 196). The politics of human reproduction becomes a “good politics [that] combines love with hope and with confidence in the reserves of goodness present in human hearts” (no. 196). It is generative as it is “constantly renewed whenever there is a realization that every woman and man, and every generation, brings the promise of new relational, intellectual, cultural and spiritual energies” (no. 196).

The concepts of “open society” and “vital force” central to Francis’s proposal are to be attributed to the French philosopher Henri Bergson, one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century.⁵⁶ Coining the term “open society” in his final book *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson pointed out that “[t]he open society is the society which is deemed in principle to embrace all humanity.”⁵⁷ It embodies on every occasion something of itself in creations through transformation and is a creative effort, “opening what was closed” and bringing every closed society “back every time to humanity.”⁵⁸ For Bergson, an open society, by nature of its openness, is a spiritual society where “societies of this kind might multiply; each one, through such of its members as might be exceptionally gifted, would give birth to one or several others...until such time as a profound change in the material conditions imposed on humanity by nature should permit, in spiritual matters, of a radical transformation.”⁵⁹ The diverse efforts of actualizing open societies, according to Bergson, can be summed up into one and the

⁵⁶ I have previously established the connection between Francis’s use of the term “open society” and Bergson’s final work. See Simeiqi He, “Towards Universal Communion,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 12, no. 1 (2023): 101–104, doi.org/10.55476/001c.6624.1.

⁵⁷ Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 267.

⁵⁸ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 267.

⁵⁹ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 236.

same thing as “an impetus” which is carried forward through the medium of persons who are able to develop the “mystic life.”⁶⁰ For Bergson, this impetus is a “mystic impetus” that is to be imparted in persons forming a spiritual society.⁶¹ It is an “impetus of love” that drives the lifting of humanity up to God and the completion of divine creation.⁶² Such impetus is what is preserved and continued through generations of human societies.⁶³

Bergson first introduced the concept of impetus—the French word is *Élan vital* and is often translated as “vital impetus” or “vital force” in English—in his 1907 book *Creative Evolution*. He conceived an “original impetus of life” that “[passes] from one generation of germs to the following generation of germs through the developed organisms which bridge the interval between the generations.”⁶⁴ Such impetus culminated in the human species, in social life, in a system of habits that bears a resemblance more or less to *instinct*.⁶⁵ Unlike John Paul II, who deemed that “instinct does not solve anything” and that human reason must rise above the instinct that dominated animals to provide a justification for personhood and moral act, Bergson presented a different and more reasonable conceptualization of intellect and instinct, noting,

The intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life. Instinct, on the contrary, is molded on the very form of life. While intelligence treats everything mechanically, instinct proceeds, so to speak, organically. If the consciousness that slumbers in it should awake, if it were wound up into knowledge instead of being wound off into action, if we could ask and it could reply, it would give up to us the most intimate secrets of life. For it only carries out further the work by which life organizes matter—so that we cannot say, as has often been shown,

⁶⁰ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 268.

⁶¹ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 236.

⁶² Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 236.

⁶³ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 236.

⁶⁴ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), 87.

⁶⁵ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 55.

where organization ends and where instinct begins.⁶⁶

For Bergson, “instinct is . . . coextensive with life,” and social instinct is “nothing more than the spirit of sub-ordination and co-ordination animating the cells and tissues and organs of all living bodies.”⁶⁷ He considered social life as “immanent in instinct as well as in intelligence.”⁶⁸ According to Bergson, while intelligence is “made to utilize matter, to dominate things, to master events,” left to itself, intelligence “would simply realize its ignorance.”⁶⁹ Instinct, on the other hand, give rise within intelligence to imagination.⁷⁰ Bergson declared that “instinct is sympathy.” It is *intuition* that leads us to “the very inwardness of life”⁷¹ and “is proved by the existence in [human beings] of an aesthetic faculty along with normal perception.”⁷² Intuition is mind itself, life itself. We can only recognize the unity of spiritual life through intuition, “[placing] ourselves in intuition in order to go from intuition to the intellect, for from the intellect we shall never pass to intuition.”⁷³ To reabsorb intellect in intuition gives us power to act and to live, for “with it, we feel ourselves no longer isolated in humanity, humanity no longer seems isolated in the nature that it dominates.”⁷⁴ Rather, all the living is held together, “as the smallest grain of dust is bound up with our entire solar system.”⁷⁵

By appealing to Bergson’s concepts, Francis invoked an alternative understanding of instinct and moved beyond the anthropocentric outlook of John Paul II to arrive at an anthrpocosmic vision. Human moral life is no longer viewed as a domination over and struggle against animal life and

⁶⁶ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 165.

⁶⁷ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 121.

⁶⁸ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 21.

⁶⁹ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 163.

⁷⁰ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 164.

⁷¹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 176.

⁷² Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 177.

⁷³ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 268.

⁷⁴ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 270.

⁷⁵ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 270.

its instinct but is conceived in the process of creative evolution and returned to the immensity of the universe, where “creation is of the order of love” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 77). No more is the personal and moral order justified by a despairing war against the natural and biological order. Rather, biology is given “the very wide meaning it should have...that all morality...is in essence biological.”⁷⁶ Beginning with intuition, moral perception returns to life, which “appears in its entirety as an immense wave...starting from a centre, spreads outwards.”⁷⁷

Thus, human life no longer begins with conception but is coexistent with the universe. Human reproduction is recaptured not merely as the birthing of human offspring but as the pulsation of cosmic life. The personal order, the moral order, the natural order, the biological order are one. Such oneness is not realized through a narrow definition of human procreation as heterosexual conjugal intercourse leading to the birth of children so human sexual life is justified with regard to the Creator. It is accomplished in love, which is the Creator and the divine order itself. Love is divine substance and the “eternal law which creates and governs the universe.”⁷⁸ It is the common good itself and the fulfillment of the law.⁷⁹ The eternal law, the natural law, and human law form a continuous series comparable to a living tree with “the eternal law for its root, the natural law for its trunk, and the different systems of human law for its branches.”⁸⁰ It is in love—which is life—that the coherence of orders and the law is accomplished. God, as noted by Bergson, is “unceasing life, action, freedom,” and creation is experienced by us in ourselves when we act freely.⁸¹ Freedom is not achieved as a triumph over animal instinct.

⁷⁶ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 101.

⁷⁷ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 266.

⁷⁸ Bernard and Emero S. Stiegman, *On Loving God* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 37.

⁷⁹ John C. H. Wu, *Fountain of Justice: A Study in the Natural Law* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 46. Regarding the common good, see ST I, q. 44, a. 4.

⁸⁰ Wu, *Fountain of Justice*, 24–25.

⁸¹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 248.

Rather, novelty and creation are inherent in the free act.⁸² Love, by virtue of its nature, is essentially free, creative, and fruitful. It reproduces itself—fulfilling itself through diverse forms—and alone is the ethical norm immanent to all acts with love as their expression. Perceived in this way, reproduction is expansive. It is a reproduction of love—the original impetus, the vital force, and the mystic impetus—that preserves, sustains, and generates the love of God as “the fundamental moving force in all creation” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 77).

Conclusion

Beginning with a thorough investigation of the concept of reproduction in the seminal text *Love and Responsibility* and the argument for prescribing heterosexual conjugal intercourse directly resulting in the birthing of human offspring as the exclusive norm for human reproduction, I demonstrated that there exist internal inconsistencies, fragmentations, and tensions within John Paul II's conceptualization of reproduction. The latter is characterized by a struggle to integrate the natural order and the personal order in the justification of human sexual acts, while maintaining that human reason must master animal instinct. I argued that underlying John Paul II's prescription of normative human reproduction is an anthropocentric moral outlook, which has exercised no small influence in subsequent magisterial developments.

However, the development of Catholic social teaching and the increasing attention to the primacy of love offers a novel opening to re-evaluate and revise previously rigid conceptualizations of reproduction. I proposed that Francis has taken the necessary steps in expanding human reproduction from the vantage point of love and its fruitfulness. His invocation of the Bergsonian concepts “open societies” and “vital force” provides us with an invitation to reconceive the nature of instinct, moving

⁸² Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 270.

away from John Paul II's anthropocentric outlook to arrive at an anthropocosmic vision. I argued that viewed within this universal horizon, love becomes the constituting norm for reproduction, accomplishing the oneness of God, human, and nature.

Thus, human reproduction is defined far beyond the narrow scope of heterosexual conjugal intercourse directly resulting in the birthing of human offspring and is capable of taking diverse forms. It is conceived as the reproduction of love, where the reproductivity of love is preserved through the generation of open societies, in which souls freely discern the mystic impetus of love. The reproduction of human life is coexistent with cosmic life and demonstrates an eternal continuity of creation and the duration of love. It is essentially a creative and solidary endeavor. Considering the universe as "the confluence of universal life in the mode of perpetual creativity,"⁸³ the Chinese philosopher Thomé H. Fang notes that "life of all forms is fulfilled and the value of all kind is achieved through the spirit of love,"⁸⁴ as the "embodiment of the felicity of life."⁸⁵ The unceasing creative transformation—that is life⁸⁶—manifesting through human reproduction represents nothing other than the fecundity and reproductivity of divine love which expresses itself immanently as "an emerging world of subjective intercommunion"⁸⁷ and solidarity. It is also the driving force for the transformation of human society to an absolutely open one, where the vital force—the impetus of love—slowly gives shape to a true culture of life as a new civilization of love. Thus, human reproduction—by reproducing love—ushers us towards the actualization of the common good, which is God, inviting us to participate in the creativity of divine life through universal communion, so humanity could be lifted up to God and divine creation reach its final consummation.

⁸³ Thomé H. Fang, *The Chinese View of Life: The Philosophy of Comprehensive Harmony* (Hong Kong: The Union Press, 1957), 71.

⁸⁴ Fang, *The Chinese View of Life*, 76.

⁸⁵ Fang, *The Chinese View of Life*, 78.

⁸⁶ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 230–231.

⁸⁷ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2015), 136.

Simeiqi He, PhD, is a Chinese Catholic theological ethicist and social worker. She holds a PhD in Christian ethics from Drew University Theological School, a Master of Arts in Theology and Ministry from Brite Divinity School, a Master of Social Work and a graduate certificate in Women and Gender Studies from Texas Christian University, and a Bachelor of Science in Materials Physics from Sichuan University. Her writings have previously appeared in *Journal of Moral Theology*, *Catholic Theological Review*, *Asian Horizons*, and *U.S. Catholic*.