

## 60 The Contraceptive Revolution and the Human Condition

Charles E. Curran

The Council of the Society for Health and Human Values has determined that the most significant and far-reaching advance produced by the new biology is contraception. The purpose of this paper is to study from the perspective of moral theology or Christian ethics the phenomenon of contraception — the great revolution of the new biology — and to see what this tells us about new images of the human condition.<sup>1</sup>

### I. The Contraception Revolution

The fact of the contraception revolution must be admitted by all. In 1976 only 7.7 percent of American married women were classified as fertile, not wanting to become pregnant, and nonusers of contraception in their marriage.<sup>2</sup> The changes brought about by contraception have been enormous. At the family level in all parts of the world the procreation of offspring can now be controlled by the marriage partners. No longer are sexual relationships necessarily connected with procreation. Family planning has replaced biological necessity as the way in which parents bring children into the world. Such family planning has above all freed the woman from the biological necessity of spending most of her life as a bearer

and nurturer of children. The ability to plan, to limit the number of children, or even to have no children at all has already contributed much to the changing role of women in contemporary society. However, in parts of the world there is still some resistance to family planning and the use of contraception.

Effective contraceptive methods have made it possible at least in theory for the population of countries and of the world to be controlled. According to the "World Population Plan of Action" adopted by the World Population Congress meeting in Bucharest in 1974 under the auspices of the United Nations, if the world population growth continues at the rate of 2 percent, which has been occurring since 1950, there would be a doubling of the world population every thirty-five years.<sup>3</sup> There are different theories about the meaning and extent of the population problem, but at the very minimum all recognize the need for population control in some countries of the world. Effective and cheap contraceptive devices make the control of population much easier.

For individuals engaging in sexual relations contraception does away with the fear of pregnancy. It is difficult to correlate the exact relationship between sexual activity among young non-marrieds and contraception, but the general wisdom maintains that contraception has definitely contributed to the fact that more unmarried people are sexually active today than ever before. A recent study shows a remarkable upsurge in premarital intercourse by unmarried teen-aged women living in metropolitan areas. A survey taken in 1971 indicated that 30 percent of these young unmarried women had sexual intercourse by the age nineteen. In 1976 the percentage rose to 43 percent. The last survey puts the figure at 50 percent.<sup>4</sup>

The term "revolution" is often abused in our media conscious age, but perhaps the word is justified in referring to the use of contraception and the resultant change brought about for individuals, for families, and for nations in dealing with the problem of human control over births. Effective contraceptive devices have given human beings control over the procreative aspect of sexual relationships and have contributed greatly to significant societal changes. However, the contraceptive revolution has not been without its

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From *American Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 3 (May 1982): 42-59. Slightly abridged and edited from the original. Used by permission of the publisher and the author.

problems. There have been a number of significant debates in the area of contraception that can help us to evaluate better the whole question of contraception as an illustration of the ethical and human possibilities and dilemmas brought about by the new biology. The debates have centered on a number of issues — the morality of using contraception; the safety and side effects of contraceptive devices, especially the pill; the problems connected with population control; and the uses and abuses of the power of contraceptive technology.

### *The Morality of Contraception*

The morality of using contraception as a means of family planning has been attacked primarily by the Roman Catholic Church. In 1968 Pope Paul VI reiterated the condemnation of artificial contraception in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. The Catholic Church, however, believes in responsible parenthood. Couples should bring into the world only those children that they can care for and educate properly. As early as 1951 Pope Pius XII acknowledged that medical, eugenic, economic, and social conditions can justify the desire to limit the size of one's family. But the official hierarchical Catholic teaching does not allow the use of any means that interfere with the natural act of sexual intercourse or with the sexual faculty. The God-given purpose of the sexual faculty is for the procreation and education of offspring and for the love union of the spouses. Every act of sexual intercourse must be open to this twofold finality. Human beings cannot directly interfere with the faculty or with the act so that the natural finality is frustrated.<sup>5</sup>

There are both practical and theoretical objections to this official teaching within Roman Catholicism. Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has recognized the serious pastoral problems existing in the American church on this issue. Quinn recently quoted statistics showing that 76.5 percent of American Catholic married women of child-bearing age use some form of contraception, and 94 percent of these were employing means condemned by the pope. Many theologians have disagreed with the conclusion and the reasoning proposed by the pope. Human beings do have the

power and responsibility to interfere with the sexual faculty and act. The official Catholic teaching is often accused of a physicalism or biologism because the biological or physical structure of the act is made normative and cannot be interfered with.<sup>6</sup> I take this dissenting position.

Some Catholics and others have been advocating natural family planning whereby a couple determines the time of ovulation by an examination of the woman's cervical mucus and limits conjugal relations to the sterile time. Promoters of natural family planning (NFP) support this approach with many reasons — often using arguments proposed against other forms of contraception. Natural family planning capitalizes on the contemporary appreciation of the natural, which seeks to avoid additives and pills. NFP appeals to the highest aspect of the human — the love and discipline of the spouses — and is not merely a scientific technique. The method is totally safe and avoids many of the dangers often associated with the pill. NFP requires the joint cooperation of both spouses and does not put the burden of contraception on one — especially the woman.<sup>7</sup> There do seem to be many attractive aspects about NFP, but I personally see no moral problem in using other forms of contraception as a means of exercising responsible parenthood. Unfortunately, NFP does not appear to be effective where discipline, training, and high motivation are not present, so that its effectiveness with regard to population control is questionable.<sup>8</sup>

A related but different moral problem concerns the use of contraception by unmarried people. Although a surprising number of sexually active teenagers do not use contraception, still there can be no doubt that the availability of contraception has contributed to the growing frequency of extra and premarital sexual relations. In general the Judaeo-Christian tradition has historically condemned sexual relations outside the context of marriage. The vast majority of philosophical and theological ethicists seem to agree in insisting that sexual relations must be seen in the context of person relations. Casual and impersonal sex violates the human meaning of sexuality. Many, myself included, understand the full meaning of human sexuality in terms of the total commitment of one person to another in marriage. On the other hand, while maintaining that casual and im-

personal sex and sex without full personal commitment are morally wrong, I and many others would urge people engaging in such sexual intercourse to use contraception as a way of avoiding conception. Such people obviously are not prepared to bring children into the world and educate them.

### *Safety and Side Effects*

The question of safety and risk has been a constant worry for women and also a matter for frequent discussion in both the scientific and popular literature. An article in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1976 accepted the conclusion proposed by Professor Martin Vessey of Oxford, whose study group based their findings on the medical histories of 17,000 users of the pill. The benefits of the pill outweigh its disadvantages, but there are some qualifications. Pill users should be kept under general supervision by their doctors. They should limit the length of time they stay on the pill. After 35 years, since the adverse effects tend to increase, for example, the risk of a thromboembolic event, other methods of contraception are suggested.<sup>9</sup> . . .

The most intense study in the United States, conducted by the Kaiser-Permanente Medical Center at Walnut Creek, California, has involved more than sixteen thousand pill users over a period of ten years. The final report of this study, which will now cease because of its high cost (4.3 million dollars), is being readied for publication. Newspaper accounts report the findings that in a population of young, adult, white, middle-class women the risks of oral contraception use appear to be negligible. But the final word is not in, and women must weigh the pros and cons among the uncertainties. Smoking, long sun exposure, and having multiple sex partners increase the risks.<sup>10</sup>

However, there has been a continuing opposition to the use of contraceptive pills, especially from some feminist groups who view the risks connected with the pill as unacceptable and unnecessary. There are other forms of safe contraception which do not put such a burden on the woman.<sup>11</sup>

One can conclude there will probably never be a form of contraception which is absolutely safe with no negative side effects and no incon-

veniences. The woman using the pill now must make a prudential judgment based on the available information. However, one should remember that there are also risks in childbearing itself. . . .

There is one other "side effect" of the pill that should be mentioned, but with side effects understood in a broader way. This is the great rise in the rate of VD. In the mid-1950s there was a general feeling that VD was no longer a real problem in the United States. Federal appropriations for VD fell from a high of 17 million dollars to 3 million dollars in 1955. But in the late 1950s after the introduction of the pill the reported cases of infectious syphilis and gonorrhea began to rise. By the 1970s gonorrhea had become the number one of all the reportable communicable diseases in the United States. Similar growth in VD has been reported in other countries of the first world such as England, Canada, Australia, and Denmark.<sup>12</sup> One can legitimately assume that the use of the pill is causally related in some manner to the increase in VD because the pill (unlike the condom) does nothing to prevent the spread of VD. The linkage between the use of the pill and the rise of VD is another indication that there is no such thing as a contraceptive which is perfect from every perspective.

### *Population Control*

The macro aspects of the contraception revolution involve especially the question of population control. Here, too, there has been much discussion in the last decades. Of primary importance is the very definition and understanding of the problem itself. I agree with the approach of Philip Hauser, who insists on a complex understanding of the problem, including four elements or even four crises. The population explosion refers to the growing number of people. The population implosion indicates the increasing concentration of people on relatively small portions of the earth's surface. The population dispersion means the increasing heterogeneity of people who share the same geographical state as well as the same social, political, and economic conditions, as exemplified by current problems in Northern Ireland, in many African countries, and even in Canada. Finally, the technoplosion refers to the accelerated pace of technological innovation which has characterized

our present era. Hauser maintains that the problems created or exacerbated by implosion and dispersion will create more human misery during the remainder of this century than the problems produced by excessive fertility and growth.<sup>13</sup> However, we must not forget the long-range problems.

A fundamental ethical problem concerns the means used by government to control the growth of population. The moral values involved here are the freedom of the individual, justice, and the general welfare of the nation, including security and survival.<sup>14</sup> On a scale of government interference in a continuum from freedom to coercive policies, the following general approaches can be identified: education, motivation, and propaganda for population control together with provision of acceptable means of controlling fertility to all who want them; change of structures which affect demography; incentives offered to control population; coercive methods.<sup>15</sup>

In general I am opposed to coercive measures except as an absolutely last resort, but it is necessary to evaluate properly the role and meaning of freedom in these discussions about contraception and population control. Too often freedom in these matters can be poorly understood in an overly individualistic sense. Insistence on reproductive autonomy can forget the social dimensions of human sexuality and procreation. Sexuality and procreation involve a relationship to the human species. Precisely because of the social aspects of procreation the individual couple must give consideration to the broader question of overpopulation. The possibility of accepting coercion as a last resort, at least from a theoretical position, is based on this more social understanding of freedom and responsibility in the matter of marriage. However, in practice, the complexity of the population problem and the dangers of abuse argue against the acceptance of coercion.

The reasoning behind the official Catholic Church's teaching on procreation and its condemnation of artificial contraception is most instructive in this matter of freedom. The Catholic condemnation of artificial contraception rests on the assumption that the sexual faculty has a purpose and finality related to the species and including more than merely the individual or the couple. Freedom of the spouses is not the only ethical concern; the species must also be considered. The

official Catholic approach is insightful in recognizing the need to consider more than the freedom of the spouses. Apart from the question of the means employed, the official Catholic position can and does support the need to control population if this is truly necessary for the human good. Catholic teaching in this and other related matters has never absolutized the freedom of the individual person but has constantly stressed the social nature of human existence. As mentioned above, I disagree with the aspect of official Catholic teaching which maintains that every single act must be open to procreation so that one cannot directly interfere with artificial means.

### *Contraception as Power*

In the last few decades there has been a growing skepticism and criticism of science and technology. Much of the recent ferment surfaced again at the Conference on Faith, Science, and the Future sponsored by the World Council of Churches at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in July 1979. One of the most significant divergencies in the conference, in the preparatory papers, and in meetings concerns the very meaning of science itself. Note that we are not talking about technology as applied science but rather about pure science itself. The one perspective, which has been typical of traditional Western understanding, sees science as an objective search for knowledge and a method for solving problems. The objectivity of science calls for the scientist to abandon all subjective prejudices and presuppositions and enter into give-and-take with fellow scientists in the objective and disinterested search for truth. The method of test and experiment facilitates this objective search. Yet there is no doubt that science itself can and has been abused. The tremendous cost of scientific research today means that pure science is subject to the industries and governments which support it. Likewise, the results of science and the technology it produces have been abused and put to wrong purposes. In this connection one can mention the question of atomic and nuclear weapons.<sup>16</sup>

A second view, often connected with a more radical perspective, sees science not so much as knowledge but as power. The sociology of knowledge reminds us that knowledge is always a func-

tion of practical interests. Science is power over nature and over people wielded by the strong against the weak. Science is what scientists do in the social situations in which they work. Science objectively exists only as a social reality and is closely related to economic and political interests. The objectivity and disinterestedness of science are a myth.<sup>17</sup>

Both positions seem to have some truth, but it is not necessary for us to become involved in a long discussion of the problem, since we are dealing with contraceptive technology, or applied science. All must recognize the connection between power and contraceptive technology. An examination of some of the debates in the matter of contraception shows that contraceptive technologies have constituted a power which has been used against the weak and the disadvantaged. Aspects of contraception as power have arisen vis-à-vis individual poor in this country, against women in general, and against the developing nations of the world.

First of all, contraception as power has been used against the poor in this country. Perhaps the best illustration has been the sterilization of people against their will. Headlines were created with the revelation that people in Virginia public institutions had been sterilized without their consent. Questions have also been raised about the free consent given by poor women to sterilizations when they did not truly understand the nature of the operation.<sup>18</sup> The dangers here are very real, and there have been many illustrations of such abuses of power without the truly informed consent of the persons involved.

Second, some feminists have maintained that women have been victimized by the pill. Men have used their dominant power to make sure that it is the woman who puts up with the risks of using the pill. While many look upon the pill as something which has brought about greater freedom for women, these feminists see the pill as another form of male oppression forcing the women to take all the risks involved in contraception. Feminists and others also resent the importance given to the psychological fears often mentioned as deterring the male from sterilization, even though male sterilization (vasectomy) is a much simpler medical procedure than female sterilization (tubal ligation). Contraception can become another form of male dominance.<sup>19</sup>

A third aspect of contraception as power is seen in the attitudes of many of the countries of the first world to the population problems in the developing nations. Too often official United States policy and the opinions of many Americans, especially before the 1974 United Nations Conference in Bucharest adopted its World Population Plan of Action, saw the solution of the overpopulation problem only in terms of a reduction of the birth rate through efficient, inexpensive, and readily available contraception. Population growth was seen as the cause of many other problems such as retarded economic growth, shortage of food resources, and pollution of the environment. One can readily recognize the temptation of employing a technological fix without realizing the complexity of the reality involved and above all without acknowledging the many problems created by the United States and other nations of the first world.

The complexity of the population problem is such that merely providing the means for individuals to control fertility is not enough. Other population factors are involved such as population distribution and structure, migration, mortality rates, and the role of women in society. Above all, the position of Americans with their unilateral approach to the population problems was suspect precisely because they failed to recognize the underlying problems to which the first world is contributing so much. Overconsumption by the first world creates just as many, if not more, problems than overpopulation by others. Above all the population question cannot be viewed apart from its interdependence with social phenomena such as economic change, environmental factors, and technological developments.<sup>20</sup>

There is some evidence to support the position that programs aimed at lowering fertility will not be successful unless they are accompanied by social and economic changes. To poverty-stricken mothers in American ghettos a child is a source of joy, hope, and contentment which cannot be had in any other ways.<sup>21</sup> India's programs for population control based on massive contraception and sterilization have been failures apparently because they did not recognize the interrelatedness of the population problem with other factors, especially the economic.<sup>22</sup> One can understand how the poorer nations of the world saw in the

American insistence on contraception and sterilization as the solution to the population problem another instance of the strong trying to hold on to their power and oppress the weak.

## II. The Human Condition

What do this analysis of the contraceptive revolution and the ethical questions raised by it tell us about our image of the human condition? Our understanding of the human condition obviously influences our evaluation of contraceptive technology, but an analysis of the contraceptive revolution and its human and ethical ramifications also sheds some light on our appreciation of the human condition. Three different aspects of the human condition will be discussed — anthropology in general, human progress, and technological progress.

### *Anthropology*

As might be expected, there have been and are different approaches to anthropology in the Christian tradition, and these differences continue to exist today. In general, one can distinguish more optimistic anthropologies and more pessimistic anthropologies. Harvey Cox with his emphasis on the secular city represented a more optimistic anthropology in his writings in the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> Cox did not deny the reality of sin, which in Christian theology has usually been the grounding for more pessimistic anthropology, but Cox attempted to reinterpret the very meaning of sin. The Christian tradition sees the primary sin of human beings as pride — the unwillingness to accept the limitations and dependency of our human condition. The good Christian thus becomes the individual who does not expect too much of oneself and is content to live within limitations. But today we need a doctrine of sin that will not encourage defense and dependency. We need an anthropology that will accentuate the responsibility that human beings must take for the cosmos and its future. An emphasis on guilt and forgiveness has made Christians look backward, but the gospel is a call to leave what is behind and open ourselves to the promises of the future. The primary sin is not pride but sloth — *acedia* — an abdication of

our power and a failure to take responsibility for the world in which we live. Today the gospel calls the Christian to an adult stewardship, originality, inventiveness, and the control of the world. Even the sin of Adam and Eve was not pride but sloth. Self-doubt, hesitant activity, and dependency preceded that fatal nibble.<sup>24</sup>

Paul Ramsey, especially in his writings on the new biology, takes a more pessimistic view of anthropology and stresses that *hubris*, or pride, is the primary sin of human beings. Ramsey sees many ethical violations on the horizontal plane of human existence brought about by the new biology — coercive breeding or nonbreeding, injustices done to individuals or mishaps, the violation of the nature of human parenthood. All these ethical violations on the horizontal plane point to a fundamental flaw in the vertical dimension — *hubris*, or playing God. In attempts of the new biology to fabricate human beings, to prevent aging, to make cyborgs, to control intimate human moods and powers, Ramsey perceives the human desire to have limitless dominion over our lives — the fatal flaw of *hubris*, or the denial of our own creatureliness. Ramsey insists on the limitations of human wisdom as a guide for the rosy future portrayed by the messianic positivists. If our genetic planning policy is no better than our foreign policy or our urban policy, then we will truly be in trouble. Human beings must be willing to accept our finitude and our limitations, to say nothing of our sinfulness.<sup>25</sup>

My understanding of Christian anthropology is greatly influenced by what is logically the first step in any theological ethics — what has been called the stance, perspective, posture, or horizon of Christian ethics. The stance is the logically first step broad enough to encompass the entire matter of Christian ethics but also able to provide a perspective within which the field of moral theology can be viewed. As a stance for Christian ethics I proposed in *Personal Ethics* the need to see all human reality in terms of the fivefold Christian mysteries of creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection destiny. In the light of this stance anthropology tends to find a balance between the extremes of Cox and Ramsey as mentioned above. Creation, incarnation, and redemption all point to human goodness and the power which is ours as God's gracious gift. However, cre-

ation also reminds us of our finitude and limitations; sin affects us without ever destroying our basic goodness and without totally escaping the reality of redemption; resurrection destiny as the fullness of the kingdom always lies beyond our attainment in this world.

Such a theoretical framework for anthropology, which recognizes the positive aspects of human existence but also cautions about continuing limitation, sinfulness, and incompleteness, is confirmed by our consideration of contraceptive technology and by developments in the new biology. Human beings through technology have a greater power and corresponding responsibility than we ever had before. With the new medical technology human beings are called upon to make decisions about life and death itself, e.g., pulling the plug on the respirator or deciding who will receive lifesaving technologies. But, on the other hand, finitude and sinfulness will always affect our human existence. Contraception has enhanced human responsibility and freed us from a determinism by the forces of nature, but biological or any other kind of technology cannot overcome our basic creatureliness. Likewise, the proclivity to abuse based on our continuing sinfulness must always be recognized. Contraception, despite its many contributions to human development, has also contributed somewhat to a depersonalization of human sexuality in some areas of human behavior. Technological contraceptive power has been used by the strong at the expense of the weak. A series of checks and balances on researchers, drug companies, and contraception programs of governments is an absolute necessity.

The recognition of the greater power and responsibility that human beings have achieved because of science, technology, and other developments has led some to describe the human being as a self-creator. In one sense the concept of the human person as a self-creator is not all that new. Thomas Aquinas grounded his anthropology in a similar concept. In the prologue to the second part of the *Summa Theologiae* which describes the ethical life, Aquinas briefly explains that he will now consider the human being who is an image of God precisely because the human being is endowed with intellect, free will, and the power of self-determination.<sup>26</sup> In contemporary theology Karl Rahner has emphasized the concept of the person

as a self-creator. Such assertions must be properly understood. Rahner does not mean to deny all creaturely limitation, but he emphasizes that the human person truly creates and determines one's own self and subjectivity by one's free action. The German theologian stresses that the new aspect in this concept today is the fact that our transcendental self-manipulation can take on new historical and categorical forms because of our science and technology, especially in the biological area.<sup>27</sup> Rahner's emphasis on the subject is part of his transcendental approach, which can be criticized for not giving enough importance to the physical, social, political, and cosmic dimensions of human existence. However, Rahner would agree that we cannot speak of the human person as a self-creator understood in terms of one who makes something out of nothing. Human beings today, thanks to science and technology, have great power over our world, our environment, and even our bodies, but we can never deny our creaturely existence and limitations.

Intimately connected with the improper notion of the person as a self-creator is the ethical reductionism of seeing the human being only in terms of freedom. A proper human anthropology must recognize both our freedom and our limits. We are embodied spirits living in multiple relationships with others. As already pointed out in our discussion of contraceptive technology, a stress on individual freedom and autonomy has often failed to recognize that procreation involves us in a broader web of human relationships. Procreation can never be adequately considered only under the rubric of the freedom of the individual person or couple.

We do not exist in the world apart from our bodies, and to a certain extent we are limited by the givenness of our bodies. The official Catholic teaching condemns contraception as an unwarranted interference in the bodily structures of human existence. I do not agree with such a position, but I also do not agree with those who fail to recognize both the importance and the limitations of the bodily. Joseph Fletcher, for example, maintains that laboratory reproduction is more human than sexual reproduction precisely because it is more rational.<sup>28</sup> However, the bodily is a part of the human, and there are limitations connected with our body that we cannot forget.

Fatigue and pain are two readily experienced limitations with which we constantly live. In the discussion of contraceptive technologies the best illustration of bodily limitations is the problem with the safety and side effects of the pill. The complex hormonal systems of the human body cannot be interfered with at will. There are intricate relationships and connections that must be taken into account. The chemicals that prevent ovulation can and do have deleterious effects on other bodily organs and functions. These limitations of the complex bodily system are analogous to the limitations of the "eco-systems" in our cosmos. The ecological crisis has made us aware of these continuing material limitations of the cosmic world that we inhabit. By overstressing our dominion, our power, and our freedom to intervene in our natural world, we fail to give due importance to the limitations inherent in our bodies and in our cosmos. Yes, human beings have great power and responsibility, but we also have limits, and true responsibility calls for us to recognize these limits.

### *Human Progress*

The question of human progress is ultimately connected with anthropology. What about human progress, especially in the light of the contraceptive revolution? Christian theology has taken a number of different approaches to human progress. In the early part of the twentieth century liberal Protestantism in general and the social gospel in particular emphasized human progress. Influenced by the theory of evolution and recent technological developments, these theologians accepted an evolutionary human progress, some even going so far as to accept the inevitability of such progress.<sup>29</sup>

Protestant liberalism was severely challenged by Karl Barth in Germany and by Reinhold Niebuhr in the United States. It was no coincidence that Barth's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans appeared in 1919,<sup>30</sup> and Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* was published in 1932.<sup>31</sup> The horror of the First World War burst the bubble of an optimistic progress which, according to the caricature, proclaimed that every day and in every way we were becoming better and better. The brutal reality of war contradicted the bland

slogans of the social gospel — the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men. It is a sad commentary that the sharpest attack in the United States against the progressivism of liberal Protestantism was occasioned by the economic problems of the depression rather than by the war! But, whatever the occasions, the progressive and optimistic theology of the early part of the century was no longer acceptable in the light of the brutality of war and the harshness of the industrial revolution with its ever-widening gulf between the rich and the poor. The neoorthodoxy of Barth and the Christian realism of Niebuhr stressed the transcendence of God rather than immanence, placed heavy emphasis on human sinfulness, and insisted that the fullness of the kingdom lies beyond the world, or "beyond tragedy" as Niebuhr entitled one of his books of sermons.<sup>32</sup> The Second World War reinforced the mood of realism with its denial of dramatic human progress within history.

In the 1960s a change occurred which can be seen in the theology of secularity and the death of God theology.<sup>33</sup> Secularity was no longer something opposed to the gospel, but the gospel according to the theologians of secularity calls for us to accept secularity with all its hopes and promises. The older pessimistic theology no longer attracted universal support, especially in the light of the power and the responsibilities that were in the hands of human beings to shape their own future and the destiny of the world. There are those who said that the secular city theology was just a warmed-over version of the social gospel, but it captured the attention of many in the middle 1960s.<sup>24</sup>

Once again, however, human experience shifted. The great hopes of the early 1960s, as expressed for example in the inaugural address of John F. Kennedy in 1960 and Lyndon Johnson in 1964, were dashed against the stark realities of discrimination, war, and poverty. Many thought that the school desegregation decision of 1954 and the march on Selma marked the beginning of a new era in race relations, but the urban riots of the late 1960s reminded Americans of how deeply racism and poverty were engrained in our society. The 1960s began with great hopes of peace throughout the world, but the involvement in Vietnam disillusioned many Americans. On a worldwide basis the poverty problem indicated



the structural problems of economic neocolonialism, because of which the first world was systematically keeping the developing world in the shackles of poverty. In the light of many of these developments the overly optimistic theology of the early 1960s was no longer convincing.

Changing attitudes to human progress from the 1960s to the present can be seen in the work of many theologians. Take, for example, Johannes Metz. In the early 1960s Metz put heavy emphasis on secularity and the world as history. This incarnational approach with its stress on history rather than on nature emphasized human freedom and responsibility in the world in which we live.<sup>35</sup> By the middle 1960s Metz's understanding of the problematic shifted from secularity to futurity, from an incarnational to an eschatological approach. Eschatology, futurity, and hope characterized the work of many theologians in this period. In this eschatology there was some continuity between the present and the future.<sup>36</sup> In the early 1970s a change emerged in Metz's development. The tone becomes more pessimistic as the aspect of suffering is added. The relationship of human beings to history now occurs through suffering, which is seen in the light of the dangerous memory of Jesus.<sup>37</sup> Finally in the later 1970s the eschatological element in Metz now emphasizes not the continuity but the discontinuity between the present and the future. Apocalyptic becomes a central theme in Metz, who strongly opposes an evolutionary and teleological view of eschatology which is often associated with the Western technological perspective.<sup>38</sup>

Thus we are confronted with the question: Is there truly human progress in history and how does it occur? Again, my theoretical approach is based on the stance or perspective. The goodness of creation, the incarnation, and the fact that redemption has already occurred argue for some continuity between the present and the future of the kingdom. However, human finitude, sinfulness, and resurrection destiny as future call for some discontinuity between the present and the future. The fullness of the kingdom is always beyond our grasp. Such a perspective has room for some truly human progress in history, but the negative aspects of finitude, sin, and eschatological incompleteness are limits against a naive, evolutionary, and too optimistic view of human prog-

ress. Such a perspective, especially when looking at history in the long view, does not expect to see any great or dramatic breakthrough in human progress. Yes, there can and will be some limited progress over time, but there will be no utopias existing in this world. My approach thus differs from both evolutionary progressivism and contemporary apocalypticism.

How does this theoretical view of human progress stand up in the light of experience in history? The interpretation of history is always risky. One can point to great deformations that have occurred in the development of history. Modern war with its nuclear weapons has become infinitely more destructive than earlier wars. However, I think there has been limited but significant historical advance in terms of truly human progress. A very basic ethical reality concerns the rights, dignity, and equality of human beings. Here one can note some true historical progress. Slavery is nowhere near as prevalent as it was at one time. Our society today is much more aware of the equal rights of women. Contemporary human beings have a greater area in which to exercise their freedom and responsibility in many aspects of human life. Democratic government has given individuals a greater participation in their government. The Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations points to an ever-growing awareness on the international level of basic human rights. Without claiming any utopian or dramatic breakthroughs one can make an argument for some true but limited progress in history.

It seems as if theology has somewhat flip-flopped in its approach to human progress and has been too easily influenced by the immediate situations of the times. There will always be more optimistic and more pessimistic periods in human history, but a theological worldview must be supple enough to recognize these ups and downs without losing sight of the overall perspective which in my judgment recognizes some true but limited progress in the course of history. Struggle with penultimate victories somewhat outweighing penultimate defeats, will characterize our historical existence.

### *Technological Progress*

What is the relationship between technological progress and truly human progress? One signifi-

cant factor contributing to the optimistic understanding of human progress in the 1960s was technological progress. There can be no doubt that technology has made great progress. Human beings have come from the discovery of the wheel to the animal-drawn cart, to the steam engine, the automobile, the airplane, and the rocket ships that landed human beings on the moon. Technological developments seem to be ever progressive in the sense that new developments build on older discoveries and constantly move forward as illustrated in the case of transportation. However, the experience of the late 1960s and the 1970s caused many to take a quite critical look at technological progress.

First, technological progress is not the same as human progress. The apparently steady progressive thrust of technological progress is not true of human progress. Newer technology always builds on the old and improves on it, but look at other areas of human existence. Why do we still read Shakespeare, listen to Bach and Beethoven, admire the sculpture of ancient Greece and Rome, and recognize the artistry of Michelangelo or Raphael? Literature, art, drama, and music do not show this always-advancing progress which is true of science and technology. Human progress and technological progress are not the same precisely because the technological is only one small part of the human. Technology is never going to solve the great human problems of life and death, love and sharing, hope and endurance. Yet technology is not something evil or necessarily opposed to the human, but rather science and technology are the result of human creativity and therefore good. However, science and technology are also quite limited in terms of the truly and fully human. Since the human encompasses much more than the technological, humans at times must say no to the possibilities of technology.

Second, technological progress is not as unilaterally progressive and developmental as was supposed. Technological progress itself is ambiguous. Developments in transportation were used to illustrate the presumably always progressive nature of technological development, but later experience and reflection recall some negative aspects of such development. Think, for example, of the problem of air pollution or the flight from the cities occasioned by the mass use of automobiles.

Technological advances, even apart from their relationship to the wider aspect of the human, are not without ambiguous side effects.

### III. Conclusion

This paper has studied the contraceptive revolution and has analyzed the understanding of anthropology and of human and technological progress from the perspective of theological ethics. In light of all these considerations, some conclusions can now be drawn with regard to contraceptive technology and its relationship to the human.

First, contraceptive technology in general has been good for human beings. The effects of contraception in the matter of family planning and population control have been very beneficial. To free human beings from physical necessity and to give them greater control and responsibility enhances the reality of the human. The very term "responsible parenthood," accepted by just about all people today, calls attention to the human good which has been brought into being by contraceptive technology.

Second, contraceptive technology is a limited human good. Technology itself can never solve or even touch the deeper human questions and problems of life and death, loving concern, or egoism. Contraception can contribute to the well-being of spouses and of families. Population control can help nations and the whole world. However, the human problems and possibilities facing individuals, spouses, nations, and the world transcend the level of biological technologies or of all technologies combined. Recall the dangerously unilateral approach which viewed the problems of limiting population in the narrow terms of providing safe, cheap, and effective contraceptives and failed to recognize the many other aspects of the problem.

Third, this limited human good remains somewhat ambiguous. The best example of the ambiguity in contraceptive advances had been the dangers and side effects associated with the pill. There will undoubtedly never be a perfect contraceptive in the sense of something that is perfect from every single perspective — the hygienic, the eugenic, the aesthetic, etc. At the very minimum all existing contraceptive technologies seem to have some limitations and imperfections about them.

Fourth, contraception is a limited good which can be abused. While contraception has made it possible for people to practice responsible parenthood, it has also made it somewhat easier for others to engage in impersonal and irresponsible sexuality. Limited human goods are always subject to such abuse.

Fifth, contraceptive technology is susceptible to takeover by the strong at the expense of the weak. The poor in the country, women in general, and the poor nations of the world have all been victims of the contraceptive technology of the powerful. Thus contraceptive technology has been a good for human beings but a good that is somewhat limited, ambiguous, and vulnerable to takeover by the powerful at the expense of the weak. This assessment and understanding of contraceptive technology should provide us with a framework for judging the newer biological technologies that will come our way in the future.

## Notes

1. This article was originally presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Health and Human Values in October 1980. Throughout the article contraception will be used in the strict sense to include both contraception and sterilization but *not* abortion.
2. Kathleen Ford, "Contraceptive Use in the United States, 1973-1976," *Family Planning Perspectives* 10 (1978): 264-69.
3. United Nations Economic and Social Council, "World Population Plan of Action," *World Population Conference* (October 2, 1974), E/5585, par. N. 3.
4. Melvin Zelnik and John F. Kantner, "Sexual Activity, Contraceptive Use and Pregnancy among Metropolitan Area Teenagers: 1971-1979," *Family Planning Perspectives* 12 (1980): 230-37.
5. For a summary of this hierarchical Catholic teaching, see Thomas J. O'Donnell, *Medicine and Christian Morality* (Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1976), pp. 238-57.
6. Archbishop John R. Quinn, "New Context for Contraception Teaching," *Origins: N.C. Documentary Service* 10 (October 9, 1980): 263-67. For an overview of the discussion within Catholicism on the occasion of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, see William H. Shannon, *The Lively Debate: Response to Humanae Vitae* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970); Joseph A. Selling, "The Reaction to *Humanae Vitae*: A Study in Special and Fundamental Theology" (S.T.D. diss., Catholic University of Louvain, 1977).
7. Mary Shivanandan, *Natural Sex* (New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, 1979).
8. World Health Organization, *Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction*, 7th Annual Report, Geneva, November 1978. This report is quoted in Carl Djerassi, *The Politics of Contraception* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), pp. 9-10. For a defense of the effectiveness of NEP, see Shivanandan, *Natural Sex*.
9. Paul Vaughan, "The Pill Turns Twenty," *The New York Times Magazine*, June 13, 1976, pp. 9ff. The scientific source for *The New York Times Magazine* article is M. P. Vessey and R. Doll, "Is the Pill Safe Enough to Continue Using?" *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, vol. B. 195 (1976): 69-80.
10. *The Washington Post*, Tuesday, October 21, 1980, p. A7.
11. Barbara Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill* (New York: Doubleday, 1980).
12. Louis Lasagna, *The VD Epidemic* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), pp. 1-11.
13. Philip M. Hauser, "Population Criteria in Foreign Aid Programs," in *The Population Crisis and Moral Responsibility*, ed. J. Philip Wogaman (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1973), pp. 233-39.
14. This is the conclusion of the Population Research Group of the Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences, which was charged by the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future to examine the relevant ethical values and principles. See *Population Policy and Ethics: The American Experience*, ed. Robert M. Veatch (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1977), especially pp. 477-84.
15. Robert M. Veatch, "An Ethical Analysis of Population Policy Proposals," in *Population Policy and Ethics*, pp. 445-75.
16. Robert Hanbury Brown, "The Nature of Science," in *Faith and Science in an Unjust World: Report of the World Council of Churches' Conference on Faith, Science and the Future*, vol. I, *Plenary Sessions*, ed. Roger L. Shinn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 31-40.
17. Ruben Alves, "On the Eating Habits of Science," in *Faith and Science in an Unjust World*, pp. 41-43.
18. *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1980, p. A1. Patricia Donovan, "Sterilizing the Poor and Incompetent," *The Hastings Center Report* 6, 5 (October 1976): 7, 8; see also the symposium "Sterilization of the Re-

tarded: In Whose Interest?" *The Hastings Center Report* 8, 3 (June 1978): 28-41.

19. See Seaman, *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*.

20. United Nations Economic and Social Council, "World Population Plan of Action," *World Population Conference* (October 2, 1974), E/5585, par. Nn. 20-67. For other authors who stressed the multidimensional aspects of the problem, see Donald P. Warwick, "Ethics and Population Control in Developing Countries," *The Hastings Center Report* 4, 3 (June 1974): 1-4; Peter J. Henriot, "Global Population in Perspective: Implications for U.S. Policy Response," *Theological Studies* 35 (1974): 48-70.

21. Arthur J. Dyck, "American Global Population Policy: An Ethical Analysis," *Linacre Quarterly* 42 (1975): 60.

22. John F. X. Harriott, "Bucharest and Beyond," *The Month* 7 (1974): 630.

23. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

24. Harvey Cox, *On Not Leaving It to the Snake* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. ix-xix.

25. Paul Ramsey, *Fabricated Man: The Ethics of Genetic Control* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), especially pp. 90-96, 150-60.

26. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae, Prologue.

27. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. IX, *Writings of 1965-1967, I* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 205-52.

28. Joseph Fletcher, "Ethical Aspects of Genetic Controls: Designed Genetic Changes in Man," *New England Journal of Medicine* 285 (September 30, 1971): 780-81; see also Fletcher, *The Ethics of Genetic Control: Ending Reproductive Roulette* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1974).

29. For an overview of this period in Protestantism, see John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity: Interpreted Through Its Development* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), pp. 160-254.

30. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, tr. from the 6th ed. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968). For a study of Barth's ethics, see Robert E. Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971).

31. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932); republished in 1960. For a recent evaluation of Niebuhr, see Ronald H. Stone, *Reinhold Niebuhr: Prophet to Politicians* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972).

32. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937; republished in 1965).

33. As illustrations of this approach, see Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, and Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966).

34. *The Secular City Debate*, ed. Daniel Callahan (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966).

35. Johannes B. Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), part one, pp. 13-77. In the preface Metz indicates that the essays in this books were written between 1961 and 1967. Although Metz does not explicitly acknowledge any development in the preface, the reader can readily see the development in the book, with part one representing the incarnational stage. See Francis Fiorenza, "The Thought of J. B. Metz," *Philosophy Today* 10 (1966): 247-52.

36. Metz, "Chapter Three: An Eschatological View of the Church and the World," *Theology of the World*, pp. 81-97.

37. Johannes B. Metz, "The Future in the Memory of Suffering," *New Concilium* 76 (1972): 9-25; Metz, "The Future *Ex Memoria Passionis*," in *Hope and the Future of Man*, ed. Ewert Cousins (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 117-31.

38. Johannes B. Metz, "For a Renewed Church before a Renewed Council: A Concept in Four Theses," in *Towards Vatican III: The Work That Needs to Be Done*, ed. David Tracy with Hans Küng and Johannes B. Metz (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 137-45. The suffering and apocalyptic themes are also found in his latest book containing articles published in the 1970s — Johannes Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1980).