phrase made famous by Pope Benedict XVI on the eve of his election to the papacy. This kind of so-called “pluralism” is not protecting the rights of all impartially today, but seems to be slowly leading society towards an unmistakable new brand of what some have called “soft despotism.” Father Rhonheimer’s analysis of what religious liberty and freedom of conscience really consist of could not be more timely.

One final point of interest about this excellent and competent book by Father Rhonheimer needs to be mentioned: as most people know, one of the principal reasons for the schismatic-type separation from Church unity of the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X is the belief of SSPX adherents that Vatican II erred specifically in its teaching on the subject of religious liberty. Father Rhonheimer does not touch upon this subject as such in the book at all. Nevertheless, his arguments and citations constitute one of the more convincing treatments anywhere in print today showing that Vatican II did not err in its teaching on religious liberty, but rather, as Pope Benedict XVI himself has observed, the Council returned to more authentic foundational Christian doctrinal roots in setting forth the teaching of Dignitatis Humanae calling for freedom from coercion in religious matters, just as the first Christians justly claimed the same freedom from the Roman state. The author’s copious citations in German and Italian will be of great interest to anyone concerned with this particular subject.

Kenneth D. Whitehead
Fellowship of Catholic Scholars


The Anscombe Bioethics Centre (until 2010, the Linacre Centre for Healthcare Ethics) has just released its first book under its new name. _Fertility and Gender_ addresses issues in marital and sexual ethics, reproductive ethics, the virtue of chastity, population growth, and same-sex attraction. It is quite interdisciplinary, with essays by philosophers, theologians, economists and psychologists. Taken together, these essays map out a fairly tight-knit and coherent family of well-argued positions on a variety of extremely contested issues; as such, the book makes a significant contribution to recent debates.
The collection begins with some general philosophical and theological essays on the issues of sex and marriage. Fr. Paul Mankowski, S.J., writes that the Old Testament’s concern for sexuality is overwhelmingly for its capacity to issue in children, to the point at which marital deformities such as polygamy and concubinage are countenanced. In the New Testament, by contrast, the “nuptial embrace itself has been decisively vindicated” (14); offenses against marriage are not simply against fecundity but against the agents themselves. As Mankowski notes, at the new center is “the acting person.”

Alexander Pruss, Luke Gormally, and Anthony McCarthy continue this discussion of the nature of marriage, Pruss by showing how the mutual “reproductive striving” of the spouses’ bodies in marital intercourse is essential to the one flesh union they seek as the consummation of their romantic love. Gormally notes that modern accounts of sexual desire fail to address the connection between sex and reproductive functioning; this is at the root of the contemporary reductive form of thinking about the reality of sex. Shorn of its connection to children, sexual desire comes to be seen as mere desire for mutual pleasure; sex thereby is on its way to a radical privatization.

In a more classical understanding, with roots in Aristotle and Aquinas, sex, and hence marriage, have a natural “meaning” in, as Anthony McCarthy argues, their procreative significance, and thereby an obvious connection to the common good, the line of thought pursued by Gormally. A lack of support for chastity, or a positive support for its opposite, are thus serious failures of political authority.

_Fertility and Gender_ contains interesting and helpful essays on topics at the intersection of social science research and Catholic sexual ethics. Phillip Sutton discusses psychological, spiritual, and existential commonalities (and singularities) found among persons with same-sex attraction; his essay is a sensitive exploration of this difficult topic. David Paton addresses a number of myths regarding state-promoted educational schemes designed to reduce teen pregnancy: Those involving emphasis on contraception and “safe” sex have done little to curb Britain’s high rate of teen pregnancy; by contrast, Ireland, with no access to abortion, and little access to contraceptives for minors, is a relative, and often overlooked, success story. Similarly, Dermot Grenham urges a reconsideration of some received wisdom about the inability of the planet to sustain its current and foreseeable rates of population growth. These chapters provide a trove of interesting data for policymakers.

Other chapters deal with chastity (Kevin O’Reilly) and the relationship between contraception and a technological mentality (John C. Berry).
Four chapters late in the book address issues in sexual and reproductive ethics not yet definitively addressed by Church authorities. One is the question of whether it is permissible for an HIV-positive husband to use a condom in marital intercourse; a second is whether embryo transfer, as a part of embryo adoption, is morally acceptable; and a third is whether techniques such as Gamete Intrafallopian Transfer (GIFT) are permissible, if they do not appear to disrupt the marital act. These essays move existing discussion of these topics forward in important ways.

McCarthy and Pruss argue that although a condomistic act of intercourse between spouses need not be contraceptive, nevertheless, such acts fail to achieve a real unity between spouses, regardless of the spouses’ intentions, and thus cannot be considered compatible with Church teaching, which requires that the unitive and procreative meanings both be respected in the marriage act. Their argument here seems to me incontrovertible.

Mary Geach provides an analysis of sexual wrongdoing in terms of the concept of imitation. What does it mean to “break” or “fail to respect” the unitive and procreative meanings of the marriage act? According to Geach, such a failure occurs when an act (which need not be a sex act) “imitate[s] the marriage act in respect of unitive[ly] significant function” (171). For example, those engaged in IVF imitate the marriage act in respect of its generative nature, which contributes to the unitive significance of the marriage act. Geach’s approach attempts to provide a unified conceptual framework for all of sexual ethics.

Geach extends this line of thought to the issue of embryo adoption, focusing primarily on heterologous embryo transfer: transfer of an embryo to whom the receiving woman is not genetically related. This transfer imitates the marital act insofar as it is, on the woman’s side, an admitting of an intromission of flesh not of her flesh of a kind to impregnate her. This, in the marriage act, contributes to that act’s unitive significance; thus it is not to be imitated. Geach’s well-known argument against embryo transfer is itself controverted; however, her articulation here provides the strongest and most nuanced version of that argument yet.

Fr. Kevin Flannery, S.J., points to an interpretation of a passage in Dignitas Personae under which GIFT procedures, which use sperm collected after the conjugal act by a semen collection device, would appear to be licit, since the procedure is one which facilitates the “natural end of the conjugal act” (192). Flannery notes, however, that the requirement that reproductive assistance not replace the marital act is supplemented, in an address by Pope Pius XII, by what he calls the “no third active factor” principle. This principle rules out all forms of artificial fertilization, including GIFT.
As with Pruss and McCarthy’s argument, it seems to me that Flannery has provided decisive reasons to reject GIFT. And Watt’s concluding essay suggests that GIFT in fact violates the “no replacing the marriage act” principle, for whether there is a marriage act in respect of those sperm that are deposited in the vagina, the sperm which are intended to fertilize the oocyte are not those sperm, but sperm held back, washed, and then replaced by catheter into the fallopian tube. It is not clear that these sperm should be considered part of the marital act, or that their holding back is morally justified; if not, GIFT is doubly deficient.

A review of this brevity cannot do full justice either to these arguments, or to the merits of the essays and the collection overall. Suffice it to say that Fertility and Gender is an auspicious beginning for the Anscombe Bioethics Centre, and will serve, as will the Centre itself, as an essential reference point for further inquiry into Catholic teaching on marriage, sex, and reproduction.

Christopher Tollefsen
University of South Carolina


In this brief volume, well-known Catholic author, translator, and writer Kenneth D. Whitehead gives a remarkably concise exposition and convincing defense of the doctrinal continuity of Vatican II’s Declaration on Religious Freedom (Dignitatis Humanae, hereafter DH) with past Catholic teaching. The conciliar Declaration on Religious Freedom has remained a source of great controversy in the post-conciliar period, giving rise to the only organized major schism, that of Archbishop Lefebvre and his followers, as well as to a spate of other “traditionalist” sectarians—all of whom have accused Vatican II of a radical break with past Catholic teaching on religious liberty. Some “traditionalists” became outright schismatics in denial of the truth of DH’s teaching on religious freedom while others have candidly expressed their inability to resolve what appeared to be a contradiction of past Catholic teaching because of DH’s doctrinal formulation of religious liberty as “one based on affirming the human dignity of the religious believer.”