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**America, sexuality, and the Catholic Church in the 1960s:
the Role of the Crowleys and the Potvins within the Pontifical
Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births (1963-
1966)**

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*Ai miei genitori,
per avermi dimostrato il significato dell'amore
accogliendo il dono della mia vita,
e della responsabilità
prendendosi cura instancabilmente
della mia anima appassionata
ma sensibile*

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The abbreviation UNDA has been used in order to refer to the archival material available at the University of Notre Dame Archives. <https://archives.nd.edu/>.

The encyclicals, papal speeches, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church were consulted at the Vatican Online Archives in English, when available. Other translations – French or Italian – have been consulted when the English version was not available and it has been signalled in the notes. <https://www.vatican.va/archive/index.htm>.

Introduction

In the years between the end of World War II and the 1960s, important social, cultural, economic, and demographic changes occurred within Western societies. On the one hand, the relative political stability achieved after the global conflict and improved economic conditions favoured a period of growing prosperity, in comparison with the previous decades. Thus, in general better standards of living could be reached and sustained. Moreover, a greater number of people living in Western countries had access to material and economic resources which, in part, can account for a rise in birth rates – hence the expression ‘baby boom’ to refer to “the rise in the birth rate across a range of industrialised countries immediately following the end of the Second World War”¹. On the other hand, however, exponential population growth represented a matter of serious concern to political leaders, wealthy industrialists, experts, and philanthropists, who, in the aftermath of the global conflict, intensified their efforts to introduce fertility control². This neo-Malthusian conception of the world, which characterised in particular US and global élites, is reflected in some social and cultural movements emerged between the 1950s and the 1960s, e.g., the birth control movement, second-wave feminism, and the sexual revolution. Furthermore, state and political propaganda, performed by governmental leaders, philanthropic and academic foundations, and industrialists, against the rise of birth rates translated into a public debate about the possibilities of artificial contraception. The development and selling of the contraceptive pill in 1957 contributed to the public widespread approval of artificial birth control.

Such debate had an impact upon Catholicism, in particular upon North American Catholicism. Until the 1950s, for centuries Church doctrine regulating contraception and marital relations had rejected any means intended for the prevention of conception. But, with the secular developments regarding this sphere, the Catholic Church could not refrain from participating in the debate about artificial contraception and eventually reconsidering its traditional position. In the midst of the Second Vatican Council, in March 1963 Pope John XXIII established a designated sextet to discuss birth regulation and population growth in relation to Church doctrine. The group’s creation – the nucleus of what eventually became known as the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births – apparently was not aimed at doctrinal reform. Indeed, the original members were to

¹ Chris Phillipson, “Understanding the baby Boom Generation: Comparative Perspectives,” *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 2, no. 2 (2007): 7, DOI: 10.3384/ijal.1652-8670.07227.

² Critchlow, Donald T. “The Legacy of *Humanae Vitae*,” in *Humanae Vitae 50 Years Later: Embracing God’s Vision for Marriage, Love, and Life*, ed. Theresa Notare (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 3-29.

discuss international population policies and demographic data on birth rates in relation to traditional Church teaching, and to develop the Catholic response to demographic and social changes, in preparation for the New Delhi conference of the United Nations and the World Health Organisation scheduled for mid-1964.

However, by the middle of the 1960s, secular pressure exerted by social movements and birth control activists to support fertility control and the spreading of artificial contraception had reached its peak. Furthermore, Vatican II ended in December 1965 and its texts left many within scholarly milieu, among the clergy, and even the laity under the impression that the Church had entered a new era, marked by “the sign of the times” (or *aggiornamento*) and open to more progressive views on modern issues. Artificial contraception represented one of the most notable examples of an area in which a great number of Catholics, particularly lay Catholics, expected a revision of the doctrine. The debate became heated among scholars across Europe and the US; American priests, concerned with the amount of penitents which complained about the marital and family troubles caused by the Church’s total ban on contraception, openly protested; and even a highly-educated portion of the North American laity joined the discussion by writing in newspapers and publishing books about their practical experience and their disappointment with the rhythm method – the only morally acceptable means of birth regulation³. The heated debate among all ranks of the Church, eventually led Pope Paul VI, the head of the Church from June 21st, 1963, to progressively enlarge the papal Commission to include 74 members and experts during its fifth and final meeting in 1966. The Commission was split among those who supported a revision of the doctrine on marriage and the lift of the ban on artificial contraception – the majority – and those who opposed this view – a minority. Representatives of the two stances drafted two separate documents, known as the *Majority* and the *Minority Reports*, to be submitted to the pope, showing how divisive the issue was within the ecclesiastical world.

It is generally widely known that Paul VI put an abrupt end to the heated debate about artificial contraception when he promulgated the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on July 25th 1968, in which he endorsed the minority position by reiterating the traditional ban on artificial contraception⁴. What is less recognised, perhaps, is the role which an elite among the North American laity had in shaping the view held by the majority of the papal Commission. Indeed, between 1965 and 1966 the leaders

³ Peter Cajka, *Follow Your Conscience: The Catholic Church and the Spirit of the Sixties* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 65-85; Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 173-203.

⁴ Leslie Woodcock Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church” *American Catholic Historical Society* 118, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 13-20.

of the Christian Family Movement, Patrick and Patricia Crowley from Chicago, and the director of a rhythm clinic in Ottawa, Canada, doctor Laurent Potvin and his wife, Colette, conducted two surveys among members of the movement and other Christian organisations. The direct experiences of married couples convinced many in the Commission that the time had come for the Church to reconsider its stance on contraception.

Given the impact of social and cultural changes in Western societies between the 1940s and the 1960s, the first chapter of this dissertation presents the developments of the attitude toward sexuality and the establishment of marital doctrine within the Catholic Church in relation to the secular world. The emphasis is placed on those events and phenomena which had a role in the creation of the papal Commission, e.g. the development of the pill, the sexual revolution, the birth control movement. Moreover, as explained above, the heated debate about artificial contraception within Catholicism also contributed to the enlargement of the Commission. Insight into the scholarly, clerical, and lay discussion is provided, with emphasis on the North American context.

The second chapter will present a timeline of the history of the papal Commission, with an in-depth analysis of the reasons behind its creation, of the contribution of its most notable characters, and of its main stages. The connection with the outcomes of the Vatican II will also be briefly discussed, as well as the conclusions reached by the majority and the minority in their reports.

The major doctrinal developments promoted in the *Majority Report* will be presented and discussed in the third chapter. In order to do so, it will be carried out a comparative analysis of the four reports written by the general secretary, Father Henri de Riedmatten, at the end of the first four meetings, and the text signed by the majority.

Finally, the American and Canadian couples present at the fourth and final meeting of the papal Commission will be presented in the fourth chapter. This part will rely both on their contribution to the discussion and on secondary sources to better define their position on marital doctrine. In addition, a detailed analysis of their surveys, the result of archival research, will be provided, to highlight similarities between the position of North American couples on marriage, natural and artificial contraception, and a revision of Church doctrine, and that of the majority of the Commission on these topics. If it is possible to find any similarities between the demands advanced by North American couples between 1965 and March 1966 and those of the Commission's majority in June 1966, these common elements may be used to identify the impact of North American lay Catholicism in the conclusions reached by the majority of the Commission and, more in general, in the 1960s Catholic debate on contraception and, therefore, have a more accurate understanding of it.

Chapter One: Catholic marital doctrine and North American Catholicism in the 1950s and 1960s

The Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births, typically referred to as the Papal Birth Control Commission, was a consultative committee established unofficially by Pope John XXIII (1881-1963) in March 1963. The Commission should discuss the issue of natural and artificial contraception, family planning, and responsible parenthood in view of scientific advancements in relation to fertility and exponential population growth. Despite the fact that the Commission's original purpose was to discuss doctrinal topics from a scientific viewpoint – contraception and Catholic marriage –, a shift toward a cultural and social perspective occurred. Indeed, after the Second World War important cultural phenomena and historical events took place which had an impact on the Catholic response to modernity, and which shaped Catholicism, especially in North America. The confrontation between the long-standing Catholic Church and its traditional values on the one hand, and post-modern Western societies, which promoted an atheist vision of humanity, and which measured progress according to its technological and scientific advance and psychological wellness, on the other, sparked a heated debate within the former. The Catholic vision of marriage, sexuality, and contraception too became a matter for debate in newspapers, academic circles, parochial groups, and, eventually, at the papal Commission's meetings.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: firstly, Church doctrine on marriage and contraception is presented, together with its development and establishment in relation to the historical conditions which shaped it; secondly, 1950s and 1960s North American Catholicism is discussed to highlight progressive currents of thought within lay, clerical, and academic circles which ultimately influenced the outcomes of the papal Commission.

1.1. Catholic marital doctrine on contraception

The current Church teaching on marriage was established by pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, issued on July 25th 1968⁵. As explained by scholar and historian Leslie Tentler, the encyclical represented an abrupt end to the “messy debate of the mid-1960s” about Catholic teaching and contraception⁶. Indeed, after World War II, important social changes, like a redefinition of the role of women in Western societies, improved economic and living conditions, followed by rapid population

⁵ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*.

⁶ Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church,” 1-20.

growth, the rise of cultural tendencies and social movements, e.g. the sexual revolution movement, and scientific discoveries, such as the development of the contraceptive pill in 1957, also caused considerable political, social, and religious concern over birth control and birth control methods. Such debate aroused even within Catholic milieu and it reached its peak in the years between 1963 and 1968.

Indeed the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family, and Births was established to confront the modern world, particularly to discuss sexuality and deal with contraception from a moral perspective⁷. The growing religious agitation described in the following pages, came to an abrupt end when Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* reiterated the long-standing ban on contraception which had characterised Church teaching for centuries. Despite Tentler's appreciation of the general tone of the text – for “[I]t spoke tenderly, almost lyrically of married love” and “[I]t acknowledged the many difficulties, individual and global, attendant on excess fertility, and expressed a hope that the rhythm method [still the only morally accepted means] would soon be rendered certain as a means of family limitation” –, it still represented a reactionary document which categorically ruled out the morality of contraception for the Church and excluded even pastoral possibilities⁸. Of major importance was the fact that the encyclical did not place too great emphasis on contraception as a sinful act. Nonetheless, in contrast with widespread opinion among the Catholic community, especially among the laity, it did not overturn the ban on artificial contraception.

1.1.1. Development and establishment of marital Church doctrine

In 1965 American judge and law professor John T. Noonan published his *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, a comprehensive analysis of the development of Church teaching on marriage and contraception⁹. In the book, Noonan successfully confuted the thesis according to which Church's stance against contraception was based on scriptural and doctrinal proof. Rather, he maintained and proved that this position was a direct consequence of the Hellenisation of Catholic Church. The American professor produced considerable evidence of the

⁷ The developments and outcomes of the Commission are discussed in Chapter Two.

⁸ Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church,” 19.

⁹ John T. Noonan, JR, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists-Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986). Judge Noonan was also invited at the fourth meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births to present the content of the book in a two hour-lecture which would help its members address the topic of marital doctrine and contraception from a historical point of view. See Chapter Two, 2.8.2. It should be noted that Noonan was a member of the well-educated, progressive North American laity; thus, although theoretically well-founded, his work served the purpose of supporting the lifting of the ban on contraception, advocated for by this group, by weakening traditional teaching based off the work of prominent theologians, and by placing emphasis on the Scriptures and historical processes.

fact that the traditional rejection of contraception can be better understood taking into account the historical contexts and processes which influenced the shaping of the doctrine across the centuries. His analysis allowed him to conclude that the 1960s were but one such case of confrontation between Church and secular morality. As it had happened in the past, a re-evaluation of its position on contraception was deemed appropriate, perhaps with different conclusions than in former occasions, thus with a favourable judgment on the morality of contraception. Starting from the assumption – made by those who opposed any change – that contraception had always been condemned by the Church, he addressed the subject from a historical perspective. At the basis of his work were a few crucial questions: why was the condemnation issued in the first place? By whom? Who was being condemned? What challenge was being faced? The analysis conducted by Noonan revealed that the doctrine originated from the Stoic view of intercourse – so, a non-Christian doctrine. The Stoics maintained that sex had a purely procreative meaning and that pleasure was an unnecessary aspect. Following this reasoning, Catholic morals had established the primary end of intercourse, namely procreation¹⁰. Although the inextricable link between sexual intercourse and procreation was set in the first century C.E., it took more than a thousand years for the Church to shape its doctrine on contraception. According to Noonan, during this time span its developments should be read as the Catholic institution's reactions to the challenges posed by three heretical groups, the Gnostics in the 1st Century, the Manichees in the 4th and 5th, and the Cathars in the 12th which, for different reasons, rejected the Christian stance on intercourse¹¹.

The Church reactions to these heresies resulted in the reinforcement of the idea that marriage and intercourse had a primarily procreative purpose. According to Noonan's analysis, the first figure to establish a clear connection between conjugal union and procreation was Saint Augustine. In response to the cultural climate dominated by Manichean pessimism, the bishop of Hippo Regius elaborated a trilogy of marital goods. The *tria bona* were: permanence, fidelity, openness to offspring¹². Once the problem had been dealt with and the doctrine established by 12th-century manuals *Aliquando* by Gratian and *Sentences* by Peter Lombard, the teaching was passed on

¹⁰ Noonan, *Contraception*, 20; 76-77. See also Robert McClory, *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission, and How Humanae Vitae Changed the Life of Patty Crowley and the Future of the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 2017), 9-10.

¹¹ Noonan, *Contraception*, 56-105; 107-138; 171-199. Although Gnostic perspective on sexual intercourse was multi-faceted, with some groups supporting the idea that it was necessary for salvation, whereas others considering it evil, most Gnostic maintained that marriage was an obsolete institution and that measures must be taken to prevent procreation. The Manichees too fiercely opposed procreation, for they saw it as an act of cooperation with an evil force. Catharism or Albigensianism, a heretical movement condemned by the Fourth Lateran Ecumenical Council, promoted the idea that coitus equated to adultery even when accomplished by married people.

¹² Giampaolo Dianin, *Matrimonio, Sessualità, Fertilità* (Padova, IT: Messaggero di Sant'Antonio Editrice, 2011), 187-191; 329-330.

unaltered. Until the 12th century, the procreative purpose of marital intercourse remained uncontested. Indeed, although in the 13th century Thomas Aquinas, a theologian, introduced some progressive distinctions to the purposes of marriage, he did not significantly alter Saint Augustine's theology, except for re-arranging the *tria bona* into a hierarchy of ends, one primary – procreation – and the other secondary – love¹³.

It was only in the Renaissance period that a Flemish monk, Denis de Carthusian, posed a revolutionary question: whether spouses had a right to pursue love from carnal pleasure in marital intercourse¹⁴. As a result, theologians had to confront with this dilemma and they tried to solve it. However, no historical contingency compelled them to provide a definitive answer¹⁵. As Noonan explained, European populations in the 16th and 17th centuries were not faced with any demographic issue. But then came the Industrial Revolution which transformed many societal aspects: machines replaced manual labour and large families were no longer a priority; on the contrary, children were no longer a physical resource but rather hungry mouths¹⁶. Yet the Church was not greatly concerned with the issue of contraception¹⁷. Not until the rise of the birth control movement, which was perceived as a new challenge Church authorities had to face and a major initiative aimed at threatening life. A series of pastoral actions begun, to limit the spread of contraceptive practices among Catholics¹⁸.

1.2. The Industrial Revolution, modernity, and the regulation of births: Neo-Malthusianism, birth control movements, first-wave Feminism, and social sciences

As shown by Noonan, a variety of contraceptive methods have been a staple in the history of humanity, at least from the genesis of the Christian tradition, and the practice of contraception common among Western societies, although clear testimony of how widely it was practiced is lacking¹⁹. Nonetheless, historians have gathered evidence of its widespread use among Western civilisations in the late 19th century- early 20th century period. According to scholar and member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Theresa Notare, proof of the use of birth control methods and devices was a drop in the fertility rates in the 19th century²⁰. The considerable increase

¹³ Ibid., 330-334.

¹⁴ Noonan, *Contraception*, 304-305.

¹⁵ Ibid., 306-339; 350.

¹⁶ Ibid., 390-394.

¹⁷ Ibid., 397.

¹⁸ Ibid., 406.

¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

²⁰ Theresa Notare, "A Revolution in Christian Morals, Lambeth 1930 – Resolution #15, History & Reception." (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2008), 125.

in birth control devices and methods was not by chance, though. Indeed, a combination of circumstances can account for this social and cultural phenomenon.

To begin with, as seen above, the Industrial Revolution introduced a substantial change in the lives of Western workers. The rate of labourer decreased, as did the demand for manual work, substituted by factory employment. In general, the workplace changed for many, from the rural setting of the field to the urban setting of the factory. So did the tasks to be fulfilled and workers were progressively replaced by machines. Therefore, new additions to a family no longer stood for additional labour sources, rather they came to represent extra hungry mouths. The rapid transformations to Western lifestyle imposed by the Industrial Revolution to a certain degree caused a desire to limit the size of families. However great its impact on Western societies, though, this historical event alone cannot account for the significant drop of births.

The end of the 18th and the 19th century saw the spreading of birth control propaganda across Europe and the U.S., which presented it as “a socially desirable practice”²¹. Supporters of this vision and its promoters had developed their stance mainly from the arguments of economist, demographer, and philosopher Thomas Malthus (1766-1834). The English scholar exposed his theories on world population and poverty and he postulated a pessimistic scenario. According to him, the number of available workers exceeded that of jobs. Thus, wages decreased, causing widespread poverty of which mainly members of the working-classes suffered. Malthus went even further with his analysis. He argued that exponential population growth would not be tantamount to the growth in food supply. The disparity, he continued, would result in rising crime, epidemics, and widespread poverty. For these reasons, Malthus deemed a rethinking of a new moral economy necessary, which promoted the education of the lower classes on demographic data, on the benefits of postponing marriage, and on the practice of self-control for married people²². At the time the English demographer and economist published his theories, he was harshly criticised by a rather significant section of society, including socialists and Christians²³. However, if his contemporaries would reluctantly accept his theories, neo-Malthusian concerns over population growth and population control became rooted in the minds of American and European élites in the 19th century, and the growing preoccupation over population numbers eventually resulted in the development of special programs in the aftermath of the Second World War. History professor Donald Critchlow explained that:

[P]opulation control manifested itself in policy initiatives internationally and domestically, as well as funding efforts to develop better contraceptive methods. This belief in the necessity of population

²¹ Noonan, *Contraception*, 387.

²² Notare, *A Revolution in Christian Morals*, 170.

²³ *Ibid.*, 171.

control manifested itself in developing birth control programs and centers in Asia, Western Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, as well as supporting scientific and technological research for better artificial contraceptive, including oral contraception (“the pill”)²⁴.

The process towards the realisation of population control programs by international authorities and governments was a gradual one and in all probability it was stimulated and accelerated by two important movements – the birth control movement and first-wave feminism – as well as the rising of social sciences.

Although supporters of artificial contraception had been active since the second part of the 18th century, the birth control movement emerged only at the beginning of the 20th. The woman credited with coining the actual term “birth control” is Margaret Sanger, an American activist, writer, sex educator, and nurse²⁵. She started practicing as a nurse in 1911, when she and her husband moved to the slums of the East Side. Sanger quickly came to the realisation that poor living conditions caused by unplanned pregnancies were troubling the population. Therefore, in 1916 she opened the first birth control clinic in the U.S. Soon after she was incarcerated for the violation of the Comstock law which prohibited the possession, distribution, and promotion of any material “for the prevention of conception, or for causing unlawful abortion”²⁶. Once released, she went back to the unrelenting promotion of birth control, along with other feminists. Her advocacy of female contraceptives was based on the belief that contraception ensured women’s rights, often threatened by the task of giving life and taking care of children. Sanger is also credited with funding the research program to the creation and approval of hormonal contraceptives²⁷. However, in spite of the effort to see women’s reproductive rights recognised and granted, corporate president and administrator Williams noted how “[I]nterestingly, Sanger’s concerns for women also includes a more sinister agenda: eugenics”²⁸.

²⁴ Critchlow, “The Legacy of *Humanae Vitae*,” 5.

²⁵ Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) was born in 1879 in New York into an Irish Catholic family. At the age of 21, Sanger began her studies to become a nurse. However, in 1902 she gave up her education to marry architect William Sanger. Partly because of her own experience as a child - her mother gave birth to eleven children and conceived eighteen times - and as a mother - she suffered from consumption and was able to bring to term three pregnancies -, and partly because of her interest in politics and feminism, she became an advocate of birth control. Noonan, *Contraception*, 406-407. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 45.

²⁶ “Comstock Act,” The Library of Congress, accessed May 2023, <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=017/llsl017.db&recNum=0639>. See also Luke Vander Ploeg, and Pam Belluck, “What to Know About the Comstock Act,” *The New York Times*, accessed May 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/16/us/comstock-act-1978-abortion-pill.html>. See Noonan, *Contraception*, 412.

²⁷ William V. Williams, “Medical Consequences of Hormonal Contraception,” in *Humane Vitae 50 Years Later: Embracing God’s Vision for Marriage, Love, and Life*, 221.

²⁸ Ivi.

Eugenics has been described as “the pseudo-science of heredity”²⁹. The expression referred to the 19th-to 20th century growing interest in biology, and more specifically in human biology and genetics with the subsequent formulation of social theories. Their supporters - Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), Francis Galton (1822-1911), and Charles Darwin (1809-1882) to cite some - with their publications laid the foundations for further developments of eugenic theories. At the base was the belief that “each race, and each specific ‘class’ of people, carried desirable and undesirable characteristics, traits, talents and abilities which were inherited in each new generation”³⁰. Consequently, in order to protect and foster “good” hereditary factors the reproduction of those segments of society which carried them was to be encouraged. Conversely, a prohibition of reproduction among people with “bad” factors was key in their elimination. The strategy to the improvement of humanity was two-folded. On the one hand, positive eugenics with the propagation of desirable groups would produce a superior race and ensure a bright future. Negative eugenics, on the other, sought to diminish reproduction of groups with undesirable traits. “In this scheme for race betterment, – commented Notare – birth control methods and even sterilization were perceived as a useful means by which eugenic goals could be attained”³¹. The same moral principles promoted by eugenics served a purpose in the struggle for legal access to birth control. Indeed, the ethical facet to the promotion of contraception, namely the betterment of society, was used by its supporters³². Catholicism strongly opposed this view and a condemnation of eugenics was present even in *Casti Connubii*³³.

Another social movement which can be credited with advancing the spreading of birth control in the 19th century is the feminist movement, which flourished at the same time family planning started to be considered not only as a commonly accepted practice, but also as an ethical one³⁴. On the one hand, early feminists would often reject artificial birth control methods, favouring natural ones and, above all, abstinence. On the other hand, however, they were outspoken about sex and marriage. The control of fertility was interconnected with these topics, more than with birth control in and of itself. Indeed, the discussion of fertility control was part of a much wider discourse on the popular understanding of marriage at the beginning of the 19th century. The first concept to be harshly critiqued was the “double-standard,” the idea that men could express their sexuality to their fullest, whereas women, devoid of the same faculty and lacking sexual drive, were but instruments to male

²⁹ Notare, *A Revolution in Christian Morals*, 195.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 196.

³² Ibid., 195-196.

³³ *Casti Connubii*, paragraphs 53-56.

³⁴ Notare, *A Revolution in Christian Morals*, 209.

satisfaction. As a consequence, a woman was defined in terms of the function she could fulfil for a man, she could either marry and become a wife and a mother, or prostitute³⁵. First-wave feminists were not against marriage and motherhood; what they did reject was a view on women which presented them as defective men. Therefore, they demanded a revision of the standards of marriage to establish a more egalitarian understanding of women endowed with rationality, dignity, and sex drive³⁶.

Finally, in the late 19th century, social sciences developed. Among the vast number of topics pertaining the study of civilisations and the relationship among human beings, Western thinkers took an interest in human sexuality³⁷. The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 was a breakthrough and the book served for the development of theories on the role and meaning of sexual instinct. If, in the immediate post-Darwinian period the sexual instinct was analysed just in biological terms, later sexologists and sociologists would classify it as more than a mere impulse of evacuation or reproduction³⁸. Related to the biological of sexuality, was its evaluation from a psychological perspective. In the 19th century an interest was developed for marital intercourse and especially the pleasure which could derive from it, as a physical and emotional comfort unrelated to procreation. Sociological and psychological studies consistently shown that the link between sexuality and sexual instinct, and procreation was not inevitably close, and the importance of sexual pleasure great, thus advancing the argument in favour of birth control.

1.2.1. Ogino-Knaus discovery of the ovulation period

An important scientific discovery which eventually fuelled the debate on the morality of contraception was made in the 1920s, when Japanese gynaecologists Kyūsaku Ogino (1882-1975) and Austrian Hermann Knaus (1892-1970) published the results of their research on the female menstrual cycle. The two men of science, working independently, reached the same conclusions and gathered similar data on the sterile period, that is the time of infertility within a woman's cycle. According to these studies – summarised Noonan in his work – ovulation occurred sixteen to twelve

³⁵ Ibid., 57-60.

³⁶ A similar argument was developed by one of the three married women which became member of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births. Mrs. Colette Potvin, from Canada, addressed the Commission during the fifth meeting demanding that women could be perceived and presented not as defective men, rather as a peer, endowed with similar, yet distinctive characteristics. See Chapter Four, 4.2.

³⁷ Notare, *A Revolution in Christian Morals*, 76. The term “social sciences” was initially used to refer to Sociology. In the 21st century, its application is wider, for it includes other academic disciplines, like Psychology.

³⁸ Ibid., 76-77.

days before the anticipated first day of the next menstrual period³⁹. Furthermore, doctor Knaus was also able to demonstrate that, once it had entered the woman's reproductive tract, the sperm could live for more than three days, but the life of ova was considerably shorter, with approximately 24 hours⁴⁰. The confirmation that a woman could not become pregnant at any time, but only within a rather limited time window, had important consequences both as far as birth control methods and the doctrine on marriage are concerned⁴¹. Indeed, the practical applications of such findings in all probability became immediately evident to the scientific community and, in addition, the possibility to devise a formula to ease its spreading was recognised and explored in Europe by Dutch physician Johannes Nicholaus Josephus Smulders, also a Catholic, already in 1930 and in the United States by American physician Leo J. Latz, in 1932⁴². The two physicians published articles and books discussing the birth control implications of such discovery and presenting its practical use. The method, named "Ogino-Knaus Method", but also known as the "Calendar Rhythm Method" for it is based on the tracking of the phases of the female menstrual cycle on a calendar, spread rapidly in the 1930s. Despite the initial support this practice enjoyed within the scientific community, but also among married couples, its effectiveness and reliability were soon questioned by its users, and its consequence questioned by birth control activists, which would not promote it⁴³.

1.2.2. The Anglican doorway: the 1930 Lambeth Conference

If, on the one hand, the 19th century saw great scientific advancements and an intellectual awakening as far as sexuality was concerned, on the other it was also characterised by great disparities between the conditions of men and women, restrictions to social and political pressure towards progress, and reaffirmations of traditional standards of marriage and sexual conduct. The rapid transition from the sexually repressive 19th century to the outspoken advocacy of reproductive and sexual rights of the 20th, starting from 1920s, can be read as a direct consequence of liberal attitudes towards sexuality. Up to this time, Christian churches had more or less resisted it. At the turn of the century, though, things started to change. Secular cultural transitions breached the long-standing defence of Judeo-Christian values, at least in some denominations, as testified by the Lambeth Conference's Resolution 15, promulgated in 1930. The declaration constitutes the first exception to the ban on contraception. Indeed, the resolution reads:

³⁹ Noonan, *Contraception*, 442.

⁴⁰ Notare, *A Revolution in Christian Morals*, 138-143.

⁴¹ The impact that the discovery made by doctors Ogino and Knaus had on marital doctrine and the birth control debate within Catholicism is presented in 1.5.2.

⁴² Notare, *A Revolution in Christian Morals*, 141.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 143.

Where there is clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on Christian principles. The primary and obvious method is complete abstinence from intercourse (as far as may be necessary) in a life of discipline and self-control lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless in those cases where there is such a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the Conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the same Christian principles. The Conference records its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception control from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience⁴⁴.

Despite the absolute requirement for Anglican couples to comply with Christian principles for the selection of birth control methods, the resolution effectively left the ultimate decision to the judgment of the faithful. In other words, it sanctioned freedom of conscience and of choice in the regulation of births, by not only permitting the practice of periodic continence, but also of artificial methods, provided they were not conceived as a justification for self-indulgence, practicality, and lust. As pointed out by historian Peter Sedgwick “Lambeth did not wholeheartedly approve of contraception, but it allowed that it could be possible”⁴⁵. The 1929 resolution had a great impact on the Anglican world. Indeed, by 1958, the year in which another important document was issued by the Conference, titled *The Family in Contemporary Society*, a vast number of Anglicans used contraception⁴⁶. From Sedgwick’s analysis three major themes emerged, which are relevant to the discussion of the Catholic reaction to the liberalisation of birth control. The scholar clarified that the 1958 document dealt with three major issues. To begin with, was the metaphysical value attached to the sexual union; since, the Conference maintained, it was difficult to determine which physical characteristics rendered the act valid, the argument which supported the condemnation of contraception for it frustrated the sexual act, was not tenable. In addition, the juxtaposition between marital fertility and fecundity, that is mere procreation on the one side, and a desire to call new offspring to life but also to provide them with proper education and a loving family on the other, was discussed. In the end, the latter prevailed on the former, thus justifying the use of contraception

⁴⁴ “Resolution 15 – The Life and Witness of the Christian Community – Marriage,” The Lambeth Conference, Anglican Communion, last accessed May 20, 2023, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1930/resolution-15-the-life-and-witness-of-the-christian-community-marriage?year=1930>. The resolutions approved by Anglican bishops greatly resembled those proposed by the majority of the papal Commission in one of its final documents, issued in 1966. See Chapter Two, 2.9.2.

⁴⁵ Peter Sedgwick, “The Lambeth Conferences on Contraception, 1908-68,” *Theology* 123, no. 2 (2020): 95, DOI: 10.1177/0040571X19894842.

⁴⁶ *The Family in Contemporary Society: the report of a group convened at the behest of the Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: SPCK, 1958).

to ensure not only the generation of new offspring, but also its educational needs. Finally, responsible parenthood was covered. In this case, the decision to allow for some contraception was made on the basis of the arguments for freedom of conscience: according to the Conference, the choice on the number of children to have, was left by the Creator to the consciences of parents⁴⁷. These themes were discussed even by the papal Commission a few years later. The conclusions reached by the majority of the Commission mirrored those of their Anglican peers, for they too recommended the lifting of the ban on contraception on the basis of a new appreciation of conjugal love, sexuality, and responsible parenthood.

1.3. The encyclical *Casti Connubii* by Pope Pius XI: Catholic reaction to modernity

The Catholic Church's response to modernity and to the social recognition granted to sexuality – with the subsequent break of the intimate link between sexual intercourse and procreation – radically differed from that of its Anglican counterpart. The official document promulgated by pope Pius XI on December 31st, 1930 was the encyclical *Casti Connubii*, regarded as the Church's infallible teaching on marriage, which restated the long-standing ban on contraception⁴⁸. It is not a fortuitous case that the encyclical was promulgated at the beginning of the 1930s, with birth control movement activists being active for more than a decade in the United States and Europe, the spreading of the Ogino-Knaus method among large section of society, although not as largely among Catholics, who still endorsed the heroicness of abstinence, and in the same year in which the Anglican Congregation lifted the ban on contraception⁴⁹. Professor Noonan cited Resolution 15 as one of the three main causes for the pontiff's action – or perhaps reaction⁵⁰. Although the text could be interpreted as the Church's effort to contain liberal views on marriage, procreation, and sexuality, all aspects which pertained to the specific time period in which it was promulgated, Noonan underlined how “its composers were indifferent to the historical contexts from which their citations came, and uninterested in the environmental changes which differentiated the present context”⁵¹. Indeed, according to him, this encyclical did nothing more than summarising Church doctrinal developments

⁴⁷ Ibid., 99. The duality of marital acts, which, according to Church teaching should maintain both their unitive and procreative characters, is better discussed in Chapter Three, 3.4.2. The juxtaposition between mere fertility and marital fecundity is discussed in Chapter Three, 3.2.1. Freedom of conscience in matters of birth control is covered in Chapter One, 1.6.2.; in Chapter Three, and in Chapter Four, 4.5.

⁴⁸ Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*.

⁴⁹ Tentler, *Catholics in America*, 49.

⁵⁰ Noonan, *Contraception*, 424. The other two causes highlighted by the American scholar were the call for revision of Church teaching on contraception by the German Catholic periodical *Hochland* in June of the same year and a belief shared by Roman theologians that priests were not enforcing such teaching. See also Tentler, *Catholics in America*, 57-58; 73.

⁵¹ Noonan, *Contraception*, 427.

along its history, but it was not history in itself, for it did not take into consideration the dilemmas of early-19th century Catholics over contraception and marriage, living in a historical period marked by considerable changes in these spheres. “Yet – he continued – if not history, it had immense doctrinal authority as a solemn declaration by the Pope”⁵². Indeed, the encyclical was promulgated as infallible and so it was received and accepted by the Catholic community⁵³.

1.3.1. *Casti Connubii*: content

It has been argued that Pius XI’s 1930 encyclical merely summarised former Church teaching on marriage and it reaffirmed the ban on contraception for Catholics, so, for this reason, it cannot be considered as history itself. However, if its composers did not explicitly refer to the historical background for which the text was developed, the influence history had on it can be inferred from the main topics covered: marital goods, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, and contraception.

To begin with, soon after the introductory part to the encyclical, Pius XI recalled Saint Augustine’s teaching on the goods of marriage, the *tria bona* already mentioned above, namely permanence, fidelity, and openness to offspring⁵⁴. In an age marked by propaganda campaigns about the positive outcomes of birth control and birth regulation, and the subsequent devaluation of the procreative meaning of a sexual act, in marked contrast, the pontiff reaffirmed that openness to offspring was at the core of any marital relation, both on a physical level and on an emotional one. This choice clearly reflected the fear experienced by members of the higher ranks of the Catholic institution that the birth control mentality could spread among Catholics as well. Indeed, in the text it is further insisted that the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation and the education of the offspring, which must be well received and religiously educated⁵⁵. The contrast with the ideas of supporters of eugenic theories, birth control methods, and some exponents of social sciences who maintained the two-fold purpose of sexual intercourse – procreation and pleasure, with emphasis often placed on the latter – is clear.

If, on the one hand, the procreation and education of the offspring is presented as the main purpose of marriage, on the other hand it is acknowledged that the primary reason behind the spouses’ decision to marry is love. In this sense, it is affirmed that:

⁵² Ivi.

⁵³ Tentler, *Catholics in America*, 73. On *Casti Connubii* and its theoretical foundation based on arguments of natural law see Lucia Pozzi, “La «Casti connubii», il magistero e la legge naturale: note sulla storia della genesi del documento pontificio,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 3 (2013): 799-822, accessed June 2023, https://www.academia.edu/3092039/La_Casti_connubii_il_magistero_e_la_legge_naturale_note_sulla_storia_della_genesi_del_documento_pontificio_Cristianesimo_nella_storia_3_2013_pp_799_822.

⁵⁴ Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, par. 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 17, especially notes 19-20.

This mutual molding of husband and wife, this determined effort to perfect each other, can in a very real sense, as the Roman Catechism teaches, be said to be the chief reason and purpose of matrimony, provided matrimony be looked at not in the restricted sense as instituted for the proper conception and education of the child, but more widely as the blending of life as a whole and the mutual interchange and sharing thereof⁵⁶.

Despite recognising conjugal love some importance, the encyclical still maintained the primacy of the procreative purpose of an act over sexual pleasure. Indeed, any reference to the intimate union of the spouses is dealt with in general terms, referring to the “mutual familiar intercourse between the spouses themselves”, which “must be distinguished by chastity”⁵⁷. The marital stability which derived from the permanence of the sacrament ultimately should benefit the familial atmosphere, the offspring, and the neighbour. No reference was made to the physical pleasure the spouses might seek through the marital act; on the contrary, an objection to “the passing lust of the moment” was raised⁵⁸. Furthermore, once the direct link between marital relations and intercourse was reaffirmed, the necessity in certain cases to regulate the number of births was evaluated. The vocabulary used to describe supporters of birth control methods expressed disapproval:

Some justify this criminal abuse on the ground that they are weary of children and wish to gratify their desires without their consequent burden. Others say that they cannot on the one hand remain continent nor on the other can they have children because of the difficulties whether on the part of the mother or on the part of family circumstances⁵⁹.

In this case, a strong condemnation of any type of birth control practice, with the sole exception of abstinence and only by mutual agreement of the spouses, is expressed. Therefore, according to the pontiff, no reason, however grave, could justify the frustration of a sexual act. The desire to limit or space children – defined eventually as responsible parenthood in the 1950s and 1960s – could not be argued for in the most important document on marriage infallibly promulgated by the Church two decades previously.

Finally, because the encyclical referred to the sinning of both husbands and wives whenever the frustration of an act occurred, it is clear that the condemnation of contraception was not limited to *coitus interruptus*, whose practice was mainly ascribed to husbands. On the other hand, however,

⁵⁶ Ibid., par. 24.

⁵⁷ Ibid., par. 22.

⁵⁸ Ibid., par. 23.

⁵⁹ Ibid., par. 53.

professor Noonan clarified that “the condemnation of *Casti connubii* did not, in its terms, reach contraception achieved by sterilizing surgery or drug”, since neither complex surgical procedures nor the pill had already been perfected⁶⁰. Thus, their condemnation is the result of further doctrinal developments.

1.4. The combined oral contraceptive pill

Hormonal contraception made its appearance in the market at the end of the 1950s⁶¹. In the United States, the first contraceptive pill, Enovid, became available in 1957 for treatment of menstrual disorders and it started to spread for its contraceptive purposes in 1960⁶². The pressure exercised by Margaret Sanger and other supporters of population control is considerable, as well as the role of the eugenic movement, which exercised great influence over the birth control movement founder⁶³. The men credited with the development of the contraceptive pill are American biologist Gregory Goodwin Pincus and Catholic physician John Rock⁶⁴. At the base of its development were the beliefs that family planning and the regulation of fertility could improve the condition and the lives of women by granting them reproductive rights. Although side effects were observed during the testing of Enovid on a group of Puerto Rican women, and despite the ethical questions about this pivotal study, the substance was nonetheless marketed, at first only to married women, and later even to unmarried ones⁶⁵. Even Catholic women started to be prescribed contraceptive pill, officially to regulate their menstrual cycles, but in reality, often to limit the size of their family, as observed by scholar Leslie Tentler in an article⁶⁶. Furthermore, continued Tentler, although some Catholic women resorted to hormonal contraception to regulate births, they probably felt guilty for disobeying Church teaching. The data on mass attendance among Catholics in their thirties and forties during the 1950s in the U.S. – which is considerably lower in comparison to older believers –, suggests that the major reason

⁶⁰ Noonan, *Contraception*, 429.

⁶¹ Williams, *Medical Consequences of Hormonal Contraception*, 221. Williams clarified that the term hormonal contraception is used to refer to different types of birth control methods which impacted the female hormonal balance. The term, therefore, referred to the combined oral contraceptive pill (also known as the contraceptive pill), injection, patches on a woman’s skin, or cervical rings.

⁶² Aliya Buttar, and Sheraden Seward, “Enovid: The First Hormonal Birth Control Pill,” *Embryo Project Encyclopedia* (January 20, 2009), <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/enovid-first-hormonal-birth-control-pill>.

⁶³ Ivi.

⁶⁴ The discovery of how progestogen could prove an effective contraceptive and of the subsequent development of the pill is briefly provided in this article by American journalist and biographer Jonathan Eig: *The Team That Invented the Birth-Control Pill*. J. Eig, “The Team That Invented the Birth-Control Pill,” *The Atlantic* (October 2014) <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/10/the-team-that-invented-the-birth-control-pill/380684/>.

⁶⁵ Williams, *Medical Consequences of Hormonal Contraception*, 221-222. Buttar and Sheraden, “Enovid: The First Hormonal Birth Control Pill,” par. 5.

⁶⁶ Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church,” 3-4.

behind their abstention from the sacraments was a feeling that they were disloyal to the Church for using contraception. “This behaviour – maintained Tentler – suggests that even disobedient Catholics, or at least a great many of them, thought that the church had the right to brand their behaviour as seriously sinful”⁶⁷.

1.5. Further Catholic teachings: Pius XII’s speeches

The sense of guilt suffered by many Catholics who had accessed to contraceptive pills was not unmotivated, though. Indeed, after the 1940s, when rhythm became commonly spread among the faithful, and in the late 1950s, with the development of the contraceptive pill, the Church had to question once again its arguments against contraception. At the time, Pope Pius XII was in charge and, acknowledging the problems and dilemmas over birth control that were troubling the faithful, he responded with a series of speeches focused on marital doctrine and its relation to scientific and social developments of the last two decades⁶⁸. Despite demonstrating greater openness towards birth control practices than his predecessor, Pius XII yet confirmed that official former teaching was still in force.

In particular, during his 1951 speech delivered to the Italian Catholic Union of Obstetrical Nurses the pope discussed the purpose of marital acts in view of the most recent scientific discoveries – e.g. the infertile period and the duration of the life of sperm and ova – and of liberal social movements, like the birth control and the eugenic movements, which promoted artificial contraception. Remaining in continuity with the Church’s tradition on this topic, he cited a passage from *Casti Connubii*, in which his predecessor had affirmed that “any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁸ Of particular relevance were six of the pope’s speeches, which were later took into consideration by the papal Commission. The speeches are available in Italian. Pius XII, “Discorso di Sua Santità Pio PP. XII alle Partecipanti al Congresso della Unione Cattolica Italiana Ostetriche,” accessed May 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19511029_ostetriche.html; Id. “Discorso di Sua Santità Pio PP. XII ai Partecipanti al Convegno del ‘Fronte della Famiglia’ e della Federazione delle Associazioni delle Famiglie,” accessed May 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19511127_associazioni-famiglie.html; Id. “Discours du Pape Pie XII aus Partecipants au XXVI^e Congrès organisé par la Société Italienne d’Urologie,” accessed May 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/fr/speeches/1953/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19531008_congresso-urologia.html; Id. “Discorso di Sua Santità Pio XII ai Partecipanti al Secondo Congresso Mondiale della Fertilità e della Sterilità svoltosi a Napoli,” accessed May 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1956/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19560519_fertilita.html; Id. “Discorso di Sua Santità Pio XII ai Dirigenti e Rappresentanti delle Associazioni tra le Famiglie Numerose,” accessed May 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1958/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19580120_famiglie-numerose.html; Id. “Discours du Pape Pie XII aux Partecipants au VII Congrès de la Société Internationale d’Hématologie,” accessed May 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/fr/speeches/1958/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19580912_ematologia.html.

offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin”⁶⁹. Pius XII proceeded by clarifying that the teaching promulgated in the 1930 encyclical was and would always remain in force, for it was the manifestation of natural and divine law⁷⁰.

However, at the same time during his speech, Pius XII also took into consideration the impact of history on marital doctrine. In particular, he referred to recent scientific discoveries and the formulation of the Rhythm method. This practice had caused considerable disagreement among the clergy, with many priests recognising it the merit of being a viable answer to the pastoral issue of births regulation, while among theological writers it had already received mostly critical reviews for its unreliability⁷¹. Even among the laity the initial enthusiastic reception of this method had dissipated into lukewarm support for similar reasons⁷². But, as scholar Tentler affirmed, “[T]he debate over rhythm was changed abruptly in 1951, when Pope Pius XII addressed the subject” during his speech. “The pope spoke of rhythm with surprising warmth, implying that the method was permissible in a potentially very large number of cases”⁷³. Professor Noonan’s analysis of the same speech confirmed that Pius XII’s statement fully endorsed rhythm “as a method open to all Christian couples”⁷⁴. Certainly, though, the pope spoke of “grave motives” for its employment; however, these included medical, economic, and eugenic reasons, as well as concerns over population growth, therefore the range of motives for its use was wide⁷⁵.

⁶⁹ Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, par. 56.

⁷⁰ Pius XII, “Discorso alle Partecipanti al Congresso della Unione Cattolica Italiana Ostetriche,” section III, par. 6. The pope did not question the arguments against contraception based on natural law. Noonan, *Contraception*, 467. However, some members of the Commission would later express their doubts on the possibility that natural law alone could explain the evilness or immorality of contraception. See Chapter Two, 2.4.2. On the meaning of natural law see Dianin, *Matrimonio, Sessualità, Fertilità*, 331-334. The objections to moral theologians traditional understanding of natural law is discussed in section 1.6.3. See Mark S. Massa SJ, *The Structure of Theological Revolutions: How the Fight over Birth Control Transformed American Catholicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 88-96. Following the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, some theologians and philosophers have tried to explain the natural law argument for the immorality of contraception. The approach of such scholars is often referred to as the “New Natural Law Theory”. See Patrick Lee, “The New Natural Law Theory, Basic Goods, and Contraception,” in *Humane Vitae 50 Years Later*, ed. Notare, 106-118.

⁷¹ Noonan, *Contraception*, 443-445.

⁷² Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 176-181.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁷⁴ Noonan, *Contraception*, 445.

⁷⁵ Pius XII, “Discorso alle Partecipanti al Congresso della Unione Cattolica Italiana Ostetriche,” section III, paragraph 17. For a further discussion of the theological debate over the morality of rhythm, the ends of marriage in relation to its employment, and the theoretical distinction between the practice of the natural method of rhythm on the one hand, and of the artificial contraceptive pill see Dianin, *Matrimonio, Sessualità, Fertilità*, 342-346; Noonan, *Contraception*, 463-473; McClory, *Turning Point*, 26-27, 43-44; Robert Blair Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was: the Story of the Commission on Population, Family and Birth, 1964-1966* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1987), 41, 48-50, 53-70.

Once the dilemma around rhythm was resolved in 1951, another turning point for the history of Church teaching on contraception was the development and marketing of the contraceptive pill. This substance was deemed a viable and acceptable option by some moralists when used for therapeutic uses, e.g. regulation of the menstrual cycle, on the basis of the principle of double effect⁷⁶. Indeed, it respected the theoretical principle explained by Pius XI in *Casti Connubii*, and later reaffirmed by his successor, that the conjugal act should not be frustrated, that is that both its unitive and procreative character must be preserved through the union of the bodies and that of sperm with an ovum. However, its birth control effects were under attack for the contraceptive pill, by putting the ovaries at rest, inhibited ovulation, and therefore impeded procreation. Wrote Noonan: “When the anovulants first became the object of theological analysis in 1957, the early reaction, in the very articles which accepted their therapeutic uses, had been to class their direct use to suppress ovulation as ‘contraceptive’ and ‘sterilizing’”⁷⁷. With the expression “direct sterilisation” theologians usually referred to the deliberate choice of the spouses to put an obstacle between sperm and ova, thus interfering with and frustrating both the unitive and procreative purposes of the act⁷⁸.

It becomes clear that, with the exception of couples practicing rhythm and women who took the contraceptive pill to regulate their menstrual cycle or for serious medical reasons, Catholics who relied on artificial contraception to limit or space births at the end of the 1950s were still considered to be committing a mortal sin, according to Church teaching. Nonetheless, the clarifications advanced by Pius XII to the use of rhythm and of the contraceptive pill were not delivered as an infallible teaching. As clarified by Noonan, the pope’s speeches represented “the only papal statement on the subject. As such, it commanded respect”⁷⁹. But the informal character of his addresses and the speeches – not a teaching *ex cathedra* – certainly reinforced the conviction that the matter of contraception was still a subject of debate.

⁷⁶ According to the doctrine of the double effect, there is substantial difference between harm that is foreseen and harm that is intended. The morality of an act, therefore, resides in the intention at its basis. Applied to the contraceptive pill casuistry, its use for medical purposes was considered as ethical for the temporary sterility caused by the substance – foreseen harm – was aimed at a greater positive outcome, possibly the resolution of menstrual or physical issues. On the other hand, its use for birth control purposes could not be justified for the obstacle put on procreation would be deliberate and intended. See Susanne Uniacke, “The Doctrine of Double Effect and the Ethics of Dual Use,” in *On the Dual Use of Science and Ethics: Principal Practices and Purposes*, ed. Brian Rappert and Michael J. Selgelid (Canberra: ANU Press, 2013): 153-163.

⁷⁷ Noonan, *Contraception*, 465.

⁷⁸ The expression would generate a lively and heated debate between theologians and medical practitioners, for, according to the latter, one can speak of direct sterilisation when there is a mutilation of one part of the body. Thus, the contraceptive pill, by simply putting the ovaries at rest, did not represent an instance of direct sterilisation in the medical sense. This crucial difference was discussed by members of the papal Commission and a brief summary and commentary is provided in Chapter Two, 2.3.1.

⁷⁹ Noonan, *Contraception*, 467.

1.6. American Catholicism and the birth control debate

The debate about the morality of contraception, and especially of artificial birth control, within North American Catholicism became particularly heated in the early 1960s⁸⁰. However, its origins can be traced to the Depression era of the 1930s. The negative economic consequences of recession brought a great number of Catholic couples to considering and practicing some limitation to the size of their families. “Catholic birth rates, like American birth rates generally – explained scholar Tentler – reached historic lows in the decade’s early years”⁸¹. As a consequence, usually priestly reaction was one of rigorous enforcement of the doctrine against contraception. Despite economic and social issues caused by historical events, such as the Great Depression, which might have been considered as a moral justification for population and fertility control, the teaching put forward by *Casti Connubii*, which rejected and condemned birth control, was actually welcomed not only among Catholic priests but also by “[M]any secular publications [which] also greeted the encyclical warmly”⁸². The instruction of Catholic couples by their parochial priests mainly occurred during confession. There, believers would be discreetly questioned on their marital conduct, following the guidelines set by Pius XI for confessors. In theory they were also to correct the faithful in the case any suspect or proof that contraceptive acts were being committed in good faith, that is on the basis of a lack of knowledge of official teaching and its content.

Some American priests certainly acted accordingly, however, many did not⁸³. In fact, regardless of their full support to the encyclical and the principles of conduct set by the pope regarding contraception, many confessors chose not to interrogate or educate their penitents on the doctrine. The great number of Catholics which regularly went to confession, kept brief and formal by the priest, was probably a contributing factor to priestly discretion⁸⁴.

Despite their reticence to discuss the practical outcomes of Church doctrine on contraception with penitents, in the 1930s priests were apt to read and comment on *Casti Connubii* in their Sunday sermons to a greater degree than in the past, yet the practice was not widespread. Their support was generally unwavering and voices of dissent were not common⁸⁵. As a result, a growing number of American Catholics was becoming familiar with the teaching, even if only partially; however, by reasons to be imputed to ignorance of its practical applications or to a deliberate choice, many decided to transgress it. Yet, “such disobedience was increasingly accompanied by guilt and even anguish,”

⁸⁰ Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church,” 10.

⁸¹ Ibid., 7. See also Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 75-79.

⁸² Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 73.

⁸³ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 79-80.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 86-90.

which supports the idea that the vast majority of Catholics, although contravening to Church teaching on contraception, did not feel a right to debate or question it.

If internal dissent in the 1930s was not a common characteristic of the laity and the clergy, it was certainly a feature among a reforming élite⁸⁶. Already in this decade a small group of progressive priests started to move towards “a more positive theology of marital sex – according to which an acceptable means of fertility control was obviously requisite, at least in twentieth-century circumstances”⁸⁷. Among this élite, certain ideas started to develop and circulate. Firstly, thanks to Ogino-Knaus discovery of the fertile period and of the limited timeframe available for procreation, some questioned the exclusivity granted to it – the primary end of intercourse, according to official teaching. The fact that scientists had determined that a new pregnancy was ruled out by nature for the majority of the female menstrual cycle gave rise to uncertainty over the purpose of marital sex performed in the infertile periods. In addition, the contribution of social sciences in the Catholic evaluation of the role of sexuality is considerable. Especially physicians and psychologists began to underline the benefits deriving from the conjugal relationship, e.g. emotional serenity, enthusiasm, and satisfaction⁸⁸. Following the new development in secular fields, like modern medicine and psychology, the reforming élite developed a vision of marriage which did not completely rejected the primacy of procreation, but it certainly upheld the importance of sexual pleasure.

It is important to notice that in the 1930s the debate within North American Catholicism about contraception was characterised by two currents. On the one side, there was the religious mainstream, made of the vast majority of the clergy and bishops, and the laity, which supported and generally agreed with the teaching put forward in *Casti Connubii*, even if it did not necessarily adhere to it. On the other hand, there was the reforming élite, whose ideas on a more positive theology of marriage, which placed less emphasis on procreation and maintained the importance of sexuality, acquired significance in the following decade and, by the 1950s, were widespread among the laity. For this reason, Tentler maintained that “[I]n the late 1940s and the 1950s, a positive theology of marital sex moved into the Catholic mainstream”⁸⁹.

If at the end of the 1930s, the common belief on marital sex was that it “was redeemed only by its connection to procreation”, by the end of the 40s “marital sex was presented as a route to sanctity”⁹⁰. Nonetheless, despite the new emphasis placed on sexuality, the North American debate on contraception still revolved around the belief that it was an immoral practice. Theology professor

⁸⁶ Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church,” 7.

⁸⁷ Ivi.

⁸⁸ Ivi.

⁸⁹ Ivi.

⁹⁰ Ivi.

Patrick Carey explained that American Catholics were becoming more sceptical about secularism which, according to them, would result in the increase of the rates of “divorce, birth control, and economic injustices”, and thus it represented a threat to the family unit⁹¹. Artificial contraception, therefore, was seen by the majority of the faithful as an immoral practice with the potential to destroy family values and unity.

The 1960s marked a decade of profound change in the Catholic debate about contraception. Some factors which contributed to this phenomenon were social and cultural developments – e.g. the sexual revolution –, others the results of further scientific breakthrough – the pill first appeared in 1957 –, and finally the outcomes of theological and pastoral discussion.

1.6.1. The sexual revolution and the Sixties

The social movement behind the sexual revolution or sexual liberation, was active in the years between the 1960s and the following decade in the Western world⁹². It promoted progressive views on sexuality and interpersonal relationships, to the detriment of the more traditional vision, which upheld heterosexual, monogamous relationships sanctioned by marriage – in unbroken continuity with Christian values. Top of the movement’s agenda were the liberalisation of premarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, pornography, the legalisation of abortion, and free access to artificial birth control.

As far as the topic of this dissertation is concerned, the latter represents the most important issue raised by sexual activists, whose advocacy had an impact on North American Catholicism. It should be noted that the advocacy of sexual activists, like Margaret Sanger, did not begin during the 1960s, rather, it had started at least three decades before. However, the development and selling of the pill in 1957, the rapid acceleration in population growth due to a great number of births in the post-War period, between the 1940s and 1950s – hence the definition of “Baby Boom Generation” for those born in this period –, the increase in the average family size, partly attributed to better life expectancy, and the rise of a well-educated middle-class – and this is particularly important for US Catholics –, represented contributing factors for the promotion of birth control. Indeed, better life expectancy translated into a greater number of children which reached adult life; however, living standards were increasing too, together with widespread higher standards of education, especially

⁹¹ Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC, 2004), 94.

⁹² Historians generally refer to the sexual revolution which started in the 1960s as the second sexual revolution, the first one happening at the turn of the 20th century, when a relaxation of morals took place in the Victoria society. However, despite the development towards less rigid moral standards of conduct, by the beginning of the 20th century the traditional ones were not completely rejected and no widespread acceptance of freedom of expression of one’s sexuality was achieved. In the 1960s, on the contrary, these two phenomena occurred.

among the middle-class. Thus, some segments of Western societies felt the need to curb or limit the number of births in order to meet those standards. To a considerable number of people, the contraceptive pill probably appeared as the most viable and practicable solution. But access to this contraceptive method was initially denied to unmarried people, and sometimes even married women had to struggle too. Hence, the advocacy of birth control activists which culminated in Court decision *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965, a landmark law which sanctioned the lawfulness of free access to contraception for married couples, followed by *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, in 1972, which recognised as unconstitutional the ban on the possession of contraception for unmarried people⁹³.

The debate about the lifting of the ban on contraception for married couples, albeit in continuity with traditional moral principles, occurred even within American Catholic groups. It might not appear as a coincidence that the ongoing discussion on the meaning of sexuality and the possibility of some birth control for married Catholics became more heated as the struggle over free access to contraception intensified within secular society. Furthermore, as it will be argued below, the vast majority of American Catholics who wished for a revision of Church doctrine on the meaning of marital sex and the ends of marriage, came from the middle-class. Therefore, as they found themselves facing similar issues as their secular peers, e.g., the need to limit family size due to improved standards of living and education, in addition, middle-class Catholics were also engaged in an internal fight with Church authorities for the right to contraception.

1.6.2. The culture of conscientious objection

Conscience and its formation is of paramount importance in the debate around birth control and Christian marriage. It was one of the top three moral, theological, and doctrinal themes discussed by the papal Commission, together with the meaning of natural law and its role in the Church's position against contraception, and the contrast between traditional teaching on the one side and historical contingencies on the other. That of conscience and its formation in relation to secular and religious norms was not a concept newly discussed or internalised by the laity in the 1960s, following the faithful's dilemmas over contraception. Indeed, as clarified by scholar Peter Cajka:

a small, yet dedicated cross section of Catholic priests began to apply the rights of conscience to civil law in a series of new arenas where modern warfare raised fresh moral problems: totalitarianism, mass

⁹³ Helen M. Alvaré, "Contraception: US Law and Messaging," in *Humane Vitae 50 Years Later*, ed. Notare, 276-291.

conscription, obliteration bombing runs, state contraceptive programs, and the rise of the Cold War garrison state⁹⁴.

In the middle of the 20th century many Catholic theologians and priests saw in a person's subjectivity – or better said, conscience – the place in which a synthesis of the objective moral laws occurred within the believer⁹⁵. Conscience is defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church as “man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths”⁹⁶. God's norms, interpreted and taught by the Church, could be properly internalised only if they found a place in which to repose and later develop. Scholar Cajka formulated this concept by saying that “[L]aws without conscience were like radio signals that never found a receiver to relay their message”⁹⁷. The merging of objective laws and subjectivity, according to Church teaching, should lead to the formation of a true conscience, one that can judge correctly whether an act is right or wrong by applying the law. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is more specific for it clarifies that an upright conscience “includes the perception of the principles of morality (synderesis); their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods; and finally judgment about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed”⁹⁸.

According to such teaching, during a lifetime, one has to continually make judgements; therefore, the formation of conscience is not achieved once and for all. In the accomplishment of such endless task, one is “assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church”⁹⁹. This last sentence clarifies that believers are not left alone in the process of discernment. Several tools are available to help and guide them. God in the person of the Holy Spirit, the Church through its authoritative teaching, and other believers. The authority of the Church is thus unquestioned. However, in the following paragraph, it is said that “man strives to interpret the data of experience and the signs of the times assisted by the virtue of prudence, by the advice of competent people, and by the help of the Holy Spirit and his gifts”¹⁰⁰.

Therefore, in the decision-making process one could ask “competent people” for advice. This statement is open to interpretation at least for two reasons: the adviser's credentials as a competent

⁹⁴ Peter Cajka, *Follow Your Conscience: The Catholic Church and the Spirit of the Sixties* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 46-47. See also *ibid.*, 45-63.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-43.

⁹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part III, article 6.

⁹⁷ Cajka, *Follow Your Conscience*, 21.

⁹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part III, article 6, I.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, II.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, III.

person and its stance and faith in the doctrine. As far as the first aspect is concerned, the identification of a person which could be considered as competent on a certain matter was of crucial importance. Could it be a confessor, a parish acquaintance, or one's husband or wife? Catholics in the Sixties increasingly believed so. For example, Bernard Häring, a theologian and eventually a member of the papal Commission, speaking at a meeting of the Christian Family Movement (CFM), argued in 1965 that "couples may make a 'decision of conscience' to use birth control after serious prayer and dialogue" and a year later he warned "that one spouse should never coerce the other's conscience into banning birth control just to uphold a church law"¹⁰¹.

Especially on matter of birth control, Catholic couples seemed to rely on their confessors, spouses, and peers to form their consciences. A couple could ask physicians too to help them make a decision on the basis of their knowledge and competency. Thus, moving out the sphere of influence of the Church. But could married people accept the advice of competent people even if it was in contrast with the teaching of the Church? Some, like reverend Häring and lay Patty Crowley answered in the affirmative¹⁰². Others, like Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle, at the time archbishop of Washington, strongly disagreed. In a letter promulgated after the publication of *Humanae Vitae* he maintained that a person's conscience must be properly formed in light of Church teaching on the matter under scrutiny¹⁰³. According to O'Boyle and other contemporaries who did not support the supremacy of the right of conscience to justify the use of contraception, Catholics could not seek refuge in an erroneous conscience, that is one which "sincerely believed [it] knew the objective truth but in fact did not"¹⁰⁴.

What is certain is that the concept of conscience was key to understand the debate on birth control within Catholicism in the 1960s and eventually on other more recent biopolitical issues.

1.6.3. Intellectual and theoretical foundation for dissent

As argued above, the debate about artificial contraception in relation to Church teaching did not start in the 1960s. Furthermore, it was not originally sparked by the laity and the clergy alone. On the contrary, the intellectual and theoretical foundation for widespread dissent during the 1960s was actually laid by both lay and clerical scholar and theology professors in the two previous decades. Disagreements about the morality of contraception, especially of the pill's, existed both among European and North American academics, with examples of nonconformism to traditional doctrine for both continents.

¹⁰¹ Cajka, *Follow your Conscience*, 95.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 94-96

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

In Europe, examples of unorthodox scholarly views on contraception are numerous. To begin with, in March 1963, at the Catholic broadcasting station in Holland, Willem Bekkers, Bishop of s-Hertogenbosch, contested that to limit the number of children should be considered as the spouses, and the spouses' only decision. He also rejected the idea that certain birth control techniques were preferable or licit, whereas others could not be taken into consideration. According to him, at the core of the issue was not the lawfulness or unlawfulness of methods; rather how much of a threat they represented to "mutual love and faithfulness"¹⁰⁵. With his statement, the bishop was effectively affirming that the most important aspect to safeguard in one's marriage was mutual love. Not even the generation of children could justify an attack to it. Therefore, he was placing spousal love above the creation and procreation of the prole within the hierarchy of the ends of marriage set forth by *Casti Connubii* in 1930.

In addition, Edward Schillebeeckx, a renowned Roman Catholic theologian too had expressed his views on birth control methods. In a 1960 pastoral letter to Dutch bishops, he spoke extensively about practices to curb the number of births. In particular, he focused on the rhythm method and the combined oral contraceptive pill. According to the Belgian theologian, the official approval of the rhythm method, in 1958 with Pius XII's speech at the VII congress of the international society of Haematology, could be ascribed to the fact that it did not interfere with the marital act. Couples could exclude a new pregnancy by taking advantage of a woman's infertile period, and not by interposing mechanical barriers, e.g. male and female condoms or diaphragms. By doing so, the nature of the act would not be frustrated for its unitive character would be preserved. As far as progestogens pills were concerned, the same theological explanation could justify their use for they did not interfere with the union of the sperm and the egg. A point of similarity between the Dutch bishop and the Belgian theologian is the questioning of the teaching put forward by *Casti Connubii*. If Bishop Bekkers maintained that the hierarchy of ends should be modified, to place marital love at the top, and generation of offspring at the bottom, Schillebeeckx was sceptical about the hierarchy of values. In *Casti Connubii*, based on the theology of Saint Augustine, three values summarised the doctrine of Catholic matrimony: "offspring, conjugal faith, and the sacrament" but "amongst the blessings of marriage, the child holds the first place"¹⁰⁶. On the contrary, not only did Schillebeeckx maintain that biology held the lowest place within the hierarchy, but he also added that, being biology less important than conjugal love, "its exclusion can be justified by reason of the highest value"¹⁰⁷. Reflecting on the lawfulness of contraception, the theologian had adopted a personalist view on the doctrine to

¹⁰⁵ Robert Blair Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was: The Story of the Commission on Population, Family and Birth, 1964-1966* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1987), 41.

¹⁰⁶ Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, par. 10.

¹⁰⁷ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 54.

answer all questions. A personalist view – as opposed to a naturalist view – was dynamic and evolving according to man’s nature and its meaning throughout history¹⁰⁸.

Furthermore, yet again in 1963, Louis Janssens, a Canon and a member of the Catholic University of Louvain, had published a 30-page essay in the Louvain theological periodical *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*. The moral theologian unequivocally supported the pill. He too, like Schillebeeckx, could not see any difference between the use of rhythm and of progestogen pills. According to him, Pius XII’s condemnation of this birth control method was not justified. At least not on the basis of the explanation provided by the Vatican. Mechanical methods, like condoms, sponges, and diaphragms, had been forbidden for they put a barrier between male sperm and female egg, thus “destroy[ing] the meaning of conjugal love”¹⁰⁹. The moralists agreed with this analysis. However, progestogen pills did not interfere with the act. Thus, they could be considered similar to rhythm. Janssens altogether rejected the idea that, with this method, one could talk of temporary sterilisation. His opinion was based on the testimony of two physicians, Jacques Férin and John Rock.

The latter, the Boston physician, a professor at Harvard, and one of the researchers who developed the combined oral contraceptive pill was a Catholic himself. Rock rejected the idea that the effects of the pill could and should be labelled as sterilising. Indeed, in his 1963 book, *The Time Has Come*, he explained that the pill simply put the ovaries at rest¹¹⁰. Therefore, unlike sterilisation – both temporary and permanent –, with progestogen pills no bodily part or function was to be forever damaged or disrupted. The ova would just remain in a state of inactivity until, were the medication to be interrupted, they would become available again for fertilisation. In other words, according to Rock, the combined oral contraceptive pill did not interfere with the ovaries’ activity permanently, which would recover as soon as the woman would stop taking it. With his explanation, the inventor of the progestogen pill had ruled out the possibility of sterilisation. Thus contradicting Pius XII’s resolution on the substance and starting a lively debate even in the United States.

Another important figure within the North American landscape, was Father Charles E. Curran, a priest of the Rochester in New York and later a theology professor at the Catholic University of America in Washington¹¹¹. Aside from his two doctorates in moral theology, the American professor was highly influenced by the work of German theologian Bernard Häring, who proposed a “person-

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 55. See Chapter Three, 3.2.1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹¹⁰ John C. Rock, *The Time Has Come* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963).

¹¹¹ Charles E. Curran (1934-) is an American priest and moral theologian. He obtained two doctorates from the Alphonsian Academic in Rome. He then returned to the US, where he became professor of moral theology first at the seminary in Rochester, his place of birth, and later in Washington, at least until the controversy caused by Curran’s progressive statements on the morality of the pill. See Massa, *The Structure of Theological Revolutions*, 79-105.

centered' approach to moral theology, rather than the older (manualist) 'act-centered' one", which also valued the role of historical contextualisation as far as theological and doctrinal developments were concerned¹¹². Whilst conducting his doctoral research in Rome, the American priest discovered that the traditional view on moral theology, according to which "certain acts were sinful everywhere, all the time, regardless of context," was not as historically founded and accepted as it was generally believed¹¹³. This led him to articulate the possibility of the subjective quality of human acts, deemed equally important as the objective aspects to judging the morality of human acts¹¹⁴. Such understanding of moral theology, eventually brought him to take into account the role of historical consciousness, the real significance of natural law, and the import of the sense of the faithful in the Church's teaching on contraception, which he considered of outstanding importance. By developing arguments which took these aspects into consideration, he also contributed to lay the theoretical foundations for the Commission's re-evaluation of Church doctrine on contraception and especially for the majority's rejection of the ban on it¹¹⁵. His disagreement with official Church teaching on marriage was openly voiced even prior to the the publication of *Humanae Vitae*. Indeed, given his progressive stance on contraception, his tenure at the Catholic University of America was let lapsed in 1967. Later, after the promulgation of the encyclical, he was one of the moral theologians outspokenly against the encyclical's content and official stance on contraception. The Charles Curran Affair, that is the Vatican successful effort to silence the loyal dissent of Curran and other progressive scholar, represented a clear example of the authoritarian imposition of Church authorities on matters related to marriage and birth control.

1.6.4. Priestly resistance to the doctrine

The history of the priestly organisation which majorly contributed to the popularisation of the right to conscience about the use of contraception was narrated by scholar Peter Cajka¹¹⁶. The Association of Washington Priests (AWP) was probably the most radical among those who saw priestly upheaval for the lifting of the ban on contraception for lay Catholics. Its formation was contemporary to the Vatican II and its members were active during the same years in which the Council of bishops was discussing a re-definition of the Church as "The People of God"¹¹⁷. Initially a loosely-organised fellowship, under father T. Joseph O'Donoghue's direction, a Washington priest who had overtly

¹¹² Massa, *The Structure of Theological Revolutions*, 80-81.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹¹⁴ *Ivi.*

¹¹⁵ See Chapter Two, 2.8.3, note 69; Three, 3.2.1.

¹¹⁶ Cajka, *Follow your Conscience*, 90-112.

¹¹⁷ *Lumen Gentium*.

expressed his critical stance on Church's teaching on contraception, "the group rebranded itself in 1966" and it adopted the name¹¹⁸. If at the beginning the group was united by a shared interest in the Bible, the priests quickly grew bolder, bolstered by the ideals of collegiality and equality developed in the documents of Vatican II. They understood their role as "representatives of the laity" and "publicly acknowledg[e] their prerogative to pass judgments on relevant issues in the Catholic Church"¹¹⁹. Among them, the most relevant one was probably the long-standing ban on artificial birth control. Indeed, they supported the idea that Church doctrine on conscience and its formation should apply to matters concerning the use of artificial contraception¹²⁰. Their dissent was voiced especially after the publication of *Humanae Vitae*¹²¹. However, their earlier activism might have influenced some of the members of the Commission. It also contributed to the Catholic unrest over the ban on artificial birth control that motivated Paul VI's decision to maintain the Commission.

As explained by scholar Tentler, the priests' major argument which supported the right to conscience when it came to a couple's decision over contraception, laid in the fact that Church teaching on the pill was still considered doubtful, at least until the promulgation of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in the summer of 1968. "After the encyclical – Tentler explained – it became very difficult for priests to speak publicly about sexual morality, given that roughly one-half of them in 1969 disagreed with the encyclical's conclusions"¹²². Prior to this date, though, no clear guidelines about the use and morality of the contraceptive pill had been established by the Vatican. Therefore, widespread disagreement existed among priests, a sign for many moralists and theologians which indicated that the teaching could be considered as doubtful, thus allowing the laity to follow their own consciences to judge on the use of this method¹²³. Indeed, many confessors appealed to the uncertainty of the doctrine to judge on the morality of certain contraceptive acts performed by their penitents. If some continued to fully endorse official Church teaching and insisted on faithful adherence to it, a growing number of confessors absolved their penitents¹²⁴.

¹¹⁸ Cajka, *Follow your Conscience*, 90.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93

¹²¹ The passionate outburst against Church law, however, was provoked by Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle's defence of the doctrine in his *Guidelines*, a pastoral letter divulged soon after the promulgation of *Humanae Vitae*. The fight between the conservative hierarchy and the progressive priests was resolved with a pastoral solution by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy. O'Boyle's actions were deemed legitimate. However, the court could not but acknowledge "inviolable" rights of conscience. According to scholar Cajka, despite O'Boyle's victory over the priestly association, the right to conscience and arguments of conscientious objection entered the vocabulary of the faithful and they recurred frequently in order to justify contraceptive acts.

¹²² Tentler, "Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church," 13.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁴ *Ivi.*

When *Humanae Vitae* appeared in July 1968, many North American priests had already adopted a stance on the contraceptive pill in contrast with Church teaching. Furthermore, in many cases their judgment did not apply merely to this type of birth control means, but their position on the morality of contraception was more general and it applied to the issue at large. As seen above, priestly action and reaction to the long-standing ban on contraception comprehended both joint efforts through public protests and personal initiative during confessions.

1.6.5. Awareness among the U.S. laity

At the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 50s, in reaction to the spreading of secularism, the relatively economic wealth of the post-War period, and of secular values which menaced those of traditional Christianity, a considerable part of the laity organised itself in lay-led groups for the preservation and promotion of family life¹²⁵. Theology Professor Carey gave some examples of such agencies concerned with marriage and family, like the Family Life Bureau at the beginning of the 1930s, *Integrity* magazine, publishing by the mid-1940s, the Cana Conference in the same period, and the CFM, at the end of the decade¹²⁶. He also clarified that this type of couples were in fact a minority.

With the post-War boom, a great portion of the American population enjoyed considerable economic wealth. Thus, many American Catholics too were able to achieve a middle-class status, difficult to acquire in the previous decades¹²⁷. Scholar Jay P. Dolan defined them as “the Catholic suburbanite”, for they mainly resided in the suburbs of big cities, were generally better educated than the previous generation, and occupied important professional positions¹²⁸. The analysis led by Tentler on this portion of the laity, concerned with family life, confirmed Dolan’s, for she described it as “a devout élite among the laity, many of them highly educated” and “active in organizations of their own, where they promoted a near-heroic vision of Christian family living”¹²⁹.

Despite the growing number of American lay Catholics actively advocating for Cristian family values and founding dedicated organisations and groups, increasing dissatisfaction with Church teaching on birth control started to rise at the end of the 1950s and one aggravating factor was probably disappointment with the rhythm method, the only birth control method allowed by Church

¹²⁵ Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 132.

¹²⁶ Carey, *Catholics in America*, 95. The Christian Family Movement, which had considerable impact on North American Catholicism with respect to the promotion of family life first, and of artificial birth control later during the 1960s, is thoroughly presented in Chapter Four, 4.1.

¹²⁷ Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 90-99; 132-146.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹²⁹ Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 173.

teaching¹³⁰. By the end of the 1940s, nearly all American Catholic couples had heard of this natural birth control method and had some knowledge about the practice, and data from this decade and the following one suggested a growing rate of its employment, especially among educated believers, but also among non-believers. “About 65 percent of the Catholic wives sampled in 1955 had used or were currently using rhythm, with the figure rising to 80 percent for those with college training”¹³¹. Among the laity, though, the inherent contradiction of a more positive theology of sex, which placed emphasis on the role of fulfilling and frequent marital relations, yet which still supported rhythm as the only moral birth control method, became apparent. Indeed, this practice required couples to abstain themselves from sexual intercourse at least for ten, if not more days within a month, thus severely limiting the possibility for them to unite. Many reacted by simply bearing numerous children; “[A]n elite among the laity, however, went further”¹³². This highly-educated group, usually involved in organisations like Cana and the CFM, championed the welcoming of any child, the fruit and expression of love. For this reason, their families usually consisted of a considerable number of children – as many as fourteen, in certain cases – and they were praised for the good and inspiring example they set to other parishioners.

Scholar Tentler remarked that “[C]ouples like this were a distinct minority of the Catholic population. But they were a highly visible minority”, whose eventual dissent in the middle of the 1960s was equally significant¹³³. The reasons which brought them to question first, and then overtly defy Church teaching on contraception are numerous. First, as explained above, was the growing dissatisfaction with rhythm. But dissatisfaction alone offers no sufficient justification, for it has also been maintained that this lay élite was actually proudly adhering to and actively spreading the teaching. A contributing factor was certainly the doctrinal confusion, fuelled by many priests, about the reasons behind the morality of rhythm. Consistently, rhythm’s defenders were emphasising technical and scientific advancements which apparently enabled women to determine the time of ovulation more accurately. “Talk like this – explained Tentler – omnipresent in Catholic circles by the early 1960s, was seen at the time as a way of defending Church teaching. But its main effect, at least for the laity, was probably to blur the distinction between rhythm and forbidden modes of family limitation”¹³⁴. If the sole purpose of rhythm was to limit or curb the number of pregnancies, then the method acquired no significant difference from artificial means of contraception on a doctrinal and

¹³⁰ See 1.5.; Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church,” 8; Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 174-189.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹³² Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church,” 8.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁴ Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 178.

theological level. Therefore, when at the beginning of the decade the contraceptive pill became available on the market, a growing number of Catholics could see no objection to its use, for this method similarly guaranteed the curbing of the number of pregnancies, whilst it did not frustrate the unitive character of the sexual act. Furthermore, growing awareness about the role of sexual relations to a stable union and to the familial atmosphere – the result of psychological investigation – the importance of rhythm was further downplayed.

The laity became increasingly bolder in its open dissent against Church teaching on contraception. Tentler confirmed that “[V]ery few of the laity spoke or wrote publicly about contraception prior to 1964. But that year saw an explosion of lay writing on the question, and lay public speaking too”¹³⁵. For the first time, the lay élite was expressing its own views on marriage and sexuality, raising serious objections to the official Catholic vision, which championed the primacy of procreation to the detriment of conjugal love and the creation of a loving community among the spouses and family members. These views were also expressed by a considerable number of American and Canadian couples questioned on their experience with rhythm and on their vision of the teaching on contraception by four lay members of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births in 1965 and 1966 – Patrick and Patricia Crowley of Chicago, and Laurent and Colette Potvin of Ottawa¹³⁶. The surveys, conducted in the post-Conciliar spirit characteristic of the second half of the 1960s, were of great consequence¹³⁷. Indeed, despite the abrupt end to the debate brought by the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, “this debate represented a genuine exchange of views, for a hitherto silent laity”¹³⁸.

¹³⁵ Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church,” 10-11.

¹³⁶ The topic is further discussed in Chapter Four.

¹³⁷ Joseph P. Chinnici, *American Catholicism Transformed: From the Cold War Through the Council* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 293-309.

¹³⁸ Tentler, “Drifting Toward Irrelevance? The Laity, Sexual Ethics, and the Future of the Church,” 14. See also Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 210-232.

Chapter Two: A timeline of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the history of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births and its developments. The Commission was established in March 1963 by Pope John XXIII with the main purpose of developing the Church's stance on population growth and international policies of fertility control. In October 1963, the group comprised six members, but by May 1966, however, Pope Paul VI had appointed more than 70 participants, between members and experts. Albeit remarkable, the increase in membership is not the only transformation the papal Commission underwent. Indeed, Pope John XXIII, who established the Commission in the first place, asked the sextet to discuss primarily the role of Christian families in the modern world, in view of social and demographic shifts, scientific discoveries, and international policies on population growth. Progressively, the focus shifted to the theology of marriage and contraception, both natural and artificial. This chapter presents the stages of this development as well as some lay and clerical figures involved in it. The timeline is mostly based on the accounts written by American journalist Robert Blair Kaiser, his fellow-countryman and colleague, historian Robert McClory, and Italian statistician, demographer, and professor Bernardo Maria Colombo¹³⁹.

2.1. Pope John XXIII: *aggiornamento* and Vatican II – October 1962

The historical background to the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births is outlined in Chapter One. The Western cultural and social context of the 1960s had significantly changed from the previous two decades. Popular ideas on the meaning of family, the role of sexuality and parental responsibility, even of women's function within societies were

¹³⁹ Robert Blair Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was: The Story of the Commission on Population, Family and Birth, 1964-1966* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1987). Journalist Kaiser (1931-2015) was a Jesuit until 1959, the year in which he decided to no longer become a priest, but rather be a journalist and a husband. as a correspondent for *Time Magazine*, his most notable work is considered his reporting for the Vatican II. Moreover, he was also a prolific writer of books, the majority of which dealt with Church reform. Robert McClory, *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission, and How Humanae Vitae Changed the Life of Patty Crowley and the Future of the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 2017). Robert McClory (1933-2015) was a former priest who left priesthood due to his disagreeing with the Church's views on some issues and his encounter with his future wife, Margaret. Given his interest in writing and literature, he decided to become a journalist while he also pursued a career as a magazine writer teacher. In his stories he voiced the loyal dissent to the Catholic Church and of notable importance are his interviews with some progressive members of the Pontifical Commission. Bernardo Maria Colombo, "Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni," *Teologia* 28, no. 1 (2003). Professor Colombo (1919-2012) became a member of the pontifical Commission in 1964. Starting from the second meeting, he attended all the sessions. He was also appointed as a *perito* in one of the Vatican II's submissions on *De matrimonio et familia*.

evolving. Cultural changes related to sexuality and family started to affect Catholic reception and adherence to marital doctrine, especially in the U.S. and within academic environments. Furthermore, with the contraceptive pill now readily available on the market, both clerical and lay Catholics began to pose questions on its morality.

Pope John XXIII¹⁴⁰ was fully acquainted with the current state. As a matter of fact, he showed an interest in providing the faithful with more adequate answers to the modern questions they were raising. Or, at least, he was moving up with the times by seeking spiritual and religious renewal¹⁴¹. The decision to call a Vatican Council testifies to the pontiff's desire to lead the Church into the twentieth century, this by evaluating its centuries-long tradition and eventually by modifying it to make it more attuned with the state and needs of modern peoples. The process of modernisation demanded by the pope was to happen according to the 'signs of the times'¹⁴². In his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, written after the opening of the Vatican II, he gave a detailed analysis of the economic, political, and social circumstances which characterised the worldwide population¹⁴³. Moreover, he underlined how the Catholic faith did not gather the Catholic flock alone¹⁴⁴. Rather, the revolutionary message brought to earth by Jesus Christ, encompassed the entirety of Christianity. Hence, the importance of evaluating the condition of man, not only of the faithful, to make the Catholic creed and moral principles accessible to all the peoples. Pope John XXIII undertook a major operation. The Vatican worked for three years, from 1959 to 1962 in preparation for the Vatican II, which opened on October, 11th 1962. The gathering of bishops and leaders of major male orders marked a momentous event in the history of the Church¹⁴⁵. One of the major reasons for its exceptionality indeed is the fact that the Commission worked in the principle of modernisation or *aggiornamento*.

2.1.1. Traditionalist vs. reformist approaches to the birth control issue

Given the consideration the birth control issue was receiving, especially among theologians, an evaluation of marital doctrine by the Council fathers is to be expected, as well as the topic of contraception to become a matter of debate¹⁴⁶. And, in part, they did. The implications for family life and conjugality arisen from the cultural changes presented in Chapter One entered the agenda of the

¹⁴⁰ Pope John XXIII (1881-1963), born Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, was the pontiff of the Catholic Church from October 28th, 1958 until his death, on June 3, 1963. Known as "the Good Pope", he was canonised on July 5th, 2013 by Pope Francis.

¹⁴¹ Giovanni Vian, "Aggiornare La Chiesa Cattolica: Giovanni XXIII e Il Concilio Vaticano II," in *La Chiesa tra Restaurazione e Modernità*, ed. G. Fabre, K. Venturini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018), 215-239.

¹⁴² John XXIII, *Humanae Salutis*, paragraph 4; Ibid. *Pacem in Terris*, pars 21-25, 45-46.

¹⁴³ Ivi.

¹⁴⁴ *Humanae Salutis*, pars 22-23.

¹⁴⁵ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 30.

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter One, 1.6.3.

gathering of bishops. The possibility of recent scientific discoveries relating to the sphere of sexuality, i.e. the contraceptive pill, although not explicitly mentioned, furthered the discourse. However, the debate on crucial points, such as the morality of birth control and on marital ends, was at times inconclusive due to divergent and conflicting views on the subjects.

In their works, journalist McClory and professor Colombo respectively narrated one event which described the ethical dilemmas encountered by the Council fathers and over the delicate balance between tradition and innovation¹⁴⁷. In his essay, the Italian professor of demography, Colombo, narrates of his involvement in one of the Council's preparatory Commissions. In particular, he was asked to revise some parts of the schema on the relation between demography and the regulation of births. Commenting on the document, professor Colombo maintained that the author did not demonstrate familiarity with the ethical questions on fertility the Catholic flock was faced with in its everyday life. On the contrary, continued Colombo, he failed to get rid of a too simplistic approach, a mistake which risked becoming common among the Council fathers. According to the demographer, the Council fathers could and should provide less simplistic answers to the faithful by establishing detailed and practical guidelines to better define the area of activity of the single believer, of couples, of national and international authorities. Furthermore, the delicate subject of institutional responsibility towards the regulation of births evaluated in *Gaudium et Spes* was not adequately covered so as to highlight how the existing doctrine could be improved to relate to modern questions¹⁴⁸. Therefore, according to Colombo, the purpose of at least one portion of the Commission was not that of discussing existing teaching in order to make it more attuned with modern necessities, but rather to simply comment on it and ultimately to leave it unvaried.

Similarly, journalist McClory briefly narrated the story of the writing of a document on Christian marriage, *De Castitate*¹⁴⁹. According to its author, Father Ermenegildo Lio, the topic of marriage, its ends, and the relation with modernity could be exhausted with a summary of *Casti Connubii* and the formal approval of the rhythm method. Evidently, to the Franciscan priest the ongoing debate about the contraceptive pill, the challenges posed by exponential population growth, national and international interventions on the personal sphere of procreation, as well as controversial

¹⁴⁷ McClory, *Turning Point*, 39-41; Colombo, "Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni", 75-78.

¹⁴⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, par. 87. Colombo also states his dissatisfaction with another paragraph of a document which deals with the implications of modernity for humanity, the encyclical promulgated by Pope Paul VI on March 26th, 1967. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, par. 37.

¹⁴⁹ The document was written by Ermenegildo Lio, a Franciscan theologian (1920-1992), who in 1950 completed his doctorate in Moral theology at the Pontificio Ateneo Antoniano in Rome. He was member of the Vatican II from its first session and he served as a speaker and secretary within the discussion of some articles of *Gaudium et Spes* and of *Lumen Gentium*. He also had an influential role in the drafting of *Humanae Vitae*.

policies for the curbing of births were not subjects to be covered by a Vatican council. Nor were burning issues, like the new role of women within Western societies, transformed family models, parental responsibility for procreation and education of the offspring, and sexuality considered so crucial as to potentially shape – or reshape – the doctrine. McClory noted how “[C]ompletely ignored was any reference to the newer personalist approaches to marriage or any recognition of the ferment occurring in the Church over birth control”¹⁵⁰.

Thus far, examples of traditionalist approaches to the birth control issue have been presented. It might seem that the discussion held among Council Fathers was led in the principle of traditionalism and rigour. But some members of the Council’s Commissions working on marital doctrine were developing strategies to update it, if not to entirely revise it. Despite appearances, the birth control issue was actually being addressed and discussed. Moreover, minor, yet radical revision of the old doctrine was being proposed and, later, it was partly approved. Reformist groups started to pressure the rest of the Commission if not to reconsider, at least to discuss the doctrine on marriage¹⁵¹. Marital doctrine, the regulation of births, and sexuality had the potential to become top of the Vatican Council agenda.

2.2. The establishment of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births – March 1963

Yet, a few months following the opening of the Vatican II, a Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births was established. The group of six was appointed secretly by Pope John XXIII in March 1963. Many scholars have discussed the pontiff’s decision to *keep* the subject of birth regulation away from the discussions of the Council fathers¹⁵². Some of them have provided various names of important figures who in all probability advised the pope. In a non-verified account of the events leading to the establishment of the pontifical Commission, *Time* journalist Kaiser affirmed that its major promoter was John XXIII’s personal secretary, Loris Capovilla. Harvey, on the other hand,

¹⁵⁰ McClory, *Turning Point*, 40.

¹⁵¹ The topic is expanded in section 2.7. Supporters of reformist stances proposed an alternative analysis of the ends of marriage, with love as the chief motive. Gradually, a shift occurred, which placed mutual love over procreation and education of offspring. This view is reflected in some of the words proposed and used in some sections of the conciliar documents which deal with Christian marriage. Prominent theologian, German Reverend Bernard Häring, who also became member of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births, had a role in this story. See Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 43-44.

¹⁵² See Colombo, “Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni”, 80–81; Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 67–68; McClory, *Turning Point*, 39–41; Gonzalo Herranz, Pilar León, José María Pardo, and Jokin de Irala, “La Comisión Pontificia para el Estudio de los Problemas de la Población, la Familia y la Natalidad y sus consideraciones médico-biológicas,” *Anthropotes*, no. 34, 1–2 (2018): 41; John C. Harvey, “André Hellegers and Carroll House: Architect and Blueprint for the Kennedy Institute of Ethics,” *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, no. 14 (2004): 204.

maintained that it was Cardinal Lawrence Sheenan – a member of the final Commission – with the support of Cardinal Alfredo Cicognani, the Vatican’s secretary of state, who suggested the idea of a separate Commission to the pope. McClory put forward the name of the then Archbishop of Malines-Brussels, the Belgian Leo Joseph Suenens. Despite the disagreement on the source of advice, they mostly agreed on the principal reasons behind Pope John XXIII’s decision: to different degrees, they all presented both doctrinal issues and concerns over international relations as probable reasons for the establishment of the pontifical Commission. The following sections aim at clarifying the amount of importance to be attached to questions of doctrine, and to diplomatic relations with international authorities.

2.2.1. Cardinal Suenens’ intervention

It has been mentioned that one of the possible characters that suggested to the pope the creation of the Commission was Leo Joseph Suenens¹⁵³. The 54-years-old archbishop had won the admiration of John XXIII, especially on the basis of his organisational skills which would prove to be crucial throughout the Second Vatican Council. He had become something similar to a confidant to his holiness. According to journalist McClory’s account, the Belgian reverend acted as soon as he had a chance to read the draft on *De Castitate* mentioned earlier. McClory wrote: “Suenens feared this dated, simplistic document might slip through the screening committee and attain a kind of immortality as Vatican II doctrine”¹⁵⁴. The archbishop was well acquainted with the fervour the birth control issue had aroused within Catholic milieu. Between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, he had actively participated in some conferences held in the Catholic University of Louvain, of which he was a great protector.

There, distinguished scholars met regularly to discuss various aspects relating to the demographic challenge posed by population growth¹⁵⁵. It is of some relevance that intellectuals and university professor were starting to identify the birth control issue as priority – and so did Suenens. Furthermore, they had come to the realisation that the subject could not be covered superficially and

¹⁵³ Leo Joseph Suenens (1904 – 1996) was a Belgian prelate. He became the archbishop of Malines-Brussels in 1961 and he occupied the role until 1979. In 1962 he was also appointed a cardinal. He was a leading figure during the Vatican II; indeed, it is believed that he exercised a great influence in the writing of two seminal documents, *Gaudium et Spes* and of *Lumen Gentium*. Furthermore, he is appreciated for his interest and work on ecumenism, for the advocacy of Church reform in the field of marital doctrine, and his endorsement for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. See the only biography written on him when he was still alive: Elizabeth Hamilton, *Cardinal Suenens: A Portrait*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975).

¹⁵⁴ McClory, *Turning Point*, 40.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

hurriedly in one single document. It needed wide-ranging discussion and consideration for the demographic, cultural, and social situations of different populations around the globe¹⁵⁶.

In all probability, the Belgian cardinal had foreseen the risk that the documents produced by the gathering of bishops at the end of the Vatican Council on marital doctrine would merely restate former teaching. Thus, not even taking into consideration the 'signs of the times'. Therefore, clarified McClory, Suenens probably encouraged the pope to establish a small, separate group to evaluate and discuss the birth control issue in detail. The American journalist also maintained that the Belgian archbishop wished that a sensible stance on parental responsibility could be presented to the faithful. According to McClory's analysis, it might seem that the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births was mainly established to evaluate marital doctrine in relation to population growth. In this way, the emphasis would be put on the theology of marriage and the focus of the first meeting on Christian matrimony.

2.2.2. The New Delhi Conference of the U.N. and the World Health Organisation

In his essay, professor Colombo contradicted this view though. In a conversation he had with Father Henri de Riedmatten, the general secretary of the papal Commission, the demographer had a chance to ask him about the motives behind its creation. Father de Riedmatten, an informed source, attributed it to the pontiff's concerns over international relations, rather than to doctrinal issues¹⁵⁷. Admittedly, even McClory confirmed international relations to be one of the reasons behind the establishment of the group of experts¹⁵⁸. Indeed, the Vatican had to be concerned about the first conference on world population problems organised by the United Nations and the World Health Organisation. The conference was scheduled for mid-1964 in New Delhi, India. It is probable that the Vatican feared the formulation of national and international birth control policies, which might challenge official

¹⁵⁶ Two reverends, Jesuit and Demographer Clément Mertens and his confrere and sociologist Stanislas de Lestapis, later appointed members of the papal Commission, were present at one such conference. Although not entirely supporting reformist stances, the former wished theologians could engage in a serious dialogue and the latter that a more dialogic approach to the birth control issue could be adopted by the Church. See Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 60-62.

¹⁵⁷ Colombo, "Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni", 80-81. Father Henri de Riedmatten (1919-1979) was a Swiss prelate. He was appointed as general secretary of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births by virtue of his experience in the field of diplomatic relations. He also became a key figure in the papal Commission for his ability in writing comprehensive and faithful accounts of the different, and at times opposing, views on contraception of the Commission's members.

¹⁵⁸ McClory, *Turning Point*, 41.

Church teaching¹⁵⁹. Therefore, it appears that the papal Commission was established to provide the pope and the Vatican with advice on strategy.

However, according to journalist Kaiser's analysis of the first report "the Commission went beyond the demographic question, even in its first meeting, in October 1963, when the Commission attempted to determine which particular methods of birth control the church could approve from a moral standpoint and which ones it could not"¹⁶⁰. The report comprised an evaluation of different methods of birth control. However, the evaluation of various practices was not part of a theological debate. On the contrary, the applicability and lawfulness of contraceptive methods were addressed majorly from a scientific standpoint. Furthermore, professor Colombo clarified that during the first meeting, the general secretary provided members with a lengthy report on national and international policies of birth control, thus arguing that the primary focus was indeed on diplomatic issues¹⁶¹.

The three authors, Kaiser, McClory, and Colombo, named both doctrinal issues and concerns over international relations as probable reasons for the establishment of the papal Commission. Colombo supported majorly the former, Kaiser the latter. McClory assigned them equal importance. As suggested by the American journalist and historian, probably both Colombo and Kaiser were right in their analysis. It might be true that the original group gathered to discuss national and international policies in relation to population growth and fertility. However, once they had started to discuss the topic, they could not refrain from taking into account important aspects which related to the main topic, e.g. doctrinal principles. Furthermore, this take would not contradict the view that Archbishop Suenens had a role in the creation of the Commission. It is still plausible that he exploited concerns over diplomatic relations to convince Pope John XXIII, and that subsequently the group increasingly turned to doctrinal aspects related to birth control. Indeed, by 1966 doctrinal revision was given outstanding importance in comparison to diplomatic concerns. Nonetheless, demography, economics, and sociology sessions were held throughout the entire working of the papal Commission. Hence, their role might become secondary, yet of considerable relevance. As a matter of fact, in order to properly address the matter, experts from the field of demography, sociology, economics, theology, medicine, and psychology were summoned. Perhaps John XXIII too, like Archbishop Suenens, had foreseen how the scope could not be limited to questions of theology or demography.

¹⁵⁹ McClory also depicts the delicate balance between the Vatican's coalition with the communist bloc, which disapproved of birth control policies, and the Third World nations, which felt birth regulation was a Western conspiracy to subject them. With the upcoming conference on population growth, the pope was in need of advice.

¹⁶⁰ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 68.

¹⁶¹ Colombo, "Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni", 81.

2.3. The first meeting of the Commission – October 1963

The Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births gathered together to hold its first meeting from October 12th to 13th 1963 in Louvain. The six members were all personal acquaintances of Archbishop Suenens. The group comprised two physicians – neurologist John Marshall from England and internist Pierre von Rossum from Belgium¹⁶². Professor Jacques Mertens de Wilmars from Louvain was invited for his expertise in the field of economy. Jesuits Stanislas de Lestapis, also a sociologist, and Clement Mertens, a demographer, were part of the representatives of the clergy, together with Henri de Riedmatten. Members represented the laity and the clergy in equal numbers: three laymen and three priests. All members came from European countries. It is important to notice that none of the priests were theologians, a fact that supports professor Colombo’s argument on the original reason for the establishment of the Commission. Furthermore, the title of the report “Politiques officielles nationales et internationales en matière de limitation des naissances”, written by de Riedmatten at the end of the meeting too suggests that the focus of the consultation was the developing of recommendations to be submitted to the pope as far as the curbing of births and governmental involvement were concerned¹⁶³. Before the meeting, members had been asked to provide the group with brief documents covering the state of research in their area of expertise¹⁶⁴.

2.3.1. Focus of the discussion and conclusions

A brief analysis of the first report confirmed that the group did not cover doctrinal aspects pertaining to population growth and birth control. The document, divided into three parts, illustrates the female menstrual cycle and its phases. In addition, it provides a scientific explanation for Pope Pius XII’s

¹⁶² The appointment of Marshall, an established neurologist, received mild disapproval in an article published by *Time* on April 2, 1965. “Roman Catholics: Division on Birth Control,” *Time*, accessed April 2023, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,941041,00.html>. The principal objection to the English doctor’s participation to the papal Commission seems to be his original stance on the irreformability of Church doctrine on contraception. In contrast with the negative prediction, a shift in his view on birth control methods and the reformability of Church teaching occurred. In a newspaper article appeared after the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, Doctor Marshall maintained that the minority position, which supported the *status quo*, was based on authority alone and on the consequences a break with tradition might have on it and on sexual morality. Xavier Rynne, “Letter from Vatican City,” *The New Yorker*, accessed April 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1968/11/02/letter-from-vatican-city-13>. On the other hand, the stance of Belgian internist Pierre von Rossum towards the issue of birth control and Christian marriage appeared immediately liberal and his approach innovative. According to von Rossum, the contraceptive pill ought to be accepted as an artificial form of birth control for Catholics on the grounds that it did not inhibit the union of sperm and ovum and that its sterilising effects were not permanent, McClory, *Turning Point*, 42.

¹⁶³ *Report of the First Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births* (1963) in Patrick and Patricia Crowley Papers (RWL), 11/07, UNDA.

¹⁶⁴ *Preparatory Papers for the First Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births* (November 13 1963) in John Marshall Papers (CBCC), 1/02, UNDA.

approbation of the so-called rhythm method in 1951¹⁶⁵. Furthermore, the functioning and the effects on the female body of the contraceptive pill are assessed. At this point, the medical section evaluated the possibility that the effects of the contraceptive pill could be equated to those of direct sterilisation¹⁶⁶. However, Doctor Marshall and Doctor von Rossum did not possess the elements to answer such question. They were able to highlight the discrepancy in the meaning of the term *sterilisation*, and more precisely of *direct sterilisation*, between theological and medical fields. In the former case, sterilisation is believed to occur whenever two spouses put obstacles in the way of nature— be it prior, concomitant, or subsequent to the act. In the latter case, one can speak of direct sterilisation when there is mutilation of a part of the human body. Yet the analysis remained strictly scientific and it did not spark a theological debate.

Aside from medical observations relating to the regulation of births, the papal Commission focused on national and international policies concerning the birth control issue. The group evaluated the state of international relations between the Vatican and other institutions. It also led a debate on Catholic attitude towards governmental legislations and the degree to which the faithful should support secular laws. In no case the group advised in favour of a compromise between secular and religious moral principles. Finally, the sextet asked Catholic institutions for research to extend the medical knowledge on physiology and on the mechanics and the effects of the combine oral contraceptive pill.

Despite showing interest in the topic of birth regulation from a scientific point of view, members advised Pope Paul VI against a definitive pronouncement on this subject. The group altogether suggested pastoral instruction of seminarian students and parochial priests. Certainly, they had ensured their support to the rhythm method. Yet, they also observed a lack of adequate expertise in its employ, both among the laity and the clergy. The first meeting of the pontifical Commission for was concluded with the full recognition of the existing teaching on birth regulation, the enthusiastic support of the rhythm method, the rejection of any policy favouring sterilisation, contraception, and abortion, and the group's reluctance to any statement on the contraceptive pill. As clarified by professor Colombo in his article, the results achieved by the group suggested the possibility of a follow-up meeting with an enlarged membership¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter One, 1.5.2.

¹⁶⁶ See Chapter One, 1.5.3.

¹⁶⁷ Colombo, "Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni", 81.

2.4. The second meeting of the Commission – April 1964

The second meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births was held in Rome, at the Pio Latino College, from April 3rd to 5th 1964. The medical, demographic, and economic concerns which motivated John XXIII to create the Commission remained at the core of discussion. However, the debate on birth control and birth control methods shifted to matters related to the theology of marriage. This might be attributed to a significant change in the group's composition. Seven new additions were included for the Pio Latino meeting: two lay experts and five priests. More importantly, it should be stressed that these last five were theologians. Surely the shift to a debate centred around theological matters can be partly motivated by a change in the group's composition. On the other hand, the resonance the birth control issue was having even among Catholics sparked the debate.

The decision to include five theologians in the pontifical Commission apparently has no connection with the conclusions presented in the first meeting final report. As explained above, the group did not demand theological or doctrinal change. It suggested more research to be conducted in the fields of physiology, demography, and economics in order to face modern issues related to population growth. It also highlighted the major role of pastoral teaching in the divulgation of the principles established by the Church regarding the sacrament of marriage. However, it appears that the papal Commission was enlarged arbitrarily to include five theologians in the 13-people group. This choice might be explained if one takes into account the prominence which the birth control issue was being given not only by international organisations, but also within Western cultures. It was becoming a burning one.

The question of whether some methods for the curbing of births could be considered moral or not would have probably arisen during the New Delhi Conference of the United Nations. Therefore, delegates of the Vatican had to provide a sound defence of the Church's position on birth control methods. The purpose of the papal Commission was precisely to discuss the issue and provide valid arguments, possibly apologetic ones. At first, demographers, physicians, economist, and sociologist were mobilised. However, the issue started to resonate and be a matter of debate within different societies, especially Western ones. Some sections were beginning to doubt the rationality of Church position on birth control¹⁶⁸. Therefore, it is possible that Paul VI believed that the insight provided by theologians during the second meeting would prove helpful: in the end Catholic doctrine was at stake.

¹⁶⁸ See Chapter One, 1.6.

It is important to notice that the viewpoint of the laity was scarcely represented at this point. Two lay people were added to the group for the April 1964 meeting at Pio Latino in Rome. Together with the three lay members which participated in the first session, the secular section now comprised five people. They already were a minority. Moreover, they were all invited for their medical, demographic, or economic expertise. Officially, no one was invited to represent the laity. As far as composition is concerned, all new additions were of European provenience, with the exception of professor Thomas Burch, a demographer from Washington. As for the laity, even Third World and developing countries were not represented in the papal Commission.

2.4.1. Pope Paul VI's Commission

Another important change took place between the first and second meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births: the venue. According to professor Colombo, the major reason for the group to gather in Rome instead of Louvain was the proximity with the high authority – the euphemism used by Father de Riedmatten to indicate the pope. The Vatican's desire of proximity might be interpreted as a means to facilitate or extend papal influence over the Commission's discussion. In other words, perhaps Paul VI had wanted the group closer to him to ensure that certain burning issues, e.g. artificial contraception, the hierarchy of the ends of marriage, were not covered. However, this interpretation would not be proven correct.

The pontiff had not originally appointed the sextet. It was his predecessor, John XXIII who had secretly established the group in March 1963. He had died only a few months later, in June of the same year. Since the group was his own idea, it was unknown to the public, and its purpose was to provide the pope with confidential advice, it is reasonable to suggest that his successor could have simply ignored the sextet. Journalist and Professor McClory discussed the same hypothesis and he confirmed that it was Montini's aim to increase both the number of experts and the scope of their research. He wrote: "Like Pope John before him, Paul hoped the Church could reach out to the larger world and therefore felt it needed a broader base of input than that supplied by cardinals, bishops, and Curia officials"¹⁶⁹. Even journalist Kaiser acknowledged the crucial role fulfilled by Paul VI as far as the organisation of the second meeting is concerned. He presented in detail the pontiff's involvement in the selection of new members. Not only did he suggested the names, but he also ensured that "diverse currents of opinion [to] be represented in the group"¹⁷⁰. So theological issues fully entered the agenda of the papal Commission and the liberal tendencies of least two of its members, Reverend

¹⁶⁹ McClory, *Turning Point*, 47.

¹⁷⁰ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 73.

Bernard Häring, one of Pope Paul's personal theologian, and Reverend Pierre de Loch, a canon in Belgium and a close acquaintance of Suenens, were known¹⁷¹.

2.4.2. Focus of the discussion and the theologians' debate

During the second meeting a lively debate on doctrinal and theological issues took place. The papal Commission discussed the ends of marriage, their hierarchy, responsible parenthood, and the conjugal act in relation to nature and against nature¹⁷². Members were able to agree on many points. However, when contraception was being covered, Häring and de Loch's takes on the issue generated perplexity. They suggested the Church rethought the primary role it had assigned to natural law to explain marital doctrine. Instead, biblical sources should be taken into consideration in order to put greater emphasis on "marriage as a community of salvation"¹⁷³. Kaiser, McClory, and Colombo affirmed that, at some point, one member exclaimed: "But now, canon de Loch, aren't you raising questions of fundamental theology?", to which the canon responded: "Yes. Why not?"¹⁷⁴.

Furthermore, Reverend Häring expressed his views on the long-standing connection drawn by Thomas Aquinas on marital intercourse and procreation. According to the German theologian, since the union of egg and sperm was impossible in the majority of cases, to maintain that procreation was the end of intercourse was to draw an illogical conclusion. To which his fellow countryman Father Josef Fuchs responded that the possibility of procreation was an intrinsic part of the marital act¹⁷⁵. Therefore, to undermine such order by using contraceptive means was to destroy its integrity. Fuchs

¹⁷¹ Redemptorist Priest Bernard Häring (1912-1998) is considered as one of the greatest moral theologian of the 20th century. For nearly 40 years, he taught moral theology at the Alphonsian Academy in Rome. He was also one of the periti at the Vatican II and he participated in the writing of *Gaudium et Spes*. He is appreciated for being a prolific author – with approximately 80 books – and personalist, scripture-based approach to the subject he taught. During an interview with journalist Kaiser, Reverend Häring maintained that he saw no objection to a couple's use of the contraceptive pill in order to regulate the woman's cycle. Moreover, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the current teaching on fertility and procreation. According to him, conjugal doctrine was too focused on the morality of the act and it failed to assessed more important issues, such as the place of conjugal love and the meaning of responsible parenthood; Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 44. Canon Pierre de Loch (1916-2007) was a Belgian theologian, professor at the Catholic University of Louvain.

¹⁷² See Chapter One, 1.1.1.

¹⁷³ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 73.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 74; Colombo, "Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni", 82. He also clarified that he was not present when the verbal exchange took place. Even McClory reported the event, however, according to his narration, it took place during the third meeting, McClory, *Turning Point*, 54.

¹⁷⁵ German Jesuit Josef Fuchs (1912 – 2005) was a professor at the Gregorian University in Rome. At the time the Commission was created, his work focused on moral objectivity, namely the idea that some ethical systems apply universally. During the working of the Commission his stances on natural law and birth control in marriage underwent a major change. He led the Commission that wrote the Majority report advocating the lift of the ban on contraception.

also pointed out that the greater emphasis recently placed on conjugal love somehow distorted the long-standing doctrine on the primary end¹⁷⁶.

Apparently, though, many agreed with Father Häring, for in the report of the second meeting the group reaffirmed and attached greater importance to conjugal love. Yet, despite the fact that the papal Commission would not rank love among secondary aspects, it maintained that magisterial teaching on this matter was still too recent to be challenged or modified. Furthermore, following the stances on contraception and the connection between procreation and marital act proposed by Father Häring, some members were hesitant about a firm condemnation of the contraceptive pill. Nonetheless, the rhythm method was still considered as the most appropriate means to regulate and space the number of children. Finally, the group expressed its perplexities on natural law and its usefulness in providing answers on the lawfulness of contraception. The pontifical Commission acknowledged the fact that further research into scientific and doctrinal principles relating to birth control were needed. Therefore, a third meeting was scheduled for the fall 1964.

2.5. The third emergency meeting of the Commission – June 1964

Very soon sexuality became public debate. Few weeks after the papal Commission's April meeting, many articles on birth control started to appear in Western newspapers. Some authors reported the dissenting views of members of the clergy, whereas others focused on priestly reactions to liberal stances on artificial contraception¹⁷⁷. Even lay people were starting to raise questions on the impact Catholic marital doctrine was having in their lives¹⁷⁸. A lively, and most importantly, public debate

¹⁷⁶ McClory, *Turning Point*, 49.

¹⁷⁷ Historian McClory signalled four episodes. British Jesuit Thomas D. Roberts's interview with *Times* in which he challenged church officials to provide rational arguments to affirm that contraception was wrong. He maintained that couples at times actually had reasons to make a conscientious decision not to procreate, e.g. physical and psychological wellbeing. John Heenan, archbishop of Westminster, and later a member of the Commission during the final meeting, responded that church's stance on contraception had been a constant since its first formulation by Augustine. Therefore, the church could not change what was clearly a God-given law. Even Reverend Häring reacted to Roberts' interview. If he could not entirely agree with the British priest, he shared his vision on the morality of certain methods of birth control, especially the contraceptive pill. In an interview appeared in the Italian magazine *Vita*, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani tried to discourage local Church ministers from expressing their views on contraception and doctrinal principles. McClory, *Turning Point*, 50-52.

Journalist Kaiser also signalled that dissenting articles by Reverends Janssens, van der Meek, and Reuss could be read in *Time*. Furthermore, he cited the University of Notre Dame as a place where conferences on population growth were held. During one of these meetings, the hypothesis that Catholics did not interfere with governmental sales of contraceptive methods was formulated. Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 76-84.

¹⁷⁸ See Noonan, *Contraception*, 489: "It was, then, a capital event in the development of testimony when in the fall of 1964 there appeared *The Experience of Marriage*, edited by Michael Novak, in which thirteen Catholic couples stated their own experiences in attempting to observe the theological doctrines on contraception and on rhythm. [T]he testimony of women was added. In twenty centuries no Catholic woman had written on contraception." Although the book was published after the conclusion of the third meeting of

was taking place in popular newspapers and Paul VI, whose desire was that the birth control matter was dealt with secretly and prudently, had to be concerned by “what was becoming an international media circus,” as McClory described it¹⁷⁹. Therefore, through a telegram sent by the Vatican’s secretary of state, Amleto Cigognani, he arranged a third urgent meeting of the pontifical Commission. The group gathered ahead of schedule at the Domus Mariae in Rome from June 13th to June 15th. Two priests, Lombard Tullo Goffi and Ligurian Theologian Ferdinando Lambruschini, were added to the group which, at this point, was constituted of 5 laymen and 10 clergymen¹⁸⁰. Representatives of the laity remained a minority and they were all invited for their expertise in a particular field of interest.

One parenthetical remark is important: no woman was invited at the first three meetings. This incidental observation is of some importance though. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines marriage as “[T]he matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life [...]”¹⁸¹. Thus, those most affected by new interpretation of the doctrine would be couples. However, no couple was officially included in the group. Some laymen had been asked to contribute medical, demographic, and theological insight into the birth control issue. The five male experts’ viewpoint was regarded as valuable and, therefore, included in the first two reports. Notwithstanding the relevance the lay male perspective was granted during the previous meetings, perhaps the lay female one was not as consequential, for apparently no woman was asked to join the group.

2.5.1. The first vote: on the lawfulness of the contraceptive pill

The Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births at its third session discussed mostly theological issues which related to marital doctrine: primary and secondary ends, conjugal love, responsible parenthood, methods of birth control, especially the rhythm method and the contraceptive pill. These matters had already been partly covered during the previous meeting and the group had not been able to provide final answers or reach a definitive agreement. This time,

the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births, it serves as a clear example of lay contribution to the birth control controversy. McClory reported of an interesting article titled *Mother of 12 Appeals for Realistic Spiritual Guides*, published the same year in the Christian Family Movement newsmagazine. Another example of lay participation in the birth control debate is the book *What Modern Catholics Think about Birth Control*. See McClory, *Turning Point*, 57.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸⁰ Tullo Goffi (1916-1996) was an Italian priest, professor, theologian, and moralist. He obtained his doctoral degree in Canon Law at the Università Lateranense in Rome. In 1946 he became professor of moral Theology at the seminary in Brescia. He supported a thorough reform of moral Theology, in view of the *rinnovamento* brought by the Vatican II. Reverend Ferdinando Lambruschini would later become famous for he was appointed by the Vatican to present *Humanae Vitae* to the media, on July 29th 1968.

¹⁸¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 7, The Sacrament of Matrimony.

however, members were informed about the fact that the meeting had a specific purpose. It was Pope Paul VI's desire to make a pronouncement on the birth control issue on June 24th, the feast of John the Baptist and his first anniversary as a pontiff. The papal Commission would help him in preparation for the speech by reaching some conclusions on the subjects mentioned above.

Journalists Kaiser and McClory concurred about the inconclusive character of the third meeting, despite the clear purpose set at the beginning¹⁸². According to professor Colombo's analysis, this might be due to the fact that differences of opinions about crucial points of marital doctrine became even more noticeable compared to the previous session¹⁸³. Nonetheless, the third day, members were asked to openly express themselves on two points: lawfulness of the contraceptive pill and the appropriateness of a pontifical pronouncement on it. As far as priests are concerned, six disapproved of its use, for they maintained that pills were but an instance of sterility and contraception on which the Church had already expressed itself. Three of them were uncertain. One of them provided an explanation: he wondered whether progestogen pills represented one of the peculiar cases already addressed by theologians. Of the two physicians present at the Domus Mariae, one was in favour of the lawfulness of progestogen pills, and the other was against it. Two other lay members shared his view. The other lay member was not completely convinced. Therefore, at the end of the third meeting, nine members were against the idea that the use of contraceptive pills should be deemed licit. Four of them were not certain, and just one member leant towards a change in the teaching.

The results are clear: the majority of the papal Commission was against a pronouncement which would state the lawfulness of progestogen pills. What is perhaps more interesting, though, is the fact that the percentage of lay members against the contraceptive pill is similar to that of priests – the ratio is sixty per cent against sixty-six¹⁸⁴. Despite the lack of ambiguity in their vote, the Commission did not advise the pope to express himself on the matter. Instead, they suggested that speeches or announcements could be the rightful means to reassert Catholic doctrine on marriage. Thus, recent controversies could be quenched and doubts dispelled. Furthermore, the group deemed a note for pastoral instruction appropriate to help pastors and pastoral educators improve the understanding and employment of periodic continence among Catholic couples. This necessity aroused following lay and clerical agitation within Catholic environments.

¹⁸² Kaiser wrote: "Altogether, an unsatisfying session," *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 86. McClory commented: "After three days though, all was still in a state of flux, and the Pope's questions remained unanswered," *Turning Point*, 54.

¹⁸³ Colombo, "Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni", 82.

¹⁸⁴ *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births* (June 1964), CBCC, 1/04, UNDA, 17.

2.6. The Pope's speech and the Commission's reveal

On June 23rd 1964, Pope Paul VI made his pronouncement which, as far as the birth control controversy is concerned, partly relied on the advice offered by the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births¹⁸⁵. Commenting on the issue, he described it as extremely serious, complex, and delicate. The pontiff continued by explaining that it was being studied by a large number of qualified experts. Indeed, professionals from various fields of study had been mobilised to address the multi-faceted problem. Pope Paul made a quick reference to the idea that the Church, in proclaiming the Word of God, could not ignore social and scientific sciences and the knowledge they were able to provide. To some, this was enough to believe that the Church would reconsider its position on contraception. Yet he immediately clarified that, until experts had expressed themselves on the matter, the teaching put forward by Pope Pius XII had to be considered true and binding. This is the main reason, according to McClory, why to others the pope's words sounded already like an adverse statement against the morality of contraception¹⁸⁶.

However, Paul VI did not avoid, nor did he evade the issue at all. As McClory correctly observed, after he had pronounced himself and made his Commission known, the pontiff more than tripled its size and reshaped its composition to include a lay majority. These decisions might suggest that he saw the question as not officially closed. On the other hand, a possible reason for the enlargement of the Commission is suggested once again by McClory. The journalist alluded to the possibility of not having birth control and marital doctrine on the Vatican Council's agenda for the matter was already being discussed by the Commission¹⁸⁷. This hypothesis might be plausible; however, if true, then at the third session of the Vatican Council in October 1964, the discussion did not proceed according to the Pope's plans. The same reason had in part motivated John XXIII to establish the Commission in the first place. His successor was probably aware of the difficulty of having birth control openly discussed at the Vatican II. However, another important factor presumably contributed to the Commission's enlargement, that is how widely the issue was debated both within clerical and lay circles. It seems plausible that the pope realised how the ongoing public discussion might have impacted on the Commission's resolutions towards a more progressive stance. However, the choice to include a greater number of members, representatives of more traditionalist views, would have only exacerbated an already tense atmosphere between the two main currents of thought. Therefore,

¹⁸⁵ Paul VI, "To the College of Cardinals, on the occasion of his name-day," accessed April 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19640623_sacro-collegio.html. The speech is available in Italian.

¹⁸⁶ McClory, *Turning Point*, 55.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

Paul VI presumably enlarged the Commission so as to favour a more wide-ranging and round-table discussion, a strategy which would prove unsuccessful.

2.7. Vatican II: The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World – October 1964

At the fall meeting, the assembly of bishops was to discuss the fifth draft of the document known as *Gaudium et Spes*, titled *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. The text had been re-written four times especially because of an extremely delicate portion, *Schema 13* on Christian marriage. It seemed that the only point on which the Council Fathers could agree was that the document never seemed to be acceptable. Some blamed it on its length – excessively brief or lengthy –, others on its content – overly modern or too traditional –; a few even described it as “too ambitious,” as Kaiser wrote, while others maintained that “it didn’t say enough”¹⁸⁸. According to Father Häring, a *perito* in one of the Council’s subcommittee together with professor Colombo, the main reason behind the rejection of the document by a considerable number of Council fathers was the fact that “the people behind it were the council’s progressive élite”¹⁸⁹.

The German theologian maintained that this minority yet pressure group was adopting a less formal vocabulary, which even the laity was familiar with. Häring’s statement seems to suggest that these selected prelates were trying to impact on the conciliar text at a linguistic level. However, at least two elements would indicate that the fathers’ ultimate scope was that of affecting the doctrinal content *Schema 13*. To begin with, some of the names listed by Father Häring are those of priests who had, at some point, openly expressed themselves in favour of a change of marital doctrine, at least as far as contraception – specifically the contraceptive pill – was concerned¹⁹⁰. In addition, despite Paul’s request not to discuss the morality of birth control – for the pontifical Commission was already covering the subject – the progressive élite added some ambiguous words to the text, crucial to the interpretation of Church doctrine on contraception.

In his essay, professor Colombo narrated one episode which he described as disturbing and which supports this hypothesis. The Italian demographer recalled that he was asked to take part in a preparatory mixed-Commission in Ariccia, an Italian town. The sub-committee he was assigned to, along with Father Häring, was to work on *De matrimonio et familia*. Even professor Colombo acknowledged the fact that members were mainly revising the language, not necessarily the content. However, he clarified how a single term could change the moral system at the basis of doctrinal

¹⁸⁸ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 92.

¹⁸⁹ Ivi.

¹⁹⁰ The most notable name is that of theologian Edward Schillebeeckx. The complete list is provided in a footnote by Kaiser, 92-93.

teaching. The day before the episode he reported, the Commission had discussed at length a certain subject, on which various members held speeches. At the end of the session, two theologians were asked to edit the document accordingly for the following day. The next morning, on his way to the session, Professor Colombo had a chance to talk to one of the theologian, who claimed: “Nous y avons mis des petits mots qui changent les choses, et les Pères ne s’en aperçoivent même pas”¹⁹¹. Therefore, it might be that one of the purposes of the élite mentioned by Häring was that of allowing for alternative interpretations of the content of *Schema 13* by adding ambiguous terminology. However, it is altogether true that some issues discussed at the Vatican II, like birth control, were so controversial that a vague lexicon was necessary in order to produce a document in which a compromise between two contrasting views – progressive and traditionalist – could be found and the two exist.

The birth control issue and conjugal doctrine were discussed by Council fathers: suffices it to think of different speeches delivered by Cardinals Émile Leger, Suenens, the patriarch of Antioch, Maximos IV Saigh, and Cardinal Bernard Alfrink of Utrecht which supported a change of doctrine on marital ends and conjugal love. According to McClory, based on the thunderous applause the speeches were received with, the majority of the Council fathers present at the sessions on October 28th and 29th favoured the change¹⁹². The American journalist also wondered about the possible outcome of a vote taken on that occasion on the intrinsic evilness of contraception. But the Second Vatican Council did not take any such vote for Paul VI had already charged the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births with providing answers to the question.

The trajectories of the papal Commission and Vatican II would cross once again after the end of the fourth meeting. In particular, at the last session of the Council, *Schema 13* had almost reached its definitive state. However, some conservative priests, Jesuit John Ford among the others, were not satisfied neither with its form, nor with its content¹⁹³. Thus, a subcommittee of mixed membership – some Council fathers and members of the papal Commission – was established by Cardinal Bernardo Colombo, one of the pope’s theologian and professor Colombo’s brother. The group, at the end, submitted four amendments, called *papal modi*. They allowed the conservative minority to ensure that a connection with past teaching – that of Pope Pius XI and of his successor – was maintained and

¹⁹¹Colombo, “Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni”, 84.

¹⁹² McClory, *Turning Point*, 61.

¹⁹³ John Cuthbert Ford (1902-1989) was a Jesuit priest and a professor of moral theology in well-established Catholic universities, e.g. The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He became a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births at the fourth meeting. He was also an important figure in the writing of some Council documents, especially the *Schema 13* of *Gaudium et Spes*. He always maintained a traditionalist stance on contraception, offering his unwavering support to the Magisterium taught in *Casti Connubii* and by Pope Pius XII, expressed in his and Gerald Kelly’s manual *Contemporary Moral theology, vol.2, Marriage Questions*, (Westminster, Md: Newman, 1963).

the evilness of contraception restated. On the other hand, the liberal majority included four changes concerning the phrasing, which would allow for a shade of meaning, further interpretations of the text, and ultimately to render contraception morally permissible¹⁹⁴.

2.8. The fourth meeting of the Commission – March 1965

The Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births gathered at the Spanish College in Rome from March 25th to 28th 1965 to held its fourth meeting. This time, given the ample scope of the Commission's research and the considerable number of members, a preparatory Commission gathered on December 6th, 1964 in Brussels¹⁹⁵. Their goal was the preparation of a plan of action for the new, significantly bigger group. Indeed, between the third and fourth sessions, the committee underwent major transformation, as far as its composition is concerned. To begin with, its membership was enlarged. To the group of 14, present at the 1964 meeting, 43 new members were added. Therefore, the size of the Commission almost quadruplicated, to reach 58 participants. In addition, the number of lay people involved raised to 33 against that of the previous meeting, to which only 5 laymen participated. Even the amount of theologians and religious men increased, from 9 to 25¹⁹⁶. The group's ethnic composition, though, changed slightly: the majority of the members were of European or North American origin. The numbers are: 34 from Europe, 11 from the Northern part of America, 5 from Africa, 5 from Asia, and 3 from Latin America. Lay people became a majority. Furthermore, among the lay representatives invited by reason of their expertise and knowledge, three men and three women were officially attending the meeting as couples. Their names are Charles and Marie Rendu from France, Patrick Crowley and his wife Patricia from Chicago, and Laurent and Colette Potvin from Canada. The number of couples asked to formally contribute to the debate on birth control and marriage at the fourth meeting was perhaps limited. However, the choice to include

¹⁹⁴ McClory, *Turning Point*, 84-85.

¹⁹⁵ The preparatory Commission's members were: Fathers de Lestapis, mertens, de Riedmatten, professor Mertens de Wilmars, doctors Marshall and von Rossum, canon de Locht, and doctor Bertolus, a psychiatrist and a new addition. For the report of the preparatory Commission for the fourth meeting see *Preparatory Meeting for the Fourth Session of the Commission* (December 6th, 1964; March 6th, 1965), CBCC, 1/07, UNDA.

¹⁹⁶ McClory counted 34 lay people and 22 priests. However, the sum of the number indicated by the American journalist does not total 58, which is the number of members present at the fourth meeting, and confirmed by McClory himself. See McClory, *Turning Point*, 62. According to Kaiser's analysis, names were probably given to the Pope by de Riedmatten and other prelates who were close to him. He then continued by guessing the principle according to which the pontiff, together with Cardinal Cicognani, might have selected some names: "[...] chose those who came recommended, first and foremost, as loyal sons and daughters of the church Church?". This might be a plausible hypothesis. However, it is not likely that Paul VI personally knew every person whose name had entered the list.

at least three pairs might be interpreted as a feeble, yet determined attempt by Church authorities to give the opinions of Christian couples on the matter a voice.

Another important transformation, which took place between the third and fourth sessions represents the papal Commission's internal organisation during the latter. The topics of discussion were no longer assessed by all members simultaneously. On the contrary, they had been classified according to the field of study they pertained to and then distributed among panel of experts who would work in sessions throughout the three-day span. In this way, members could fully focus on specific subjects in which they were professionally competent. Moreover, they did not have to be present or engaged in the discussion of issues they were only partially familiar with and could not contribute to exhaustively. Therefore, the effort of each panel was devoted to the examination of as many topics as possible which related to their area of expertise and to the birth control matter. Three subgroups were established to cover the issue from various perspectives. The first one comprised experts in the field of demography, economics, and sociology. The second, consisted of professionals of medicine and psychology. The third group included theologians and moralists¹⁹⁷. The assignment of different matters relating to the main one – birth control and marriage – ensured that each group could cover a vast selection of topics simultaneously. In this way, the Commission could efficiently provide detailed insight into issues which had been highlighted during the first three meetings. The selection of topics had been made prior to the meeting. Members were sent a questionnaire in which they were asked to list the most urgent matters, according to their personal view, and also other secondary, yet crucial points, relating to marital doctrine.

2.8.1. The North American delegation

In preparation to the session, North American members of the pontifical Commission decided to meet. They were: Patrick and Patricia Crowley, invited as leaders of the Christian Family Movement (CFM) and as representatives of married couples; doctor André Hellegers, a gynaecologist, professor Donald Barrett, a sociologist from the University of Notre Dame; John Macisco, who substituted demographer Thomas Burch, a veteran in the Commission; the already mentioned theologian Jesuit John Ford; and doctor Laurent Potvin and his wife Colette, actively instructing Catholics on the rhythm method in his clinic in Ottawa. "Purpose – said Kaiser – to organize themselves (and perhaps the Commission, too)"¹⁹⁸. Dissatisfied with how the previous meetings were conducted, informed by professor Burch that the discussion was led in French, North American delegates proposed to raise

¹⁹⁷12 for demography, economics, and sociology, of which 8 were lay members. The number of participants for the other sections are not given expressively given in the report. Married couples were placed in the second group.

¹⁹⁸ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 108.

money to provide non-French-speaking members with simultaneous translation. Furthermore, some of them criticised how the Vatican was dealing with the logistics of the Commission. In addition, they expressed their resentment to Pope Paul VI's June 23rd speech and his relative lack of leadership when it came to preventing so-called experts to express themselves openly about the birth control issue, thus confounding the faithful¹⁹⁹.

In the end, the American delegation did not send its letter to Pope Paul VI. However, the initiative of the American members in this occasion – the majority of them lay Catholics –, and later when they gathered after the fourth meeting to discuss some theologians' names to be proposed to the Vatican for the following session, is of some importance. Their effort to provide the Commission with economic means and practical and quick solution to the debate on marital doctrine perhaps reflects the right to self-determination claimed by U.S. Catholic milieu in the 1950s and 1960s²⁰⁰.

2.8.2. A lecture by Noonan and the second vote: on the reformability of *Casti Connubii*

On March 25th all members were reunited to start the fourth meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births. North American judge John T. Noonan, at the time professor at the Notre Dame Law School in Indiana, was invited to open the gathering with a lecture. His work on usury and Church teaching was renowned²⁰¹. Noonan believed to have found a point of similarity between Catholic doctrine on usury and the teaching on contraception. He maintained that, because the Church had modified its moral principles on usury, despite a long-standing prohibition, it could act in a similar way in the case of contraception, by lifting the thousand-year-old ban in view of changed historical conditions.

The two-hour-long lesson he gave was a synthesis of the North American scholar extensive research on the historical development of church doctrine on contraception, published three years later in the volume *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*²⁰². Towards the end of his speech, the North American judge and professor analysed the most salient events which characterised Church history from the 1930s to Pius XII's approval of rhythm in 1951. His take on the moral system of values that motivated the long-standing ban on contraception can be summarised in three points: "1) procreation is good, 2) procreation is never complete without education of the children that follow, 3) human life is sacred"²⁰³. According to Noonan, the pontifical Commission constituted yet another important piece in the development of

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 109.

²⁰⁰ Chapter One, 1.6.

²⁰¹ Chapter One, 1.1.1.

²⁰² See Chapter One, 1.1.

²⁰³ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 117.

Church teaching on contraception. He was asking whether this Commission would challenge the thousand-year-old Catholic teaching on marriage. Noonan's lecture sparked a heated debate which is reflected in the report of the fourth meeting and which also partly contributed to the doctrinal changes on responsible parenthood, conjugal love, and the hierarchy of ends described in Chapter Three.

Members discussed at length different methods of contraception, as well as the possibility of their employ in various regions of the planet. Each section was trying to prove their point: the group of demographers, statisticians, and experts of economy underlined the fundamental difference in the value attached to offspring in Western societies and in Third World populations. With the Industrial Revolution and cultural developments – e.g. role of women, marriage as the voluntary union of the spouses, cost of education – Western societies had started to reconsider the consequence of having a numerous family and, therefore, had re-evaluated birth control methods. The latter, on the contrary, had not²⁰⁴. The medical section evaluated the morality of contraceptive practice, focusing especially on two aspects: 1) the method cannot be labelled as an abortifacient, 2) the method preserves the unitive character of the act²⁰⁵.

The group of theologians discussed the reformability or irreformability of the teaching put forward by *Casti Connubii* and a vote was taken: 12 supported the former stance, 7 the latter. The result is surprising if one considers that only two years before, during the third meeting, an overwhelming majority had considered the official teaching too recent to be challenged. Now, not only did a great number of theologians considered the teaching reformable, but it also wished for such change.

However, Joseph Fuchs, probably the most eminent theologian at the time who favoured reformability, underlined two important aspects. To begin with, he maintained that to affirm that a teaching could be changed did not imply that it should be changed. Furthermore, the question on how to modify it was still unresolved²⁰⁶. At this point, among the Commission's theologians, two distinct currents of thought were apparent. On the one hand, there was a minority who claimed the intrinsic evilness of contraception. Their arguments were based on natural law and, therefore, they reasserted the teaching of *Casti Connubii*. On the other hand, there was a bigger group which maintained that natural law alone could not prove that to employ birth control methods was an intrinsically evil act. According to this more liberal section, the authority of the Magisterium was no longer sufficient reason to ban contraception. Nevertheless, they were able to demonstrate that at least the

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 119-120.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 121.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 126-127.

contraceptive pill should be considered a licit method, for it stood in continuity with former teaching²⁰⁷. Therefore, both groups were able to prove that their stance did not mark a break with the existing Catholic tradition on marital doctrine.

2.8.3. Letters from North American lay Catholics

A turning point was reached when letters of members of the Christian Family Movement gathered by Patrick and Patricia Crowley were distributed and read. While the responses of some members of the movement, also called CFMers, clearly adhered to existing Church teaching on marriage, others expressed dissatisfaction with it. In particular, the rhythm method was under attack, for some members felt it destroyed the spontaneity of the conjugal act. Furthermore, they were left under the impression that the Church, with its technicalities about the mechanics of the conjugal act, was being insensitive to the physical and human needs of Catholic spouses²⁰⁸. This remark, together with Häring's analysis of the meaning of marital intercourse – not a mere biological act, but the proper means for the expression of love – provoked a serious reflection on the approach to the birth control issue. This was voiced by de Locht who maintained that, being the marital act not always procreative, therefore primarily expression of the love between husband and wife, the goodness or evilness of a contraceptive method lay on their marital life, on their intentions, and ultimately, on their consciences²⁰⁹. This moment was a milestone in the history of the Commission. To the majority, it became clear that one possible way to answer the question of the morality of contraception was to listen to the experiences of real couples. If the analysis of doctrinal technicalities on the mechanics of the act had perhaps led to an impasse, the moment had come to inquire into the experience of lay Catholics – and perhaps even of the priests who were in touch with them daily. In other words, the papal Commission was suggesting widening the scope of their research from cardinals, bishops, and experts to the sense of the faithful²¹⁰. Therefore, the three lay couples present at the meeting, were

²⁰⁷ The liberal majority argued that the infertility caused by the contraceptive pill can be equated to women's natural periods of infertility. The reasons to affirm that are: the temporarily character of the intervention; the fact that there is no direct sterilisation, both in the medical and theological sense; that no obstacle is put to the union of gametes. Therefore, the unitive character of the marital act is preserved.

²⁰⁸ The responses of members of the CFM are further analysed and discussed in Chapter Four. One couple, for example, described the practice as “a strain on natural husband-wife relations,” and another one commented that it “causes frustrations, both mentally and physically for both parties. Thus, causing quarrels and un[w]holosome attitude around the home”. These and similar opinions on rhythm and its mostly negative outcomes were frequently expressed in the document. Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples* (1965-1966), CBCC, 2/07 M-8, UNDA.

²⁰⁹ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 132.

²¹⁰ The “sense of the faithful”, despite being described with other words, is extensively covered in *Lumen Gentium*, especially in paragraph 12: “The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when ‘from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful’ they show universal

asked to conduct a survey or to relate on the experiences of Catholic couples they worked with, in the case of the Rendus and the Potvins, or which were part of their movement, in the case of the Crowleys. The results would be shared among the Commission's members at the following session.

2.8.4. The papal audience

Before the end of the fourth meeting of the pontifical Commission, members were received by the pope. In this occasion, he gave a speech in which he stressed the importance of widening the scope of their discussion and research, a desire the pontiff himself had expressed when he had more than triple the size of the Commission²¹¹. According to some members interviewed by Kaiser, the pope's speech reassured many in the group that it was not only opportune, but just on their part to go deeper into the birth control issue. Furthermore, they were encouraged to evaluate scientific knowledge provided by newly developed sciences – e.g. physiology, psychology – to advise him on the stance which the Church might adopt. He asked them to conduct their research objectively and openly, without restraint²¹².

The general secretary of the Commission, de Riedmatten, delivered the report of the fourth meeting, along with a great number of essays written by various members, reassured by the pontiff's words. However, the pope startled at the length of material his Commission had produced²¹³. It is reasonable to suggest that it was Paul VI himself that asked Cardinal Ottaviani to Commission a small number of theologian with the draft of a summary on the major points the Commission could agree on: responsibility, love, sexuality, and education²¹⁴. Nine theologians laboured to produce a document which presented different currents of position on these subjects, as well as a project for pastoral

agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life. *Lumen Gentium*, paragraph 12. The papal Commission was instructed on the meaning of this expression through a brief lecture by Father name Goffi. There, he affirmed: “Quando si tratta che il Magistero determina la legge naturale sotto la luce della salvezza, è tenuto a consultare i fedeli. Non è una necessità di ordine giuridico, ma è una convenienza onde si giunga alla verità in modo più intimamente ecclesiale. I fedeli, per il ba[t]tesimo e la cresima ricevuti, hanno la luce della fede, ossia il principio personale di discernimento sociale attraverso l'‘homologia’ [...]. I fedeli partecipano del potere profetico di Cristo”. *Il senso dei Fedeli*, Speech by Father Tullo Goffi at the Fourth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births (1965), RWL, 6/02, UNDA.

²¹¹ Paul VI, “À la Commission d'Étude sur les Problèmes de la Population, de la Famille, de la Natalité,” accessed June 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19650327_demographic-commission.html. The speech is available in French.

²¹² Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 134-135.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 136.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

instruction, whose original author was De Riedmatten. The text was later revised by other members of the papal Commission²¹⁵. Apparently, the document, later renamed *The Green Book*, was to be distributed to the bishops attending the Vatican II's last session in September. However, it did not satisfy the taste of more progressive voices, like that of bishop Joseph Reuss and for this reason it was withdrawn and never printed²¹⁶.

2.9. The fifth meeting of the Commission – April-June 1966

In the same way as a preparatory Commission had gathered before the fourth meeting to organise the activity of the rest of the group, even in this occasion a small portion of the papal Commission met to develop a plan of action²¹⁷. The Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births held its fifth and final meeting at the Spanish College in Rome, between April and June 1966. Representatives of the clergy and of the laity were no longer referred to as members, rather as experts. 16 cardinals and bishops chosen by the pope became the real members who were to propose any final recommendation. Therefore, the new group comprised 74 among experts and members. The organisation of the work remained similar to that of the previous meeting. Panels of experts held numerous sessions dealing with specific topics which pertained to their area of expertise. Plenary sessions of all experts were held between June 6th and 8th. Professionals gathered to evaluate doctrinal stances emerged within subgroups. Furthermore, the purpose of the last session was the writing of a document to summarise the conclusions reached by the experts. The text was to be submitted to members of the Commission, thus the 16 cardinals and bishops appointed by the pope. The topics to be covered were those highlighted during the previous meeting: birth control in relation to responsible parenthood, conjugal love, sexuality, and pastoral education.

In reality, the two currents of thought wanted by Paul VI – the one supporting the adherence to tradition, the other advocating for change – became more evident. This shift had already been signalled by the general secretary in the fourth report²¹⁸. Then, the split simply sparked a lively debate,

²¹⁵ The nine theologians were: Fathers Häring, Labourdette, de Lestapis, de Loch, Visser, Perico, Fuchs, and Sigmond. The second group who revised the text comprised Archbishop Linz, Mgr. Lambruschini, Canon Delhay, Father Alfons Auer, John Marshall, André Hellegers, J. R. Bertolus, Pierre von Rossum.

²¹⁶ For a detailed account of the events that led to the censorship of *The Green Book*, see Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 136-147. A copy of the document is available at University of Notre Dame. *Unpublished Report on Pastoral Instruction* (1965), RWL, 5/04, UNDA. However, this is an unverified version.

²¹⁷ An unverified list of members comprised: Fathers Goffi, Fuchs, Ford, Binz, Auer, Anciaux, and professors Burch, Barrett, doctors name Ferin, a gynaecologist from Louvain, name Gaudefroy, another gynaecologist, from France, and name Görres, a German internist and psychologist. For the report of the preparatory Commission for the fifth meeting see *Preparatory Papers for the Fifth Meeting of the Commission* (1966), CBCC, 1/08, UNDA.

²¹⁸ The shift towards more progressive views on contraception did not regard one aspect relating to this topic, rather it was more generally a tendency to acknowledge the possibility of some contraception on the basis of

especially among theologians, and it was registered without important consequence on the nature of the report. This time, however, the two groups of theologians, traditionalist and reformist, did not limit themselves to discuss their opposite views. They made clear the separation by producing two separate documents and the advice they offered the pope was completely different. The former now counted only a few names – Ford, Visser, Zalba, and de Lestapis – and no mentioning is made neither in the document nor by the sources which narrated the history of the Commission about lay support to their stance. The latter group, which comprised both long-standing and recently converted reformists, grew considerable in size and it enjoyed the support of a vast majority of lay members.

2.9.1. The survey of couples

The shift of a considerable number of members towards reformist stances did not occur merely because theologians found convincing ways to explain their position. Indeed, the narrative and arguments adopted by this section had been a constant from the second meeting. They heavily relied on the idea that natural law alone could not explain nor motivate the entirety of Church position on marriage. They also advocated for a greater scripture-based approach to marital doctrine. Furthermore, they relied on scientific facts to demonstrate that the primary end of intercourse could not be procreation, for in the majority of the cases it did not occur. Yet, somehow, a great number of experts within the Commission became convinced that the Church should reform its conjugal doctrine and do so by lifting the long-standing ban on contraception and re-imagining the hierarchy of marital ends. The probable, major reason for this shift is the diffusion among participant of the three surveys conducted by married couples²¹⁹.

Patrick and Patricia Crowley, founders and leaders of the Christian Family Movement (CFM), conducted a survey primarily among North American and Canadian couples. Given the resonance the letters presented at the 1965 meeting had, in April 1966 they asked key members of the CFM to answer a few questions on the effectiveness of the rhythm method. The results were analysed by professor Barrett²²⁰. Furthermore, another questionnaire on the same subject was sent later the same month to contact couples in charge of pastoral programmes. This time, in order to ensure that couples

various moral arguments, e.g. the significance of responsible parenthood in modern society. This shift is thoroughly discussed in Chapter Three.

²¹⁹ Historian Massa maintained that the survey of the Crowleys had considerable influence on the conclusions reached by the majority of the Commission at the end of the fifth meeting. However, the relevance of the survey conducted by the Potvins and the Rendus should not be underestimated for they provided useful and similar data. Massa, *The Structure of Theological Revolutions*, 60. The survey conducted by the Crowleys and the Potvins are analysed and presented in detail in Chapter Four.

²²⁰ *Does Rhythm work for Catholics*, A Study by Professor Donald Barrett from the University of Notre Dame (1966), RWL, 3/02, UNDA.

were randomly sampled, the sheets were distributed to pairs whose surname started with the letters “a” or “b”. The results presented by the Crowleys and by professor Barrett are based on the answers of 181 questionnaires, although they had initially contacted 328 couples²²¹. Extracts of the answers are included in the report presented to the papal Commission.

Doctor Laurent Potvin and his wife, Colette’s research focused on Canadian Catholic couples. Their sample comprised people from different community associations, e.g. Serena instructors, couples in charge of pre-marriage courses. They sent 1000 questionnaire and received 319 answers. Even in this case, extracts of the respondents’ testimonies were included in the report. The study of the Potvins is certainly based on a greater number of data than the Crowleys’. However, the North American couple was able to contact couples from non-Western countries, thus ensuring ethnical variety to the answers²²².

The third couple, Charles Rendu and his wife Marie, gathered the testimonies of 400 couples. The majority of them were Catholics of good social status. The French couple too, who had been long involved in pastoral teaching of married and soon-to-be-married couples, distributed a questionnaire. However, they decided not to include the written experiences and testimonies in their study. Therefore, theirs is a summary of the questionnaires²²³. The Rendus’ report also analysed the results of the study conducted by doctor Marshall among 394 English couples.

The results of the three survey somehow integrate themselves. Among the conclusions signalled by doctor Rendu, is the effectiveness of the temperature method to avoid a new pregnancy, which showed a lower failure-rate than the rhythm method. In the study, it is maintained that the temperature method proved to have “positive psychological values to some couples” but also “psychological problems” to others. The French doctor acknowledged the fact that the study could not provide answers to two important aspects related to natural methods of contraception. Indeed, the survey did not verify “what percentage of the population find it [the temperature method] psychologically helpful and what percentage harmful” and “whether those who find it harmful do so because of something intrinsic in the method or in themselves or whether it is due to the fact that they have not been properly educated”²²⁴.

The studies conducted by the Crowleys and the Potvins, instead, provided more definitive answers to these questions. Couples were asked about their experience with the rhythm method. However, the answers of many showed how they had conflated the two practices – the Ogino-Knaus method and the temperature test. The results are further analysed in Chapter Four. Nonetheless, some

²²¹ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples* (1965-1966), CBCC, 2/07 M-8, UNDA.

²²² Laurent and Colette Potvin, *Survey of Couples* (1966), CBCC, 2/07 M-9, UNDA.

²²³ Charles and Marie Rendu, *Survey of Couples* (1966) CBCC, 2/08 M-13, UNDA.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

tentative explanations can be proposed. It appears that the majority of couples had indeed general knowledge about the rhythm method²²⁵. A great number of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the practice based on motives different than its mere unreliability. Some named the fact that the method was perceived as unnatural, for it removed spontaneity and it prevented the genuine expression of love among the spouses. Tension, frustration, and irritability both on the part of the husband and of the wife were mentioned too. Many showed resentment towards Church teaching.

2.9.2. Majority and Minority Report

The suggestions put forward by the majority of theologians at the end of the fifth session in the document titled *Schema for a Document on Responsible Parenthood*, also referred to as *Majority Report*, seems to reflect, acknowledged, and provide solutions to lay dissatisfaction with Catholic teaching on marriage²²⁶. Crucial doctrinal changes to *Casti Connubii* and Pope Pius XII's pronouncements were proposed. The group agreed with Pius XI's definition of conjugal love, as "the chief reason and purpose of matrimony", provided marriage was understood not only in its institutional value, but also in a wider sense as the permanent union of two spouses²²⁷. Drawing a connection with tradition, the authors maintained that marriage, understood as a loving community, could be established only if selfless mutual donation was achieved for the creation of new life. Conversely, generation of new offspring and its education were only attainable within a loving family. Therefore, "[C]onjugal love and fecundity [became] in no way opposed, but complement[ed] one another [...]"²²⁸.

This statement carried important implications as far as the hierarchy of marriage was concerned. Because conjugal love and procreation thus became equally important, couples could at time pursue one without detriment to the other. Furthermore, the group of theologians maintained that even a more critical evaluation of the role of sexuality was necessary. According to them, sexuality was the criteria to pass judgment on the morality of marital intercourse. They affirmed: "[...] the morality of sexual actions is thus to be judged by the true exigencies of the nature of human sexuality"²²⁹. Finally, the authors of the *Majority Report* assessed the meaning and the role of responsible parenthood in a couple's marital life. That this aspect was assigned great importance is testified by the title of the document itself. Conscientious procreation, according to the majority of

²²⁵ Historian Tentler too maintained that the vast majority of married Catholics had, by the 1950s, vast knowledge on the rhythm method. Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 174.

²²⁶ McClory, *Turning Point*, 171-187.

²²⁷ Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, par. 24.

²²⁸ McClory, *Turning Point*, 174.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

the Commission, required careful consideration for the future of both living and unborn offspring, and a loving family. Therefore, responsible generation should contrast mere animal reproduction. Consequently, birth control methods received growing or lukewarm support insofar as they were able to ensure that the couple be responsible in the exercise of paternity and maternity. Ultimately, in view of these considerations, the group demanded that the ban on contraception was lifted and that couples could conscientiously and autonomously choose those methods they deemed more appropriate to achieve responsible parenthood²³⁰.

At the end of the fifth meeting of the Commission's experts, the general secretary, de Riedmatten, was handed another document, titled *The State of the Question: The Doctrine of the Church and Its Authority*²³¹ or *Minority Report*. The major voice behind the text was that of theologian Ford. Along with other three theologians, he was concerned about the advice and recommendations put forwards in the majority's text. In particular, he disagreed with their understanding of natural law. According to their analysis, human nature could mutate with the evolution of history. Such understanding of human nature permitted various actions and conducts despite the universality of one principle²³². The ambiguity in the interpretations assigned to natural law concerned the authors of the *Minority Report* for they believed that the authority of the Magisterium was put into questions²³³. The majority group of theologians rejected the two accusations made by their opponents in a third document, titled *Summary Document on the Morality of Birth Control*, also known as *Majority Rebuttal*. The antagonism between the two factions – supported by other members of the Commission who held one or the other stance – the conservative one and the reformist one, was not resolved. Therefore, the Commission was not able to hand to the assembly of bishops one, unanimous answer on the birth control issue.

2.9.3. The third vote: on the intrinsically evil of contraception

Two years after Paul VI had revealed that a group of theologians, along with lay and clerical experts from various fields whose insight related to the birth issue, was evaluating the subject from the Catholic perspective, on June 24th 1966 members – that is the 16 bishops appointed by the pope – were asked to vote²³⁴. They were to express themselves on three questions: “Is contraception

²³⁰ Massa, *The Structure of Theological Revolutions*, 62.

²³¹ “Minority Report of the Papal Commission for the Study of the Problems of the Family, Population, and Birth Rate,” accessed July, 2022, <https://www.bostonleadershipbuilders.com/0church/birth-control-minority.htm>.

²³² Massa, *The Structure of Theological Revolutions*, 74.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 75.

²³⁴ However, only 15 members finally vote, for at-the-time Archbishop of Poland – later Pope John Paul II – did not attend. McClory, *Turning Point*, 190.

intrinsically evil? [...] Is contraception, as defined in the *Majority Report*, in basic continuity with tradition and the declarations of the Magisterium? [...] Should them or Magisterium speak on this question as soon as possible?”²³⁵. The results of the first vote were 9 yes, 3 noes, and 3 abstained. To the second questions, 9 said yes, 5 no, 1 abstained. Finally, 14 bishops believed the Magisterium should soon pronounce itself on the issue, only 1 said no²³⁶.

On the same day, the *Majority Report* was almost unanimously endorsed by the bishop members, despite the fact that, during the Commission’s members’ meeting, 9 had vote in favour of the intrinsic evilness of contraception. Moreover, a pastoral document was written by one of them, as an introduction to the report and it received full approbation by the Commission²³⁷. Thus, after three years of discussions, data collection and analysis, and exchange among lay and clerical members, the work of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family, and Births had come to an end. Most importantly, the majority of the Commission’s experts and some bishops had expressed themselves against the intrinsically evilness of contraception and in favour of a greater value attached to conjugal love and responsible parenthood. Now, it was the pope’s turn to become familiar with the sense of his faithful and, perhaps, act accordingly.

2.10. The leak of the Commission’s report

The *Majority*, *Minority*, and *Rebuttal Reports* were meant to be and remain within the Commission, as working documents. Indeed, they did not constitute Church teaching to be published as an authoritative pronouncement of the Magisterium; rather, at this point they represented a summary of the state of the sense of Catholic faithful in a particular period of time, the 1960s. But in April 1967 the three documents were leaked to three popular newspapers, the American *National Catholic Reporter*, the French *Le Monde*, and the English *The Tablet*²³⁸. Commenting on the event, professor Colombo recalled the words of de Locht on the issue, who defined it as a carefully orchestrated campaign²³⁹. The move was probably aimed at securing overwhelming Catholic support to the majoritarian position on birth control, given the wider public debate about the morality of contraception within Catholic circles. It seems reasonable to suggest that, given the great number of

²³⁵ McClory, *Turning Point*, 127.

²³⁶ *Ivi.*

²³⁷ *Ivi.*

²³⁸ The three reports were published in their entirety in the American newspaper. “National Catholic Reporter,” accessed April 2023, <https://theCatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=d&d=ncr19670419-01.2.50&e=————en-20-1-txt-txIN————>.

²³⁹ Colombo, “*Discussioni sulla regolazione della fertilità: esperienze personali e riflessioni*,” 94. The professor and demographer, who gathered this information from the Commission’s general secretary, admitted that de Riedmatten never disguised the name of the member or members who leaked the document.

Commission's members in favour of Church revision of marital doctrine, there was no need to convince the faithful, whose stance had apparently been summarised in the couples' survey. However, "what is often overlooked is that this document [the *Majority report*] was only one of 12 presented to the Pope for his consideration in drafting *Humanae vitae*"²⁴⁰.

Did someone in the majority group have reasons to believe that the report alone did not constitute sufficient proof to convince the pope to reform the teaching put forward by *Casti Connubii*? Furthermore, did they fear that pressure put on the pontiff by the influent, conservative minority – like Reverend Ford, who repeatedly visited the Vatican after the end of the Commission –, could once again determine continuity with tradition of magisterial teaching²⁴¹. When the documents were leaked, Pope Paul VI affirmed that their publication had caused considerable harm to the Church. Surely, it did cause him great trouble for, once *Humanae Vitae* was promulgated, it provoked strong dissent among the laity and the clergy.

²⁴⁰ Samuel J. Aquila, "*Humanae vitae* and Accompanying the Flock," *Anthropotes*, no. 34, 1-2 (2018): 392. Some of the documents are accessible at the following unverified source: "The Way of the Lord Jesus," documents released by theologian Germain Grisez in 2011, accessed June 2023, <http://twotlj.org/BCCCommission.html>.

²⁴¹ McClory, *Turning Point*, 130-136.

Chapter Three: An analysis of the reports produced by the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births

The analysis of the reports written by the general secretary at the end of the first four meetings of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births and of the *Majority Report* highlighted important developments in the understanding of four aspects of the doctrine on marriage, namely pastoral education, conjugal love, sexuality, and responsible parenthood²⁴². Moreover, it has identified the dilemma over the lawfulness of certain birth control methods as the main issue on which the discussion was often centred. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the developments in the four areas mentioned above and the implications these changes carried in relation to the Commission's stance on contraception. These developments were highly influenced by two surveys conducted among North American married couples. If, on the one hand, the questionnaire will be analysed in the following chapter, on the other hand, in Chapter Three emphasis will already be placed on the pressure exercised by a portion of the laity – a well-educated, middle-class one – onto the clergy, mostly detached from the practical problems encountered by married people as a consequence of traditional marital doctrine. Indeed, although progressive voices were already present at the first three meetings of the Commission, the majority of the clergy supported a change once it had read about the real experiences of couples.

Starting from the first meeting, in October 1963, members researched, analysed, and debated the insight to the birth control issue provided by various fields of study, e.g. medical, psychological, demographic. The contribution offered by this portion of the Commission is considerable and the documents, data, and lectures pertaining to these fields proved useful to establish a theoretical framework for the analysis of the reports. However, being this study mainly focused on Catholic doctrine points, the commentary or summary of the material from other disciplines is not its primary object.

²⁴² The majority of the documents produced by the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family, and Births were classified and never released by the Vatican. However, records of some meeting discussions, of research and position papers prepared by the experts, and of the reports of first four meetings were made available by some members, e.g. Patricia Crowley and doctor John Marshall. Moreover, transcripts of the *Majority* and *Minority Reports* can be found online and in books. *Report of the First Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births* (1963) in Patrick and Patricia Crowley Papers (RWL), 11/07; *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births* (November 13th, 1963), CBCC, 1/03; *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births* (June 1964), CBCC, 1/04; *Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, Unpublished English Version (May 14th, 1965), RWL, 5/02; *Majority Report* in McClory, *Turning Point*, 171-187.

3.1. Education

Throughout the five meetings held by the Commission, education and pastoral teaching were recognised of considerable importance in clerical and, later, lay reception of Church teaching on marital doctrine. As far as clergymen are concerned, they usually received their training on the subject in seminary classrooms. Every seminarian at some point had to take a class in moral theology; however, these were taught mainly in Latin, a language which only a minority of students could speak fluently. Moreover, professors were certainly familiar with manuals on the principles of conjugal morality, but critical engagement and group discussions on the subject were neither encouraged nor particularly welcomed. In addition, in the majority of cases the evolution of certain moral stances was not historically motivated, and little attention was also given to the Scriptures and to the theology of dogmas. In particular, with the case of contraception, some probably sensed that Church stance on contraception was poorly motivated. Nevertheless, no real controversy, both among the clergy, nor among the laity existed at the beginning of the 1950s²⁴³. Therefore, seminarians generally did not question their training and, after their ordination, they tended to apply the knowledge acquired from textbooks and seminary professors when confronted with problems of conjugal nature. These were mainly discussed during confession, a practice a great number of Catholics still followed, thus an opportunity for priests to collect information about spouses' difficulties with birth control and methods to achieve it.

The education of the laity on marital doctrine was usually less academic. Although only partly instructed in Catholic institutions, during the 1950s lay believers – and in particular North American ones – became engaged in pastoral activity which focused on marriage and family life. The instruction of the Catholic flock often took place at a local level. Indeed, “Catholic colleges and even high schools embarked in large number on courses in marriage and family life”²⁴⁴. These lectures were focused primarily on topics such as human nature, its distinction between man and woman, the meaning of sexual intercourse, and the rhythm method, recently endorsed by Pope Pius XII²⁴⁵. Furthermore, a scholarly-educated élite of lay Catholics went as far as founding organisations, of which they became leaders, to promote the Catholic vision of family²⁴⁶. Lay couples had a chance to be instructed on marriage and family life even through journals and books. Examples were the lay-edited *Integrity*, the Christian Family Movement periodical *ACT*, doctor John Rock's book *The Time has Come, The Experience of Marriage: The Testimony of Catholic Laymen* edited by philosopher and journalist

²⁴³ Tentler, *Catholics and contraception*, 140-142.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁴⁵ *Ivi.*

²⁴⁶ See Chapter One, 1.6.5.

Michael Novak in 1964²⁴⁷. Some of these also presented dissenting voices, which started to be raised by the mid-1950s. Nonetheless, lay pastoral teaching on marriage and family life, although not new, was reaching more people than in the past and the spreading of this phenomenon laid the foundations for lay involvement in the re-evaluation of the Church official stance on contraception²⁴⁸. The Commission too, from its early phases, acknowledged the role of education and pastoral instruction. If, however, at the beginning it would serve the sole purpose of spreading the existing teaching, at the end, it demanded educational renewal and its focus became the formation of conscience, as opposed to dogmas and principles of morality.

3.1.1. Pastoral instruction

The papal Commission took pastoral teaching into consideration from its early stages of work, when its main focus was still the discussion of demographic aspects relating to the birth control issue and international policies for the curbing of population growth. Therefore, the reflections upon marital doctrine and its reception sprung from the group's awareness of the role played by cultural and social diversity in the process. Consequently, they underlined the importance of envisaging pilot projects within working-class milieu and underdeveloped areas and, to a lesser degree, on the response of peoples with wealthy background or living in developed countries²⁴⁹. The group further specified that the results of such activity should be presented as rigorously and as scientifically as possible²⁵⁰. The Commission, in its early stages, simply suggested an adaptation of the methods in which the teaching was delivered, shaped according to the exigencies of a certain population.

At this point, during the second meeting, members did not propose variations of content to Church official doctrine on marriage. This suggestion, though, eventually came up. One member, whose name was not revealed, called attention to the fact that Catholic doctrine at times proved abstruse or insufficient to couples and consequently, that lay reception of the teaching was uncertain. In particular, he was referring to the deterministic attitude towards sexuality, which inextricably tied its purpose with procreation. For this reason, he demanded that a revision of doctrinal content on

²⁴⁷ Tentler, *Catholics and contraception*, 173. Noonan, *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, 513.

²⁴⁸ The active role of the laity, not merely as the intermediation of Church teaching but also as a resource to develop it, was discussed even in *Lumen Gentium*.

²⁴⁹ The idea that fertility and births control could allow for rapid development and progress in underdeveloped countries was discussed yet again by Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*.

²⁵⁰ *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 4.

marriage was conducted, to make it more accessible to couples, and other group members joined him²⁵¹.

Suggestions of content adaptation to modern exigencies of marital doctrine were made with respect to another aspect of education, namely couples' knowledge and employ of the rhythm method, a method not so easy to apply without basic knowledge of physiology. At its second meeting, not only did the group favoured this natural method of contraception over artificial practices, but it also underlined the role played by pastoral teaching in its acquisition. The Commission deemed appropriate a project for pastoral instruction. The document would be intended for priests and it would cover the notions of the doctrine on marriage for which definitive guidelines could be provided. Although the project would not address the laity, the Commission's resolution suggested the desire to clarify the teaching through the pastoral channel²⁵². The novelty laid on the fact that, if the Commission had previously put the accent on the validation of rhythm from a scientific point of view, it now emphasised how its theological validity was equally important to ensure its acceptance among Catholic couples.

Placing the emphasis on couples' appreciation of the doctrine, and in this particular case of its significant bearing on the employ of the rhythm method, progressively contributed to the idea that a couple's choice must be an informed one. Furthermore, the group accentuated not only the role of medical experts, but especially of pastoral teaching and it maintained that the transmission and positive reception of the Church's official teaching on marriage, and specifically on responsible parenthood, was entrusted to those in charge of pastoral instruction. Consequently, it advised for the promulgation of a document which would extensively and exhaustively cover the topics from a pastoral perspective. According to the group, the first task was to avoid the risk of rejection by Catholic couples because of a perceived break with former teaching. In addition, it included a list of key points to be covered in the text: 1) responsible parenthood, accomplished from the very start of marriage, 2) a warning against the ideas and standards proper of those environments described as "ambient", that is prevailing or popular, 3) a reassurance that the emphasis of pastoral teaching was not on the number of children a couple could bring to life, rather on the treasure which each new life represented, 4) an appreciation of Christian prudence and other theological virtues²⁵³. Although these guidelines were still mainly developed for priests, modern exigencies of couples, such as the necessity to space the number of children and to devote greater effort to their education, were starting to receive growing recognition.

²⁵¹ *Ivi*.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, section III, 11.

²⁵³ *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 8-9.

With a greater awareness of the meaning of responsible parenthood came also the realisation that pastoral teaching could not be limited to the provision of general recommendations and of basic instructions on the regulation of births. On the contrary, priests, pastoral instructors, and parents must be provided with clear guidelines in order to define their tasks. The importance of adequate education on sexuality and marriage, according to the group, encompassed believers of all ages. They were referring to the “education of children and adolescents on the question of love”, the preparation of “young couples for marriage”, and to the “constant training of married couples”²⁵⁴. The commentary on the inadequacy of the content of pastoral teaching clarifies the suggestions put forward by the Commission. To begin with, members demanded that Church authorities sought immediate remedy to the lack of guidance offered to Catholic couples on how to responsibly exercise their parenthood. In addition, they suggested that an in-depth analysis of their exigencies, doubts, and questions as far as responsible parenthood and the regulation of births were concerned, be conducted. Therefore, direct lay involvement in the examination was implied.

At the end of its work, the majority of the Commission called for educational renewal. Through a shift from a merely scientific and demographic analysis of the reception of conjugal doctrine, to a theology-based approach, the group highlighted the need for a revision of the content of pastoral teaching. Moreover, by adequately identifying the addressers of pastoral instruction, not only priests, but also lay couples and young Catholics, the Commission also identified the areas in which doctrinal update was demanded. Finally, through the testimonies of Catholic couples gathered by some members, the group could maintain the importance of their proper education to promote independence in the exercise of responsible parenthood, in particular by being well-informed on birth control methods and the criteria for their employ. The educational role of the Church in modern times, according to the authors, was especially needed to help couples form their consciences and make responsible decisions about the call to life of new children²⁵⁵.

3.1.2. Birth control methods and education

Initially, the Commission’s analysis on the question of educating couples to the regulation of births was limited to rhythm and temperature. The group evaluated two studies conducted among two groups of women, which revealed how results in their use varied according to the degree of expertise of women on these methods. The more detailed the knowledge, the greater the chance of their

²⁵⁴ *Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, Unpublished English Version, 10.

²⁵⁵ McClory, *Turning Point*, 182-183.

success²⁵⁶. The direct correlation between familiarity with a practice and its success proved the crucial role of pastoral training in its spreading. Furthermore, at this point natural birth control methods which took advantage of a woman's infertile period to avoid a new pregnancy were the only methods considered licit by official teaching. Therefore, any pastoral effort intended for the education of couples about physiological and theological principles which determined its lawfulness would also ensure pastoral reception of Church doctrine on contraception.

That the understanding of the theological system at the basis of Church pronouncements on contraception was of central importance to a portion of the Commission is testified by some observations made during one of the meetings. Some members, "familiar with the use and pastoral diffusion of the so-called rhythm method" emphasised how the use of natural methods educated couples about self-control and conjugal chastity²⁵⁷. In particular, this group was against the opinion that the outcomes of pill use – prevention of a new pregnancy – could be assimilated to the practice of the rhythm method, for they did not believe that to take advantage of the sterile period was to positively exclude procreation. Nonetheless, at some point a growing number of members started to support the idea that the contraceptive pill could be considered a licit method in certain cases. It is probably for the great importance attached to the understanding and adherence to theological principles behind Church teaching on contraception that the Commission once again reiterated the role of education. It demanded that pastoral teaching devoted great effort to ensure that the implications which derived from the use of the contraceptive pill were understood. The report reads: "[E]n effet l'intervention d'un pareil moyen dans la vie de la femme est un élément grave qui requièrent toujours une raison particulièrement sérieuse pour être autorisée ou simplement choisie"²⁵⁸.

Until this point, only natural birth control methods and the contraceptive pill were taken into consideration by the Commission. Moreover, the accent was placed on Catholic reception of theological principles rather than on pastoral necessities. But a shift occurred, due to the turmoil caused by lay and clerical publications on the topic, and members evaluated the possibility of a pronouncement to be issued by Catholic authorities²⁵⁹. Therefore, they considered the hypothesis of

²⁵⁶*Report of the First Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 6–7. See also Richard J. Fehring, "A Historical Review of the Catholic Scientists Who Answered the Call of *Humanae Vitae*." In *Humanae Vitae, 50 Years Later: Embracing God's Vision for Marriage, Love, and Life*, ed. Theresa Notare (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 153-155.

²⁵⁷ *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, sec. III, 10.

²⁵⁸ *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 14. The wording used by the Commission's general secretary is similar to the adjective used by Pius XII in his 1951 speech. There, he allowed for the use of the birth control methods when "grave motives" existed behind such choice. Pius XII, "Discorso di Sua Santità Pio PP. XII alle Partecipanti al Congresso della Unione Cattolica Italiana Ostetriche."

²⁵⁹ Chapter One, 1.6; 1.6.3.

a universal statement covering Church position on contraception and the argumentations at the base of its stance, especially in the case of a lift of the ban. However, a considerable number of members, many of which worked in the demography, sociology, and economy section, advised against such a solution for it would be neither definitive, nor viable for every people due mainly to cultural differences in the understanding of sexuality, responsible parenthood, parental roles, and marriage. Indeed, they underlined how behaviours towards marriage, sex, and love were highly influenced by cultural factors. Thus, a wide-ranging document would fail to embrace cultural variation and different interpretations among societies of topics relating to marriage, e.g. sexuality, the distinction between maternal and paternal role, and might result in the opposition to a pronouncement in favour of contraception²⁶⁰.

Furthermore, the medical and psychological section registered how Catholics were mostly troubled by the question of methods, more than by theological principles regulating their use²⁶¹. Therefore, a substantial group was suggesting that not only would no statement address the doubts of all couples around the globe, but also that the main area in which they asked for guidance was that of methods²⁶². The educational role of the Church in modern times, according to the majority, was especially needed to help couples form their consciences and make responsible decisions about the call to life of new children. Despite acknowledging that “[T]he conscientious decision to be made by spouses about the number of children is not a matter of small importance”, it is clearly maintained that such decision should be made following one’s conscience and not strict guidelines²⁶³. At the end of the Commission’s working, the emphasis of pastoral teaching on birth control methods was placed on the formation of consciences and less on theological principles²⁶⁴.

²⁶⁰ *Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, Unpublished English Version (May 14th, 1965), RWL, 5/02, 21-23.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁶² These observations were based on the practical experience of some members involved in pastoral teaching and rhythm clinics. However, it should be noticed that they mainly worked with Western populations, therefore it might as well be that the need for Church guidance on birth control methods was not universal, but rather a cultural phenomenon.

²⁶³ McClory, *Turning Point*, 183.

²⁶⁴ As argued in Chapter One, 1.6.2, that of conscience was a concept of outstanding importance in the US, not merely in Catholics circles, but also to civil society. Scholar Cajka has proven that the formal recognition of the right to conscientious objection was actually first demanded to relieved the consciences of Catholics in matter pertaining to public and civil life, e.g. some Catholics asked to be dispensed from participating in the Vietnam War and in the distribution campaign of artificial birth control methods. Cajka, *Follow Your Conscience*, 45-85.

3.2. Conjugal love

The role of conjugal love in marriage and its ranking within the hierarchy of ends became a matter of debate from the early stages of the Commission's activity. In particular, the growing appreciation of its primary purpose in fostering marital communion and the creation of a loving community for living and future offspring gave rise to the controversy. The contention between those who would rank conjugal love among the first ends of marriage, and those who would not, was partly supported by alternative interpretations of existing official teaching, also highlighted by historian Noonan, and partly by cultural changes which took place between the 1950s and 1960s. In his analysis of the history of contraception by Catholic theologians and canonists, the American historian signalled a gradual, yet fundamental shift in the role assigned to conjugal love. The revolution, according to Noonan, was started by German theologian Dietrich von Hildebrand who, for the first time "taught that love was a requirement of lawful, marital coition" at the end of the 1920s²⁶⁵. This new approach, although not openly praised, was cautiously accepted by Pius XI in *Casti Connubii*. By quoting the Roman Catechism's definition of matrimonial fidelity, the pontiff effectively affirmed that it required a union of love²⁶⁶. Here love, despite not being primarily understood as physical interaction, was given a role in marriage which former teaching had overlooked²⁶⁷. Admittedly, "no attempt was made to develop the relation between coitus and the perfection of the other spouse and the communion of lives. But, for the first time in a papal document, coitus and love were linked"²⁶⁸.

The place of conjugal love for couples was discussed again by his successor, Pius XII²⁶⁹. In 1951, he clarified that the primary end of the institution of marriage, as designed by the Creator, was not the reciprocal improvement of the spouses. Instead, its primary ends were the procreation and the education of offspring. Moreover, according to the pope, other ends, although intended by nature, were subjected to the primary end. However, Noonan managed to dispel the idea that the papal teaching was limited to a rigid hierarchy. In his book, citing the pontiff, he proceeded to explain that the conjugal act was understood as a collaboration of husband and wife, through which the two spouses expressed their mutual donation²⁷⁰. Thus, the basis for a new interpretation and classification of conjugal love within the hierarchy of ends was established not only culturally, but also theologically.

²⁶⁵ Noonan, *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, 495.

²⁶⁶ Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, par. 23.

²⁶⁷ Noonan, *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, 495.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 496.

²⁶⁹ In particular, Noonan referred to the pontiff's speeches delivered to the Italian Catholic union of Obstetrical Nurses in 1951 and at the Congress of Haematology in 1958.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 500.

3.2.1. Ends and nature of marriage

The meaning of conjugal love in marriage is intertwined with that of the hierarchy of ends. In order to clarify its role, the Commission had to discuss its place and significance in relation to the other purposes, set forward by Pope Pius XI in *Casti Connubii*²⁷¹. Initially, the Commission agreed on the fact that traditional doctrine should not be modified in order to comply with modern demands on the part of the faithful. Consequently, it did not question the hierarchy that would classify procreation as the primary end and conjugal love as secondary.

Nonetheless, it pointed out that its implications for practical problems posed by modernity should be clarified²⁷². In particular, some theologians maintained that official pronouncements were conditioned by the historical conditions of the time period in which they were pronounced²⁷³. Just as the teaching on the primary and secondary ends of marriage was continually assessed after the promulgation of *Casti Connubii*, its content and significance further clarified by Pope Pius XII and moral theologians, in a similar way, the Commission had the right to question the implications of the hierarchy established by Pope Pius XI. The debate was centred around new elements which might further the understanding of conjugal love in marriage. Physiologic data on the female menstrual cycle proved that not each and every marital act resulted in procreation, the primary end, thus allowing for a re-assessment of the hierarchy. The Commission largely concurred that conjugal love was at the centre of marriage. Moreover, the group would not classify it as a secondary end. From lay members' perspective, the call to life and conjugal love should be treated with the same importance and they described them as two facets of the same coin. On the one hand, there was a closer and more imminent purpose, the creation of a loving community. On the other hand, was the more comprehensive and appropriate purpose, the generation of life. The latter was intended to perfect the former. However, some members complained that this interpretation was tendentious. According to them, it gave conjugal love the status of constitutive element of marriage.

Here, two different approaches to the hierarchy of ends are identifiable. On the one hand, is the vitalistic one, which accentuated the achievement of the primary end, the call to life of new offspring; on the other hand, is a more personalist approach which shifted the focus on a couple's fruitfulness

²⁷¹ See Chapter One, 1.3.1.

²⁷² *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 1.

²⁷³ The episode took place during the second meeting of the Commission. In the report, de Riedmatten did not clarify which member suggested this idea. However, based on the timeline proposed in Chapter Two, it is highly probable that Reverend Bernard Häring and Canon de Loch supported and proposed the idea that official pronouncements should be historically contextualised and their meaning and implications continually assessed.

and commitment to fecundity²⁷⁴. Supporters of the latter approach contested the use of primary and secondary as a way to refer to the ends of marriage for they reinforced the idea that some aspects were important, whereas others were not. Moreover, they maintained that the definition of marriage as set by *Casti Connubii* only considered in its institutional character greatly emphasised the importance of fertility and it did not allow for conjugal love to be an integral constituent²⁷⁵. But if, as it had been demonstrated by modern physiology, not each and every marital act resulted in procreation, it became clear that the meaning of creativity and of marital fecundity was layered and the role of conjugal love central. Therefore, the hierarchy of ends of marriage was effectively questioned and, progressively, procreation was given a lesser degree of importance as opposed to fecundity.

The two different approaches, one more ‘conservative’, the other more ‘progressive’, reflected a split within the Commission on the understanding of the place of conjugal love in marriage. The two tendencies became evident especially among theologians. Nonetheless, even lay members expressed themselves and they demanded a pronouncement on the crucial role of love, even if its bearing had not been fully clarified as far as the place of conjugal love was concerned. At some point the liberal majority defined the hierarchy of ends as “certainly inadequate for setting out the complete, established doctrine on marriage for the faithful today”²⁷⁶. In particular, the group denounced how “too often love is depicted as something accidental or supererogatory, when in point of fact it is the principle of the genesis of conjugal union”²⁷⁷.

Therefore, “[C]onjugal love and fecundity [became] in no way opposed, but complement[ed] one another [...]”²⁷⁸. Indeed, marriage, understood as a loving community, could be established only if selfless mutual donation was achieved for the creation of new life. Conversely, generation of new offspring and its education were only attainable within a loving family. In this way, conjugal love and fecundity were placed on the same level of importance. As a consequence, even the hierarchy of ends was transformed. The former primary end, procreation and education of children, depended upon the creation of a loving community, the tangible proof of the spouses’ reciprocal love, which prompted them to generously, yet prudently generate new lives. Because the attainment of conjugal love thus prevailed over procreation, couples could at times pursue the former without detriment to

²⁷⁴ *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, sec. II, 6.

²⁷⁵ *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 4.

²⁷⁶ *Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, Unpublished English Version, 9.

²⁷⁷ *Ivi*.

²⁷⁸ McClory, *Turning Point*, 185.

the latter. One major development, therefore, is the abandoning of the terms primary and secondary to refer to procreation and conjugal love respectively and, consequently, a lesser degree of importance placed on the realisation of the former primary end. In addition, the majority affirmed the centrality of conjugal love and its superior status among the other ends.

3.2.2. Birth control methods and conjugal love

The developments in the understanding of the lawfulness of birth control methods in relation to conjugal love, reflected the Commission's progressive re-evaluation of its centrality in marriage. To begin with, the group highlighted the crucial difference between simple procreation on the one hand, and the realisation of a loving community on the other. Members altogether underlined that the negligence on the part of past theologians in clarifying the implications of the dichotomy between mere fertility and marital fruitfulness had serious consequences. In particular, it created confusion among the laity, which was generally unable to fully grasp why acts accomplished during the sterile periods were considered licit, while those achieved through more positive methods were not²⁷⁹.

Therefore, in order to clarify the reasons which brought theologians to hold this view and to dispel lay doubts on this subject, members focused on general principles regulating marriage and sexuality. Moreover, they tried to expand on how those principles applied to periodic continence and to the contraceptive pill²⁸⁰. At this point, the third meeting, the majority of the Commission still maintained that traditional teaching on the primary end was not to be modified and, consequently, that a moral act was one whose integrity was preserved, that is, in which the union of the egg and the sperm was not impeded. These conditions would be met both in the case of a couple's practicing periodic continence and using the contraceptive pill. This conclusion represented a first element of novelty in the analysis led by the Commission, for it would allow for the lawfulness of the contraceptive pill.

However, a further step towards the lift of the ban on contraception was taken when the group maintained that, as far as the couple was preserving the integrity of the act, some form of birth control was not only licit, but also desired. It immediately clarified that the orientation towards the realisation of the primary end should be preserved²⁸¹. Nonetheless, as seen previously, at some point the majority of the Commission did change its view on the hierarchy of ends and it maintained that procreation

²⁷⁹ *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, sec. I, 4. It is not specified what it is intended by "positive methods". Presumably, the expression refers to the contraceptive pill. This is a plausible hypothesis for in the third chapter of the report a disagreement on its lawfulness is reported. Moreover, no other methods are discussed in the report.

²⁸⁰ *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 10.

²⁸¹ *Ivi*.

and conjugal love should be given equal importance. The basis for the lift of the ban on contraception had already been provided when the group had strongly recommended that couples regulated their fertility. Certainly, thus far, members could agree only on the lawfulness of periodic continence and, although only partially, of the contraceptive pill. But with the increased membership and a greater presence of lay people, the unwavering support that the practice of periodic continence had received before started to weaken. The majority of the psychology section and several other members questioned its efficiency, both as far as its biological and psychological outcomes were concerned²⁸². Furthermore, as far as the contraceptive pill is concerned, a critical judgement on this method did not prevail. In the end, the placing of conjugal love above the other ends of marriage brought the majority to maintain that, by reason of a couple's duty to be responsible, allowed the majority to maintain that spouses could freely choose in conscience which method for the regulation of births to adopt. This was possible to affirm because a couple's awareness in the exercise of their parental responsibility was understood as a direct consequence of an improved appreciation of conjugal love.

3.3. Sexuality

The role of sexuality in marriage – here understood as the physical, intimate relationship between two spouses – started to be acknowledged and discussed by theologians only relatively late if compared to the long-standing tradition of moral theology. Indeed, Flemish monk Denis de Carthusian firstly posed the question on whether spouses had a right to pursue love from carnal pleasure in marital intercourse in Renaissance time²⁸³. Furthermore, it was only later, during the 19th century, that French moral theologian, Jean-Pierre Gury effectively fostered the link between spiritual and carnal love. He maintained that marital acts had four lawful purposes: procreation, return of the conjugal *debitum*, preventive measure against incontinence, longing for nurturing harmonious relationship which fostered marital love²⁸⁴. This approach was further explored one century later by German theologian, Dietrich von Hildebrand, who supported the personalist perspective shared by a considerable number of Commission members. Therefore, the meaning of sexuality in marriage was not firstly assessed by the Commission, but it had a history throughout the tradition of moral theology.

Certainly though, the lively debate on the topic among members was encouraged by other factors. To begin with, from the years 1963 to 1966, the same years during which the Commission met, the sexual revolution was taking place in western societies, particularly the American one²⁸⁵.

²⁸² *Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 32.

²⁸³ Noonan, *Contraception*, 304-306.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 491.

²⁸⁵ See Chapter One, 1.6.1.

The papal Commission probably did not approve of all the stances maintained by promoters and supporters of this social movement, e.g. liberation from the traditional view on sexuality which promoted heterosexual, monogamous relationships sanctioned by marriage. But, aside from preaching about the normalisation of premarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, pornography, and the legalisation of abortion, sexual activists also encouraged the spreading and selling of birth control methods, especially the contraceptive pill. The latter was a topic already common among lay, clerical, and academic Catholic milieu. The ongoing social turmoil caused by the sexual revolution, in particular by the liberalisation of contraception, contributed to the debate even among Commission members.

In addition to the sexual revolution, another factor most likely encouraged members to evaluate the role of sexuality in marriage, namely a renewed interest in psychology by some priests and religious scholars. Modern psychology was not born in the 1960s. Indeed, its origin can be traced back to the end of the 19th century. However, during the 1950s liberal clergymen became attracted to the discipline, and most notably they were fascinated by its contribution to the traditional doctrine on conscience²⁸⁶. For example, in 1954 delivering a series of lectures, Bernard Häring had prompted other confessors and seminarians to study this subject, in order to better comprehend the exigencies of their penitents. He believed that “[A] confessor might wrongly urge a penitent to abstain from sexual activity, although sexual gratification was easing a painful neurosis”²⁸⁷. Once established, the link between conscience and sexuality was further explored by the theology and psychology sections of the Commission, probably incited by its members: liberal theologians like Bernard Häring and lay couples and doctors already favouring contraception, like von Rossum.

3.3.1. The role of sexuality

The evolution from the Commission’s original stance on the role of sexuality in marriage to its final view is considerable. At the beginning, the issue was assessed from a purely medical perspective. Members demanded that scientific research devoted special effort in developing methods of birth control suitable to the exigencies of Christian love and the moral teaching²⁸⁸. The focus was on the birth control methods and on the mechanics of the act to ensure adherence to the existing doctrine.

²⁸⁶ Cajka, *Follow Your Conscience*, 121–130. The role of psychology in the formation of the faithful’s conscience was later acknowledged even during Vatican II. A solicitation to all priests to deepen their knowledge of sociology and psychology is present in *Gaudium et Spes*.

²⁸⁷ Cajka, *Follow Your Conscience*, 124.

²⁸⁸ *Report of the First Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 15.

Later on, a shift occurred, from the morality of an act to the role of sexuality in marriage. In particular, it was analysed to further explain the role of conjugal love. To the Commission, it proved a valid and proper mean for the realisation of love. Sexuality was considered as the carnal dimension through which the divine love, which unites the spouses, became apparent within marital relations. Yet, it remained one among the other aspects that characterised charity between spouses. Indeed, despite acknowledging its importance, the group warned against an idea which according to them was becoming excessively common at the time, that marital acts were *absolutely* necessary. On the contrary, they maintained that Catholic spouses should progressively discard a purely physical view on conjugal love in favour of a spiritualisation of their relationship²⁸⁹. To support this stance, two arguments were advanced. On the one hand, acts of tenderness and physical touch between the spouses were praised and their importance to enhance conjugal love emphasised, thus downplaying the role of sexual acts almost equating them to other forms of physical demonstration of affection. On the other hand, some members clarified that the exercise of periods of continence in marriage was dissimilar from the continence demanded of non-married couples. Therefore, the common objection against this natural method of contraception was rejected, for the effort required by the practice apparently was considered as serious but not great.

When the role of sexuality started to be acknowledged and discussed, no change in magisterial teaching was demanded, nor was the vision of marriage much affected by the special consideration physical relations between the spouses were receiving. Eventually though, sexuality was described as a means for the spouses to know and understand each other. Nonetheless, Catholic couples should be reminded of the human aspect of sexuality. This, in turn, would ensure that sexuality did not cloud the importance of procreation, the education of offspring, and love²⁹⁰.

However, the debate on this topic became particularly lively within members of the psychology section. Lay couples in particular demanded that the Church openly expressed itself on the positive value of sexuality. It is important to notice that such necessity was voiced mostly by those members who had practical knowledge and understanding of sexual activity, for this portion of the Commission was composed of many married experts. On the other hand, there were clerical figures, thus unmarried theologians, moralists, and priests in general who, despite discussing the topic by virtue of their theoretical knowledge, had no real experience of the practical implications of the doctrine. To support this stance, data made available by psychology experts and the experiences of Catholic couples, gathered in the questionnaire and studies conducted in France, North America, Great Britain, and

²⁸⁹ *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 5.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

other countries should be taken into consideration²⁹¹. Therefore, it becomes clear that a shift from the medical perspective on the impact of sexuality on marriage to a psychological evaluation of its bearing to a couple's relationship occurred. At the beginning, the role of sexuality was assessed in relation to the morality of certain birth control methods. At the end, this aspect of a couple's relation was recognised major importance. Although the majority still placed high value on the exercise of conjugal chastity, it affirmed that: "[A] right ordering toward the good of the child within the conjugal and familial community pertains to the essence of human sexuality"²⁹².

3.3.2. Church attitudes towards sexuality

Early into the debate, the papal Commission criticised the determinist attitude towards sexual activity characteristic of Church teaching on marriage. In particular, some progressive members underlined how the direct connection between sexuality and procreation – the purpose of the former being the accomplishment of the latter – had been weakened by the discovery of the infertile period in a woman's menstrual cycle. Indeed, the existence of sterile periods implicated that not each and every sexual act was generative. Thus, the idea that the role of sexuality was primarily procreative was questioned and the necessity to define its meaning from a non-generative perspective arose.

The Commission did not totally reject the procreative purpose of sexual activity; but it acknowledged that sexuality constituted a fundamental component of marriage: "Grâce propre d'une institution essentiellement finalisée vers la procreation, l'amour conjugal est marqué par son implantation charnelle"²⁹³. Therefore, thanks to this new appreciation of sexuality, not only seen as a mean to achieve procreation, but also as a concrete expression of the spouses' reciprocal love, members exhorted religious authorities to be less severe and to judge less harshly on a couple's weaknesses, in view of their willingness to call new people to life and to preserve a dignified communion²⁹⁴.

Furthermore, because sexuality was thus understood as an essential to a stable marriage, the rigorous stance held by some past and contemporary theologians –Ford *docet* – that each act posed not to procreate was sinful was no longer tenable²⁹⁵. According to the majority, aside from the achievement of procreation, sexuality had a further meaning and purpose, presented above, and the time had come that the Church adopted an official position on this topic, one preferably less

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 29-33.

²⁹² McClory, *Turning Point*, 177.

²⁹³ *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 5.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁹⁵ An example of the rigorous stance against contraception is given by Kaiser in a report of one of the Ford's speeches during the final meeting. McClory, *Turning Point*, 124.

determinist and rigorous than the past. The suggestion put forward at the end of the 1966 meeting was that any moral stance on sexuality should take into consideration not “the direct fecundity of each and every particular act” but the entirety of a couple’s sexual life, even the exigencies of human nature or the desire to space children to foster conjugal love²⁹⁶.

3.3.3. The morality of marital acts

The Commission’s debate about the morality of marital acts was sparked off by a lecture on ‘Nature and against Nature in Marriage’ prepared by one of the members²⁹⁷. The author explained that sexual relations are not procreative in and of themselves. Procreation is a natural process which may occur as a result of a human act. Whenever two spouses put obstacles in the way of nature – be it prior, concomitant, or subsequent to the act – they opposed it deliberately and knowingly. However, whenever two spouses purposely united during the infertile period, they consciously performed an individual sterile act. Therefore, they respected its integrity and they were not going against nature.

But the theological explanation on the morality of acts posed during sterile periods became a source of disagreement among members, more than the basis for widespread agreement on the relation between sexuality and conjugal chastity. A group of lay representatives took issue with the view on marital acts held by some theologians and moralists. The former denounced that the latter may at times have been too absorbed in the subtleties concerning the unfolding of an act, to the detriment of other crucial aspects, first among everything the real meaning of conjugal fecundity. In particular, lay members denounced how theologians might have failed to confront with the juxtaposition between mere fertility and marital fruitfulness, explained above²⁹⁸.

In addition, the Commission also touched on the morality of incomplete sexual relationships. In particular, it was highlighted that a too vague definition on the part of theologians might result in lay confusion on this type of acts. Some members pointed out that couples, seriously fearing committing a sin, might find themselves refraining from giving any form of physical touch. Further discussion into the meaning of incomplete sexual relationships might have provided greater insight into the physical display of affection and, therefore, into the morality of marital acts. However, the Commission did not expand on this topic for it lacked sufficient time to discuss it²⁹⁹.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.,177.

²⁹⁷ *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, sec. III, 9. The author of the paper, delivered as a lecture to the Commission, is not cited in the report.

²⁹⁸ See 3.2.2.

²⁹⁹ *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 11.

Nonetheless, the critical remarks on the incomprehension between theologians and moralists on the one hand, and the laity on the other, were welcomed by the majority of the Commission for, at the end of its meetings, it affirmed that sexuality was the criteria to pass judgment on the morality of marital intercourse. They affirmed: “[...] the morality of sexual actions is thus to be judged by the true exigencies of the nature of human sexuality”³⁰⁰. Therefore, according to the majority, the morality of an act resided no longer primarily in the openness to offspring but rather in the quality of the sexual relations among spouses.

3.3.4. Birth control methods and sexuality

The Commission discussed the relation between sexuality and birth control methods from its first meeting. At this point, only two methods of contraception were being accessed: natural practices, like rhythm or temperature, and the contraceptive pill. Members openly praised natural methods of birth control for they ensured adherence to Church teaching on contraception whilst allowing parents to space or limit the number of children. However, they also admitted that evidently these practices required a considerable level of self-control on the part of the two spouses that should abstain from sexual intercourse during the fertile period and, in case of irregular menstrual cycles, for a longer time interval³⁰¹. Furthermore, while recognising natural birth control methods great merit, the Commission nonetheless warned against too much of an emphasis put on its value³⁰². Indeed, the studies analysed by the Commission had underlined that pastoral teaching could certainly help in spreading these methods but also that their use was not practicable for every couple, due to varying reasons, like menstrual irregularities, menopause, or breastfeeding.

Nonetheless, according to the group, periodic continence fostered the acquisition of self-control. By exercising continence, couples also had a chance to acquire temperance, a Christian virtue. Regardless of the downsides of the practice – long periods of abstinence and its limited applicability for a low, yet not entirely negligible number of couples – at its early stages, the Commission reaffirmed its unwavering support of it. It maintained that periodic continence fostered conjugal love for it required couples to grow in mutual respect, self-control, and in Christian virtues. Furthermore, members also believed that the exercise of periodic continence harmonised with the notion of responsible parenthood for it was a conscientious choice on the part of the spouses and it also preserved the integrity of marital acts.

³⁰⁰ McClory, *Turning Point*, 177.

³⁰¹ *Report of the First Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 7.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

Members were not able to reach a similar conclusion while discussing the morality of the contraceptive pill in relation to a couple's sexuality. Fundamental disagreement persisted among the group, for some lay members were convinced that, as far as the preservation of the integrity of an act was concerned, the use of the contraceptive pill could not be equated to the exercise of periodic continence. Therefore, when the first official vote was taken, no agreement could be reached on the morality of the combined oral contraceptive pill, but the entire Commission endorsed the lawfulness of the rhythm method³⁰³.

However, once the Commission was significantly enlarged and a considerable number of lay members and couples included, the unwavering support that the practice of periodic continence had received until the third meeting, started to weaken and differences between two currents of thought – one more conservative, the other more progressive – became more noticeable³⁰⁴. The majority of the psychology section and several other members questioned the efficiency of natural methods, the temperature one in particular, both as far as its biological and psychological outcomes were concerned. The major catalyst for this shift were letters of North American couples gathered by Patrick and Patricia Crowley. The report reads: “[I]mpressive evidence collected by Mr. and Mrs. Crowley led the majority of the group to doubt whether this method [temperature test], which is permissible, could answer the needs of the modern world and especially Catholic couples, when it comes to regulating births”³⁰⁵. On the other hand, a minority upheld the conservative stance on natural methods “that for many married couples [these methods were] a privileged opportunity for progress on account of the continence demanded which is achieved through love and not just through respect of the law”³⁰⁶. The conclusions reached by Rendu and his wife, active in medical and pastoral teaching of the rhythm method, granted this view additional support.

By the end of the fifth meeting, the Commission's initial stance on the morality of natural methods and immorality of artificial practices had significantly changed. As far as the former are concerned, the group still supported the idea that the meaning of sexuality “is maintained and promoted especially by conjugal chastity”³⁰⁷. However, this limitation achieved through natural methods, which entailed continence and abstinence, was not openly praised. Both the questionnaires collected by the Crowleys and the Potvins, and psychological data on the nature of the marital act presented during the last two meetings seemed to confirm that rhythm and temperature, far from

³⁰³ Chapter Two, 2.5.1.

³⁰⁴ *Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 32.

³⁰⁵ *Ivi.*

³⁰⁶ *Ivi.*

³⁰⁷ McClory, *Turning Point*, 177.

fostering conjugal love and marital communion, proved useful and successful only in a limited number of cases³⁰⁸. Consequently, the reasons put forward in the *Majority Report* to support periodic continence differ significantly from those presented above. Previously mutual respect, self-control, and the acquisition of Christian virtues were cited as positive outcomes. In the end, periodic continence received lukewarm support for it proved useful to preserve “the good of one of the spouses (physical or psychic well-being), or because of what are called professional necessities”³⁰⁹.

In contrast to the majority’s ambivalent attitude towards natural methods of birth control, the group granted artificial one growing consensus, at least within the psychology section, composed mainly by representatives of the laity, and the progressive members of the theology section. Whilst remaining in accordance with the teaching put forward by Council fathers, that “[M]arriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children”, the majority altogether affirmed that “[A] right ordering toward the good of the child within the conjugal and familial community pertains to the essence of human sexuality”³¹⁰. In order to practice their parenthood responsibly, that is prudently, generously, and by fostering a loving community, couples had a duty to also improve the quality of their sexual life. Sexuality was given greater importance than in the early stages of the Commission’s debate, to the point that it was considered as a condition sine qua non conjugal love and responsible parenthood could not be attained. The “egotistical, hedonistic and contraceptive way which turns the practice of married life in an arbitrary fashion from its ordination to a human, generous and prudent fecundity” was still condemned³¹¹. However, if the fostering of sexual life was pursued by a couple in order to exercise their parental responsibility and grow fonder in mutual love, spouses could, in good conscience, chose to use whichever means of contraception they deemed more suitable³¹². In conclusion, sexuality became not only the criteria to judge the morality of an act, but also a valid reason to suggest and maintain the lawfulness of artificial methods of birth control.

³⁰⁸ Chapter Four, 4.1.2; 4.2.2.

³⁰⁹ McClory, *Turning Point*, 176.

³¹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, II, chapter 1, par. 50.; McClory, *Turning Point*, 177.

³¹¹ McClory, *Turning Point*, 178.

³¹² The choice was to be made according to the objective criteria listed in the *Majority Report*. The instructions provided by the authors are: abortion is excluded for it is the elimination of offspring already conceived; sterilisation is usually excluded for its irreversible nature; the respect of the meaning of the mutual donation and of generation within a loving community must be ensured; the means should be proportionate to the need for avoiding a new pregnancy for a period of time or forever; there must be an evaluation of the disadvantages intrinsic to each method as well as of the availability of a certain method.

3.4. Responsible parenthood

The expression “responsible parenthood” appeared in a conciliar text before it was chosen as the title of the *Majority Report* by its authors. Indeed, *Gaudium et Spes* affirmed: “when there is question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspects of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives, but must be determined by objective standards. These, based on the nature of the human person and his acts, preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love. Such a goal cannot be achieved unless the virtue of conjugal chastity is sincerely practiced”³¹³. The gathering of bishops clearly stated that couples at times might find themselves compelled to regulate the transmission of life. In the responsible exercise of their parenthood, spouses were not left without guidance; on the contrary, they followed a set of moral criteria set forth by doctrinal teaching on marriage. The fathers also added: “[R]elying on these principles, sons of the Church may not undertake methods of birth control which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of the divine law”³¹⁴. In adherence with ecclesiastical teaching, parents not only had a right, but also a moral obligation to regulate births. However, such regulation was to be attained only through methods morally accepted by the institution.

The expression might have become popularised by the renowned conciliar text; however, the notion was not new to Catholic teaching on marriage. Albeit not referring to it as responsible parenthood, theologians and moralists had already underlined how Augustine’s view of matrimony actually contained a reference to it. According to him, the purpose of marriage was not solely procreation. On the contrary, he stated that the three goods of matrimony were permanence, fidelity, and openness to offspring. Offspring, though, did not referred to mere reproduction, but rather to the generation of new children of Christ³¹⁵. Therefore, the idea of human procreation being different from mere animal reproduction, and consequently of it being responsible, was already embedded within the doctrine, as well as the necessity to educate the offspring. Education, then, and especially religious education, is an aspect inevitably linked to historical conditions and to cultural understanding of this phenomenon³¹⁶. The re-assessment of the impact of education in the regulation of births in the 1960s was probably bounded to the cultural background, in particular to the awareness raised by birth control activists and political authorities of the relevance of new standard of living. Furthermore, the emphasis put on education as opposed to mere animal procreation in all probability is linked to the

³¹³ *Gaudium et Spes*, par. 51.

³¹⁴ *Ivi.*

³¹⁵ Noonan, *Contraception*, 127.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

progressive rejection of the terms primary and secondary ends to refer to procreation and conjugal love respectively.

3.4.1. The meaning of the expression

The notion of responsible parenthood, which entailed the procreation and education of offspring, had been constantly teaching by theologians, although the emphasis had been put on the former and the latter had been greatly influenced by cultural developments. During the early meetings of the Commission, some theologians discussing the subject pointed out that official pronouncements were in fact conditioned by the historical conditions of the time period in which they were pronounced³¹⁷. In particular, one member of the group took into consideration the most recent official teaching on marriage, *Casti Connubii*, and it carried out a critical analysis of the text in relation to the social and demographic context which Pius XI was considering when he promulgated the encyclical³¹⁸. He maintained that the pontiff had barely mentioned the notion not because he had failed to confront with contemporary social issues, but rather because he had developed a marital teaching which reflected and answered the exigencies of the period in which it was promulgated, one characterised by a simple natalism and not threatened by exponential population growth. Therefore, this member was not insinuating that *Casti Connubii* was wrong in neglecting the importance of responsible generation of offspring, but that its premises were different from those the Commission was faced with. For this reason, a historical contextualisation of former official teaching was recommended. The report reads:

“certains énoncés non irréfutables de l’Autorité restaient sujets à révision” and also that “[C]e qui est attendu de l’Eglise [...], c’est une doctrine qui par l’approfondissement et la mise en évidence de son contenu de toujours, soit susceptible de fournir clairement les prémisses de solutions adéquates aux questions contemporaines”³¹⁹.

In the 1960s, new interpretations of responsible parenthood became possible, as a consequence of societal changes, e.g. the drop of infant mortality rate, improved standards of living and education. Progressively, the entirety of the Commission acknowledged the necessity to discuss the link between historical context and marital doctrine. The papal Commission acknowledged that more and more

³¹⁷ *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, sec. I, 1.

³¹⁸ See Chapter One, 1.3.

³¹⁹ *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, sec. I, 1-2.

certain socio-cultural, medical, and economic changes had impelled Christian couples to delve into the essence of the notion of responsible parenthood and its implications. At this point, the group could proceed in two different ways: by demanding a change of direction for the Church's teaching on birth control, or by examining the existing doctrine and provide more adequate answers. Initially, the Commission chose the latter: "[L]'Eglise n'est pas démunie pour répondre à cette nouvelle situation: tant sa doctrine du primat de la personne que des fins du mariage, tant son enseignement social que sa pastorale sont à même de montrer l'admirable continuité de l'enseignement de la foi et son actualité devant chaque situation nouvelle"³²⁰.

The reference point to situate new implications of the notion of responsible parenthood became Pius XII's 1951 speech to the Italian Catholic union of Obstetrical Nurses. The Commission agreed on the fact that the pontiff's statement had answered exhaustively the questions of those couples who, for serious motives, wished to limit the number of children for a period of time or even indefinitely. Nonetheless, the group went further into detail. In the conscientious exercise of their paternity and maternity and in the accomplishment of the first end, couples should act primarily in regard to its object, the offspring, more than to the act itself. According to the Commission, this distinction set human procreation apart from simple animal reproduction. Furthermore, they agreed that the generation of offspring demanded coherence, free will, and selfless love. Members, therefore, pointed out that the procreation of new lives was not simply a question of quantity, but rather of giving and loving. In addition to the good of the progeny, parents should take into consideration the demands of the community in which they planned to raise their children. For these reasons, the group maintained that the number of children was not an issue to be settled *a priori* according to a series of fixed and predetermined guidelines. On the contrary, the delicate matter of quantity was to be resolved by parents with the guidance of moral criteria set by the institution.

In continuity with the teaching put forward by Pius XII, the group asserted that parents should welcome any type of expert help in order to make an informed choice about the number of children. Nonetheless, the choice remained theirs³²¹. The novelty of this passage lies in the claim of independence for lay people. Without making a direct reference to conscience, the Commission was able to affirm that the exercise of responsible parenthood was a couple's private task, an intimate and private duty. Further evidence that according to the group, neither governmental, nor religious institutions had jurisdiction over it, is provided by the following statement: "s'il est évident qu'on ne saurait tolérer d'intervention indue de l'Autorité civile, il n'est pas inutile d'inciter certains prêtres à

³²⁰ *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 7.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

rester très réservés sur ce sujet et à ne pas s'arroger des droits de décision qui ne leur appartiennent pas"³²². Some members were underlining how responsible parenthood would be a direct consequence of pastoral education and proper teaching on conscience. Therefore, once instructed, parents did not need a mediator between their choice and the doctrine.

Certainly though, parents were bound to take into account a hierarchy of values, clarified by theological teaching and spread through pastoral instruction. The Commission suggested that four major points be included and clarified in a document intended for pastoral teaching: responsibility did not equate limitation; responsibility should not be presented as a way of escape; responsibility was better understood as freedom of choice; responsibility entailed conscientious education of children, selfless donation towards the offspring, and careful thought of the eugenic and social repercussions of one's family life. Members altogether underlined that the existing teaching considered during previous meetings put greater emphasis on procreation to the detriment of education. The latter, however, was an aspect not to be neglected given certain historical changes.

Several members of the psychology section encouraged critical reflection on responsible parenthood and the maturity of couples³²³. The two concepts, indeed, related to one another. The report reads: '[I]t is maturity alone which allows free and responsible beings to fulfil their exalted mission to bring beings into this world'³²⁴. According to these members, a couple which matured in its mission did not understand responsible parenthood as limitation, nor did it cease to demonstrate its generosity towards the call to life of new offspring. On the contrary, it was precisely through maturity that couples could remain open to the mission God had entrusted them. In the end, the majority came to the conclusion that a couple's awareness in the exercise of responsible parenthood was understood as a direct consequence of an improved appreciation of conjugal love.

But the group went even further with their explanation of this concept. Indeed, responsible parenthood was not simply a direct outcome of a re-evaluation of the doctrine on the ends of marriage. The name of the text might constitute an indication of the importance attributed by its authors to this particular aspect, among all other subjects discussed during the five meetings. In fact, pastoral teaching, conjugal love, and sexuality were all covered in the *Majority Report*, but their meaning is understood in relation to responsible parenthood.

³²² *Report of the Third Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 8.

³²³ *Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 29-31. In particular, the American doctor Cavanagh, German professor Görres, French doctor Bertolus, Patrick and Patricia Crowley, and Laurent and Colette Potvin.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

To begin with, is the attitude towards conjugal love and procreation. The two became complementary once, during the fourth meeting, where members denounced the emphasis put on procreation to the detriment of education in the upbringing of children. Conscientious procreation, according to the majority of the Commission, required careful consideration for the future of both living and unborn offspring, and a loving family. Therefore, responsible generation should contrast mere animal reproduction. On a similar note, even the importance of sexuality could be appreciated in relation to parental responsibility. Indeed, sexuality was identified as an element crucial to the fostering of a loving community, considered as a prerequisite for the procreation and adequate education of offspring. Furthermore, even pastoral teaching acquired a new function once responsible parenthood gained prominence.

At the beginning, the education of couples translated as the teaching of Church doctrine of marriage. In the end, a further, more crucial purpose was assigned to it, that of forming the consciences of couples so that they could autonomously take responsible decisions on the generation of offspring. Even if the choice could not be arbitrary and must follow certain indications, the group effectively demanded a change in Church doctrine, namely the abolition of the ban on artificial contraception. They held this position on the basis of the importance in modern times of responsible parenthood³²⁵.

3.4.2. Birth control methods and responsible parenthood

As for the case of pastoral teaching, conjugal love, and sexuality, and the definition of moral principles to back or reject the use of certain methods, even for responsible parenthood the Commission initially took into consideration only rhythm, temperature, and the contraceptive pill. On natural methods of birth regulation, the group stated: “[C]esi dépend évidemment des motivations et exige une éducation convenable des couples à propos du sexe, du mariage et de la responsabilité parentale”³²⁶. This passage, far from simply recalling the importance of proper education on periodic continence, already links the idea of birth regulation with responsible parenthood. Natural methods were recognised the possibility of fostering self-control and marital communion, and the limitation of the number of children while still preserving the integrity of marital acts. Therefore, in its early stages, the Commission concurred in its entirety with the morality of periodic continence.

As far as the contraceptive pill is concerned, initially the debate revolved around three major points: the harmfulness of the contraceptive pill in the long-and- short term, the diffusion and the side effects on foetuses of Thalidomide; the moral danger which this form of birth control might

³²⁵ McClory, *Turning Point*, 179.

³²⁶ *Report of the First Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 7.

represent³²⁷. A distinction was made between two types of oral contraceptive pills. On the one hand, were anti-nesting pills, which could be compared to abortifacients because they destroy a fertilised egg. On the other hand, was the anovulation pill, which simply put the ovaries at rest for a period of time. Following the principles and guidelines established by Pius XII in his 1958 speech to the participants to the Congress of Haematology, this method was permissible when medical conditions required its use. However, it was not possible for the group to determine whether the effects of the action of the anovulation contraceptive pill could be considered as natural. For this reason, the group suggested that the authority, namely the pope, refrained from taking a definitive stance on the morality of the contraceptive pill for the time being³²⁸.

The debate on the morality of periodic continence and of the contraceptive pill, as seen above, focused especially on the mechanics of marital acts. In the case of rhythm and temperature, the Commission was able to determine its morality on the basis of the preservation of its unitive, natural character. A similar conclusion could not be reached for the contraceptive pill. Notwithstanding the scientific analysis provided to determine the morality of these methods, a broader perspective was adopted. Indeed, members suggested that, instead of focusing solely on the mechanics of marital acts, other aspects pertaining to marriage should be taken into consideration. To begin with, the responsibility of each human being called by God to collaborate in the creation of new lives is claimed. In addition, its obligations to its children, family, community, and society are recalled, which played a role in its decisions. Furthermore, the interaction between personal conscience and socio-economic situations is clearly stated³²⁹. All these concepts can be categorised under the notion of responsible parenthood. Therefore, it becomes clear that from its very beginning the Commission was not merely conducting a scientific analysis of birth control methods to determine their morality according to doctrinal principles. But rather, that the moral obligation of couples to conscientiously and responsibly give life was directly implicated.

The growing importance attached to this notion eventually led a considerable number of members to support the lift of the ban on contraception. However, the process was gradual. As seen above, at the beginning members clarified that responsible parenthood was not understood primarily as the desire to limit the number of children or to grant couples freedom during times of hardship³³⁰. On the contrary, improved moral accountability of Catholic spouses in the generation of new lives

³²⁷Ibid., 8. Thalidomide was a medication first marketed in 1957. It was promoted for, among other disorders, morning sickness during pregnancy. Therefore, it was not unusual for pregnant women to take it. However, further research highlighted grave collateral effects on foetuses, like birth defects.

³²⁸ Ibid., 10.

³²⁹ Ibid., 14-15.

³³⁰ *Report of the Second Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, sec. IV, 12.

denoted a generosity which derived from the creation and fostering of a loving community. For this reason, members could endorse the lawfulness of periodic continence. But then the primacy of procreation in the hierarchy of ends was questioned and greater emphasis was put on conjugal love and sexuality. Psychological and sexual maturity in marriage was seen as a sign of the couple's maturity as parents. For this reason, conjugal love and sexuality became fundamental components in the creation of the loving community in which a child was to be born and educated. At this point, members came to the conclusion that mature couples had a right to regulate and space the number of children without external interference³³¹. Nonetheless, they deemed it appropriate to clarify that mature responsibility did not translate into self-determination in the use and choice of birth control methods, both natural and artificial. The group was in total agreement when it stated that any decision pertaining the generation of new lives was to be taken by the couple alone. Even the accounts gathered by the Crowleys provided evidence to this stance: "These accounts all agree that if the desire to have children is natural in every man, a sense of responsibility could lead to a limitation in number, and one would not necessarily have the right to talk about selfishness"³³². However, freedom of choice still referred to the number of children a couple desired to procreate, and not to the birth control methods it might use to achieve such limitation.

But in the *Majority Report* members supported freedom of choice even for birth control methods employed by Catholic couples. This development from the right to regulate births to freedom of choice in the methods used to achieve such limitation is probably motivated by the renewed appreciation of the notion of responsible parenthood. Indeed, certain birth control methods received growing or lukewarm support insofar as they proved beneficial to responsible parenthood. The temperature test and rhythm method, for example, highly praised by members at least until the third meeting, started to being considered as a failure, for the reports gathered by North American couples had consistently shown that they did not foster conjugal love nor proved particularly helpful in the spacing of births. As a matter of fact, if the notion of responsible parenthood also meant the limitation of births, these natural methods were not considered as reliable. On the contrary, artificial methods ensured that the conscientious decision on the number of children remained up to the couple, for they had proven more successful as far as the spacing of births was concerned.

It is true that a list of objective criteria is provided in the *Majority Report* to help and guide couples both in the decision of regulate births and in the choice of the means to achieve said regulation: "there are objective criteria as to the means to be chosen of responsibly determining the

³³¹ See 3.4.1.

³³² *Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births*, 30.

size of the family: if they are rightly applied, the couples themselves will find and determine the way of proceeding”³³³. These criteria, set by the Commission’s majority, are meant to foster “the essential values of marriage as a community of fruitful love”³³⁴.

The first principle is that the unitive and procreative marital act is performed in “a context of true love”³³⁵. In addition, the methods chosen to prevent a new conception, should be “proportionate to the degree of right or necessity of averting” it forever or for a period of time³³⁶. Furthermore, the negative effects which any birth control method carries with itself – be it natural or artificial – should be taken into account to ensure that “the personal dignity of the spouses, and the possibility of expressing sufficiently and aptly the interpersonal relation or conjugal love” is preserved³³⁷. Finally, the choice of methods should highly depend upon regional and economic availability³³⁸. Despite the list of objective criteria, the Commission was effectively demanding the lift of the ban on contraception. The majority of members supported this stance especially because the prohibition against contraception did not allow couples to conscientiously exercise responsible parenthood, seen as the complete integration of sexual maturity on the part of the spouses, and of a loving community, for the generous, yet prudent generation and education of offspring.

To conclude, the four major developments proposed by the majority of the pontifical Commission regarded four areas: pastoral education, conjugal love, sexuality, and responsible parenthood. To begin with, the role of pastoral education, seen at the beginning as the mere instruction of couples on Church teaching on marriage, shifted to that of instructing the consciences of parents, in order to being able to independently make responsible choices on the number of children to call to life. In addition, the primacy of conjugal love, which at the beginning was classified among the secondary ends of marriage, was acknowledged, and its place within the hierarchy of ends equated to, if not elevated above procreation. Furthermore, a renewed interest in psychology and the socio-cultural changes which characterised the end of the 1950s and the 1960s, e.g. development of the pill and the sexual revolution, led the Commission to evaluate the role of sexuality. Completely ignored at the beginning, classified as one among more important elements of marital relations, sexuality, in the end, was regarded as the major criterion to judge on the morality of sexual acts. Thus, not

³³³ McClory, *Turning Point*, 181.

³³⁴ *Ivi.*

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 181–182.

³³⁶ *Ivi.*

³³⁷ *Ivi.*

³³⁸ *Ivi.*

procreation, but marital fulfilment and the creation of a loving communion through sexual relations became the most important elements of marriage. Finally, all these aspects acquired meaning and importance in relation to a new understanding of responsible parenthood. Given the changed historical context, one in which the education and nourishment of children cost more, women were increasingly leaving their houses daily to work, and healthy and happy familial atmosphere were praised, a certain limitation of fertility was not only necessary, but also desired. In this case, the role of the laity is outstanding. Indeed, clerical members probably agreed on some population control. However, that such limitation could be achieved through artificial methods was still considered as immoral by the majority of the clergy. On the contrary, lay Catholics, and North American ones in particular, clearly supported the lifting of the ban on artificial contraception, for they believed that consciences were mature and the time ripe to listen to them and trust they would generously, yet prudently call new children to life.

Chapter Four: Sexuality, theology of Marriage and the North American lay Catholics

In this chapter an in-depth analysis of the studies produced by Patrick and Patricia Crowley and Laurent and Colette Potvin is provided. As co-founders of the Christian Family Movement (CFM) and educators at a Natural Family Planning (NFP) clinic respectively, the two couples were asked by the papal Commission to conduct a survey among U.S. and Canadian couples on the efficiency of periodic continence and on their opinion on Catholic marriage at large. The Commission's request echoed the call made by *Lumen Gentium* to inquire into the sense of the faithful, that is to listen to the voice of all members of the Church, from cardinals and bishops to the laity, for there discernment and agreement could be found "in matters of faith and moral"³³⁹. Both studies include experiences by lay couples gathered through some questionnaires which demonstrated a varying degree of dissatisfaction with Church teaching on contraception. In addition, the answers were analysed and statistics were released to the whole Commission to ultimately support a lift of the ban on contraception.

In the previous chapter, major changes in the Commission's stance on four topics have been highlighted, namely pastoral teaching and education, the place of conjugal love within the hierarchy of ends, the meaning of sexuality, and the prominence of responsible parenthood in marriage. Following the commentary provided in Chapter Three, mostly couple's statements which commented, rejected, or criticised Church teaching on these four topics are presented, in order to establish a direct connection between the outcomes of these studies and the Commission's majority final recommendation to lift the ban on contraception. Thus, the considerable impact North American Catholicism had on it would be verified. Furthermore, the analysis of the survey has underlined certain characteristics, peculiar to North American lay Catholicism, which are briefly presented and contextualised at the end of the chapter.

4.1. Patrick and Patricia Crowley and the Christian Family Movement

Patrick and Patricia Crowley, nee Caron, became co-founders of the Christian Family Movement in 1949³⁴⁰. Patrick, "a handsome, outgoing young man with a great sense of humor and a lot of self-confidence," was born in 1911 from an affluent family with Irish-descent³⁴¹. Both his parents were Catholics but they were also habitu  of the Chicagoans, a circle for wealthy people of Irish origin. Consequently, not only did Patrick received a Catholic education, but he did so in prestigious

³³⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, par. 12. See Chapter Two, 2.8.3.

³⁴⁰ Burns, *Disturbing the Peace*, 13-38.

³⁴¹ McClory, *Turning Point*, 30.

universities, such as the Loyola Academy and the University of Notre Dame. Despite the renown of the institution he was enrolled in, Patrick never qualified as a brilliant student. The Great Depression put the Crowley family under real strain and young Patrick was compelled to work on his father law office during the day and to attend law classes in the evening. Nonetheless, his youth was spent in bland observance of Catholic teaching and the enjoyment of all pastimes granted by his father's economic fortune.

The contrast with his future wife's, Patricia, upbringing is striking. The twenty-one-years old woman whom he met in 1934 at a party and dated for several years before their marriage in 1937, came from a strictly Catholic family. His father, Ovidas J. Caron, a staunch supporter of Jansenism, was born in Quebec but had moved to the United States when a diphtheria epidemic killed many of his relatives and made him an orphan at the age of six. Eventually, he settled in Rochelle, Illinois, where he founded a quite successful family business, the Caron International Spinning Company. Patricia's mother, nee Marietta Higman, came from a Baptist family. In addition, she was also a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution³⁴². Therefore, the marriage with French Canadian Catholic Ovidas was not particularly welcomed by Marietta's family. Nonetheless, the two married in 1912 and Patricia, Patty, was born only one year later, in 1913. After her two other siblings, Richard and Marietta, were quickly added to the family in 1914 and 1915 respectively. By 1921, the year in which Patricia's mother almost suffered from a mental breakdown, she had given birth to other two children, Joan Zintak and John³⁴³. As a consequence, to relieve her mother, it was decided that eight-years-old Patricia would be sent to school at the Sacred Heart convent in Lake Forest, Illinois. There, she became well-acquainted in Catholic fundamentals and rules of conduct. Once her family settled in Chicago, Patty was sent to the local school ran by sisters of the Sacred Heart. In an interview with author and professor John Kotre, she would admit not particularly liking the elitist climate which characterised the institution and the ambient people who attended it³⁴⁴. But the standards of the school much reflected her parents' educational style: "[I]n the Caron home religious ideas were never subjects for debate or even discussion"³⁴⁵. Young Patricia enjoyed greater academic freedom at college. She enrolled in Trinity College in Washington, DC, for a major in French and history, which gave her the opportunity to attend the Sorbonne in Paris for one year. She also attended

³⁴² The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) is a female-only organisation founded in 1890 in Washington, DC. It gathered women whose American lineage could be attested and whose ancestors had an active role in the American Revolution. It promotes projects on education, the study and preservation of national history, and patriotism.

³⁴³ William Droel, *Patty Crowley, Lay Pioneer* (Chicago, Illinois: Loyola University Press, 2016), 9.

³⁴⁴ John N. Kotre, *Simple Gifts: The Lives of Pat and Patty Crowley* (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1979), 13.

³⁴⁵ McClory, *Turning Point*, 30.

a university course with monsignor John Ryan, which she acknowledged as a positive influence in her intellectual awakening³⁴⁶.

Patrick and Patricia married at the age of 26 and 24 respectively in Chicago. In the post-Depression era the model for any middle-class family was the same: the husband was the breadwinner, the wife stayed at home to take care of the children, and in their free time, they went to parties and attended social events³⁴⁷. So did the Crowleys. The young couple had also been instructed by Mrs. Caron on the begetting of children. Indeed, Patricia's mother suggested them to postpone having children for some time. Therefore, they used the rhythm method, despite Pat's frequent complaint with it and Patty's scepticism about its efficiency. And their doubts were founded, for only after two years, in 1939, their first child – Patricia, nicknamed Patsy – was born, followed by a miscarriage, an infant death, another daughter, Mary Ann, in 1943, and a son, Patrick, the following year. Nonetheless, the growing family settled in a wealthy neighbourhood in Wilmette, Illinois and their future was secured thanks to Patrick's career advancement as a corporation lawyer.

But their comfortable, suburban existences were changed by a meeting with a priest in his forties, Reynold Hillenbrand. The Chicago priest, former seminary rector of St. Mary of the Lake and a one-year student at the Gregorian University in Rome, was well-known for his liberal stance on liturgical renewal and theology. More importantly, along with other priests, he would later become famous for introducing a working-class movement from Belgium, the Young Christian Workers (Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne, JOC), into the United States³⁴⁸. The jocist movement, founded by Joseph Cardijn in the 1910s – Cardinal from 1965 –, was eventually at the base of the Christian Family Movement. First as a worker, later as a priest, Cardijn experienced the consequences of poor working conditions. In the same period, a great number of Catholic workers were leaving the Church attracted by Marxist ideals. Borrowing from the communists, “[H]e persuaded small groups of young workers to meet regularly and report what was going on in the factories”³⁴⁹. The motto of these action cells was “observe, judge, act”. Until the 1930s, however, the movement expanded at a slow pace, for it attracted harsh criticism, for some believed it was potentially too radical – as an example, at the beginning it was condemned by Cardinal Archbishop Désiré-Joseph Mercier of Brussels in 1924.

³⁴⁶ Ivi., Monsignor John Ryan (1869–1945) was an American moral theologian renowned for his advocacy on social justice. He was also involved in political actions and reforms which eventually were included into the New Deal. His most notable work was his doctoral dissertation, in which he argued for a minimum wage and which was later revised and published as a book.

³⁴⁷ McClory, *Turning Point*, 31.

³⁴⁸ Other crucial figures were Fr. Louis Putz, CSC (1909-1998) of the University of Notre Dame, Fr. Donald Kanaly (1925-2005) of Ponca City, Oklahoma, and Paul Maguire, an Australian lay leader behind the Knights of Columbus. Burns, *Disturbing the Peace*, 14-15. Droel, *Patty Crowley Lay Pioneer*, 7.

³⁴⁹ McClory, *Turning Point*, 32.

Cardjin, then, appealed to Pius XI, who endorsed the movement. Thus, once its status was officially recognised, the JOC could begin its international expansion.

Starting from 1943 the first few groups emerged in three cities: Chicago, South Bend, and New York. Following the observe-judge-act method, also known as the “Social Inquiry Method”, these groups conducted social inquiries into political, cultural, and national issues they were faced with. Patrick Crowley was one of the first to join one such group in Chicago. However, as it became immediately clear to him, unlike their Belgian peers who had found a common denominator in the social injustice they were faced with in their workplace, greater diversity characterised the first American cells. For example, Patrick’s group comprised “two lawyers, an insurance salesman, a statistician, an investment counsellor, and a newspaperman”³⁵⁰. But a common denominator was soon identified: these men were all fathers. Therefore, the major area of interest for these American action cells naturally was family life. Shortly after, women too took the initiative and started to gather together, supervised by a chaplain – a staple at any male and female’s group meeting – and it was considered a real breakthrough. One of the first female group was established by Patty Crowley herself and, commenting on the initiative, Kotre affirmed that never before had Catholic wives met to discuss their family lives seriously³⁵¹. Borrowing from the JOC method, the American cells grew into groups of discussion for family-life related topics. Eventually, as the number of these groups increased around the US, in 1949 the CFM was founded.

By this date the separation between husbands and wives started to disappear as couples seemed to greatly prefer meetings in which both spouses were invited. Early communal inquiries on the family were quite unsuccessful; “[N]onetheless, – wrote Burns – the notion of a couples’ movement was gaining momentum”³⁵². Enthusiastically advocated for by Patricia, initially not quite convinced about mixed groups, the gradual transformation of the Christian Family Movement was perceived as a natural one by other members³⁵³. Equally instinctive became the necessity to have the rapidly growing number of cells organised and supervised by a small number of appointed representatives. The Coordinating Committee included Patrick Crowley, and it was assisted by an Executive Committee. In addition, the newspaper *A Quarterly for Adult Catholic Action* (ACT) was chosen as the official publication. Furthermore, as the movement started to spread – by February 1949 these CFM groups were active in twenty cities in the US –, even the topics of discussion and groups’

³⁵⁰ Burns, *Disturbing the Peace*, 19.

³⁵¹ Kotre, *Simple Gifts*, 44.

³⁵² Burns, *Disturbing the Peace*, 22.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 23.

inquiries were regulated and a common program, whose definition the Crowleys were highly credited for, was established in a booklet titled *For Happier Families*³⁵⁴.

During the 1950s the CFM grew considerably, with groups present in more than 330 cities³⁵⁵. In addition, it became an international organisation, as members were instructed to be concerned not only with national issues, but also with difficulties and problems all over the world³⁵⁶. Despite the CFM considerable national and international success, there are other few aspects which are even more crucial. To begin with, is the emancipation from external authority which the groups' internal organisation granted the laity. According to Hillenbrand, "[L]ay people had their own calling, their own sphere, and their own spirituality" and "the priest [was not] to usurp the role of the lay person"³⁵⁷. The observe-judge-act method probably brought more and more lay Catholics to feel an integral part of the Church, as Hillenbrand maintained, and by voicing their personal experiences at the presence of a priest, they could learn more on how to interpret the magisterial teaching in their everyday³⁵⁸. In addition, of central importance was the leading role the Crowleys progressively assumed within the movement. Vital to its spreading was the web of relationships fostered by the two, who held dinners at their place and met regularly with other group leaders³⁵⁹. Crucial were also their numerous trips to cities and provinces in which the CFM was active³⁶⁰. Burns maintained that "[T]hey continued to be the single most important force behind the expansion of the CFM"³⁶¹. Therefore, when in 1965 they asked members to honestly answer the questionnaire on periodic continence, CFMers responded enthusiastically for they recognised them as their undisputed leaders.

The movement was born as a primarily "upper-middle-class, white, professional" one and it was not able to attract new additions from other social strata and from minorities³⁶². This aspect is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, the contribution of the CFM to the papal Commission is certainly great but it might as well be representative of the opinion on contraception of this particular portion of American lay Catholicism. Secondly, the answers to the questionnaires which are analysed

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-17; 53. The sense of belonging experienced by CFMers from the very beginning of the movement and the recognition their experiences were granted by this Catholic organisation can explain why later, in the 1960s, members did not refrain from freely expressing their views on contraception and Church teaching. Even more, they probably became aware of two important similarities: Hillenbrand's consideration of the Mystical Body of Christ was in fact not different from the Council's definition of the entirety of the Church as the People of God; moreover, their years-long inquiries into the state of American Catholic families was a practical example of what the Council's had recommended, namely to inquire into the sense of the faithful. *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁶¹ *Ivi.*

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 97.

further down necessarily reflected the anxieties, preoccupations, and interests of this portion of society as far as the generation and education of offspring were concerned. Indeed, the CFM from its very beginning had tried to present, portray, and promote the stereotypical Catholic family – working husband and stay-at-home wife –, a lifestyle more common and attainable by affluent people³⁶³. Moreover, the roles and personalities of men and women were accurately presented as distinctive and their purposes different: the man was considered more logical, pragmatic, and aggressive, thus more apt for working and providing for its family; the woman was considered as sensitive, obliging, and intuitive, therefore many in the CFM believed that her right place was at home, where she could be a devout housewife and a mother³⁶⁴. However, the very structure of the movement itself, with husband and wife who joined important conversations on family life as equals, already challenged these stereotypes³⁶⁵. In addition, with the sexual revolution, women’s large-scale access to the workplace, and the liberalisation of birth control, the traditional vision of the Catholic housekeeper started to be challenged even by CFMers.

As a direct consequence of the re-imagining of a woman’s place within society, even the role of sexuality was being re-assessed and the necessity to curb the number of children to properly educate them whilst working certainly arouse. Indeed, Burns affirmed that “CFM’s attitude toward sexuality in the 1950s followed traditional lines and was not much different from that of mainstream America”³⁶⁶. However, “[B]y the mid-1960s, CFM had begun to reconsider its attitude toward birth control and sexuality. As early as 1963, CFM moved to the forefront of the growing debate over birth control and the growing perception that the Church was going to modify its traditional teaching and approve some form of birth control”³⁶⁷. Thus, when Patrick and Patricia joined the Commission in 1965, not only had the CFM, of which they were the leaders, already discussed the possibility of some forms of contraception, but many had also formed an opinion which questioned or challenged Church existing teaching.

4.1.1. Survey among CFMers: scope, method, and respondents

The Crowleys’ study submitted to the Commission during the 1966 meeting comprised more than 70 pages, the vast majority of which devoted to the experiences and opinions of CFMers on the rhythm method mainly from the US, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, but also from other countries, like

³⁶³ Ivi. Commenting on the different lifestyle led by upper-middle-class women and lower-class ones, Burns affirmed that the former had a great amount of leisure time at their disposal, whereas the vast majority of the latter worked.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

Ireland and Italy³⁶⁸. The inquiry led by the leaders of the CFM had already started in 1965 when they received a letter from Father De Riedmatten in which he notified them with their appointment to the Commission. At this point, the Crowleys asked only members of the Executive Committee of the movement to contribute their stance on the effects of rhythm in marriage, in the form of letters. Following the fourth meeting, by request of the Commission's general secretary, a questionnaire was designed and distributed among key members of the CFM around the world. Their responses were analysed by professor Barrett from the University of Notre Dame and a member of the Commission, and the results published in a separate study³⁶⁹. The scope of the Crowleys' inquiry was later widened and other couples were contacted by diocesan leaders, also called "contact couples", between April 6th to 14th 1966. In the report it is clarified that the choice to widen the sampling and to do it randomly was made to verify the conclusions reached in the analysis of previous responses. Indeed, before, only key members and leaders of the movement had been involved in the study. Their high position within the CFM, however, probably made them more conscious of early forms of dissent against Church teaching and NFP, which could affect their responses.

Initially, the scope of the study was limited to Catholic perception of the effects of rhythm and periodic continence in marriage. 328 questionnaires were sent and 181 couples responded. By the time the third questionnaire was distributed, though, the scope was widened to include attitudes towards a change in Church teaching about contraception and suggestions on future statements by Church authorities on the issue³⁷⁰. In this case, 532 copies were distributed in the US and 265 couples answered; 60 copies were sent in Canada, and 33 couples answered. Although these couples were not all personally known by the Crowleys, commenting on their lifestyle, they maintained that "[T]he couples of whom we inquired have demonstrated allegiance to the church and her teaching through long services in the work of the Christian Family Movement" and also that they had "limited [their] exploration to couples who love the church and have shown this disposition in many heroic ways"³⁷¹. However, Fehring and McGraw have argued that "[M]any of the CFM couples' responses reflected the historical context of the year in which the study was completed", thus suggesting that these couples might have remained faithful to the Church until other factors contributed to the growing

³⁶⁸Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples* (1965-1966), CBCC, 2/07 M-8, UNDA. Pages numbers are unspecified. The questions of the rhythm questionnaire were: 1) Was the practice of rhythm in any way harmful to your marriage, i.e. what negative things would you say about its use

³⁶⁹ *Does Rhythm work for Catholics*, a Study by Professor Donald Barrett from the University of Notre Dame (1966), RWL, 3/02, UNDA.

³⁷⁰ Copies of the questionnaires and the original papers sent by couples are available at the University of Notre Dame. See *Completed Questionnaires on Birth Control* (1965-1966), RWL, 13-16, UNDA.

³⁷¹ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

dissent³⁷². “In 1966 – continued Fehring and McGraw – there was an expectation of change and media reports that rhythm was not effective and was probably not very good for your relationship”³⁷³. Thus, growing overwhelming consensus on the harmfulness of rhythm, dissenting articles on ACT, the influence of Planned Parenthood at the CFM conference that year, together with secular, social phenomenon – the spread of the contraceptive pill, to cite one – shaped the responses of CFMers, at least according to Fehring and McGraw³⁷⁴. Of a different opinion is journalist Kaiser, according to whom these testimonies were not exaggerated or dictated by the circumstances in which they were produced. On the contrary, he maintained that “Commission members could read the vivid, almost choking testimony of many (for the Crowleys had now distributed copies of the questionnaires and letters) and some judged that the Crowleys may have understated the case”³⁷⁵. Fehring and McGraw too admitted the powerful impact of these raw testimonies but, although acknowledging how compelling some experiences were, they doubted the Crowleys’ results, affirming that “[F]rom a scientific standpoint, the information from the Crowleys study is interesting but not very valid”³⁷⁶.

4.1.2. The Crowleys’ Results

Given the two main areas of interest identified by the Crowleys, the effects of periodic continence and possible changes in marital doctrine, the results of their analysis showed the perception of CFMers mainly on these topics. To begin with, from the responses of the rhythm questionnaires it appeared that “100 couples used the calendar method; only 25 used the temperature chart and 41 used both. 9 used none and 6 used other methods”³⁷⁷. This questionnaire was answered by 181 couples. Therefore, it is clear that the vast majority of respondents was familiar with the practice of periodic continence, in the form of rhythm, temperature, or both. As far as the effects of these methods are concerned, over 80% of respondents maintained that periodic continence had harmed their marriage in some way, although positive aspects were also highlighted, but mainly among older couples.

³⁷² Richard Fehring, and Elizabeth McGraw, “Spiritual Responses to the Regulation of Birth (A Historical Comparison),” *Life and Learning* 12 (2002): 278–279. Professor Fehring, professor emeritus at the Marquette University, College of Nursing, Milwaukee, WI., and director of the Institute for Natural Family Planning, has conducted extensive research into Fertility Awareness Based Methods (FABM). He has also discussed the impact of lay couples’ survey on the content of the *Majority Report* in this, and other articles. See Richard Fehring, “An Analysis of the Majority report ‘Responsible Parenthood’ and its Recommendations on Abortion, Sterilization and Contraception,” *Life and Learning* 13 (2003): 121-152; Leona VandeVusse, Lisa Hanson, Richard Fehring, Amy Newman, and Jamie Fox, “Couples’ Views of the Effects of Natural Family Planning on Marital Dynamics,” *College of Nursing Faculty Research and Publications* 9 (2004): 1-13.

³⁷³ Ivi.

³⁷⁴ Burns, *Disturbing the Peace*, 176-179.

³⁷⁵ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 129.

³⁷⁶ Fehring and McGraw, *Spiritual Responses to the Regulation of Birth (A Historical Comparison)*, 279.

³⁷⁷ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

Discipline or self-control, and security or reliability were mentioned as the main advantages. As explained above, the scope of the study was later widened to include CFMers' perspective on a change of marital doctrine. In this case, 78% of participants hoped for some type of change, 21% disagreed and supported the status quo, and 1% did not answer the question. The most common topics covered by North American CFMers in their responses are summarised in Table 1 and 2³⁷⁸.

Table 1.

Rhythm prevents the expression of love	58
Rhythm causes fear of a new pregnancy and frustration	63
Rhythm feels unnatural and/or impractical	14
Rhythm is unreliable	18
Rhythm exposes to sin	3
Rhythm puts a greater burden on the wife	4

Table 2.

Primacy of conscience	18
Church authorities are detached from the doubts and problems of lay married couples	17
Primary role of conjugal love	18
Procreation should not be considered as the primary end of marriage	7
Role of historical contingencies and scientific advancements in shaping the doctrine	7
Couples who already used the contraceptive pill for medical reasons	6

The results of the analysis of the first questionnaire on rhythm and of the second one on doctrinal change were conflated into one comprehensive report. The recommendations submitted by the Crowleys at the 1966 meeting represented a summary of CFMers' responses on both subjects. Patrick and Patricia started from the main point of agreement among couples, namely the widespread dissatisfaction with the rhythm method. They said: “[M]ost expressed dissatisfaction over the Rhythm method for a variety of reasons from the fact that it was ineffective, hard to follow; and some had psychological and physiological objections”³⁷⁹. It might appear, consequently, that any recommendation for change was based on CFMers' discontent with this practice and also that such discontent was to be fully ascribed to its unreliability as a method.

³⁷⁸ The document presented by the Crowleys to the Commission did not include a comprehensive list of the major topics emerged from the answers of CFMers. On the contrary, some responses were selected and inserted in the document as representatives of a wider sense of disappointment both with the rhythm method and Church teaching on marriage in general. Therefore, Table 1 and 2 are the result of an in-depth analysis of the answers and their scope is to make them more accessible by providing an overview. The absolute number of responses does not correspond to the real number of couples whose answers were included in the document, for some responses have been counted more than once, as they dealt with more than one topic contemporarily. Table 1 summarises responses on rhythm, Table 2 on suggestions for a change of Church teaching on marriage.

³⁷⁹ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples (1965-1966)*, CBCC, 2/07 M-8, UNDA.

The anxieties and distress of the respondents, though, were not merely a direct consequence of disappointment with rhythm and temperature. The issue, according to CFMers, was wider than the mere liberalisation of birth control methods and the change to be expected affected areas of marital doctrine, other than contraception. Indeed, “[M]ost expressed a hope that the positive values in love and marriage need to be stressed and that an expanded theology of marriage needs to be developed”³⁸⁰. In other words, respondents wished that the Church would not merely focus on the issue of contraception, but that all aspects of marriage – its ends, values, family and social outcomes – could be taken into consideration and clarified in a more comprehensive way. Some respondents better identified the main area to be addressed by the Commission and Church authorities. To begin with, a historical contextualisation of marriage, both in its natural and sacramental value, was demanded, for this institution, created for “the fulfilment of the individual partners as Christians and human beings and the perfection of society” represented the human manifestation of God’s love³⁸¹. In addition, emphasis was placed on “the intention of fruitfulness”, rather than on mere reproduction, for the desire to procreate was defined as “normally part of the marriage union” but it was also clarified that “[T]he number of children by which a couple can best reach this end can be determined – should be determined – by the couples alone”. Furthermore, a re-evaluation of the morality of sex was called for. It was maintained that the integrity of the partners’ sexual life was to be judged in its entirety, “not on analysis of the isolated act of intercourse”. Finally, the role of conscience in the decision about the number of children was asserted, together with the need for proper education on how to form it. These are the same topics discussed in Chapter Three, in which a development of the doctrine was observed, namely education to conscience, the primacy of conjugal love, the acquisition of a mature sexuality, and the exercise of responsible parenthood. Therefore, the changes demanded in the *Majority Report* reflected those suggested by CFMers.

North American respondents also reported dissatisfaction with the Church authorities’ way of dealing with the birth control issue. Some clearly stated that they felt as if marital problems relating to sexuality were not fully grasped by clerical figures. As a consequence, it seemed that the lack of understanding hindered the suggestion of a realistic and satisfactory solution for married Catholics. Moreover, some also underlined the importance of historical contingencies and of scientific discoveries in shaping the doctrine. In particular, they referred to the higher standards of living and education, the new role of women in society – not only wives and mothers, but also workers –, psychology and medical studies on the importance of mental and physical health, and the

³⁸⁰ *Ivi.*

³⁸¹ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*. The following citations are all taken from the Crowleys’ document.

development of the pill, as valid reasons for reconsidering Church stance on contraception and rendering it more attuned to modern needs.

4.2. Laurent and Colette Potvin and the clinic for natural family planning

Laurent Potvin, an internist at a private clinic in Ottawa, Canada, and his wife, Colette, joined the Commission during its fourth meeting like Patrick and Patricia. At the time, they were 44 and 42 respectively. Laurent ran a small centre, helped by volunteers who educated couples on natural family planning and in particular on the temperature method³⁸². In addition, the Potvins were involved in a Catholic program for the education of couples in preparation to marriage. Like the other two couples invited by Pope Paul VI as representatives of the laity to discuss marriage, procreation, and birth control, Laurent and Colette could no longer have children. Indeed, Colette had to undergo a hysterectomy after the birth of her fifth child – similarly, Patricia underwent the same medical procedure after the birth of her fourth child. The reasons behind Marie Rendu’s sterility, instead, are not clear. In fact, commenting on their family situation, journalist Kaiser simply clarified that Marie and her husband’s children were all adopted³⁸³. He also suggested that, because they could have no children of their own, the French couple involved in rhythm programs at the *Equipe de Notre Dame* in Paris, a movement similar to the CFM that was not personally affected by the issue³⁸⁴. A similar remark could be made for the other two couples, the Crowleys and the Potvins. However, given the considerable effort and extensive research all three couples devoted to the issue, it is irrefutable the extent to which they all felt affected by the Commission’s resolutions, if not at a personal level, at least as representatives of the millions of Catholics who were demanding for clear guidance from the Church³⁸⁵.

If, as it has been suggested above, one can maintain that the Crowleys arrived at the Spanish College with an almost clear vision of the direction Church teaching should take, this is not the case

³⁸² McClory, *Turning Point*, 63. However, at page 141 McClory affirms that, following the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, Laurent Potvin refrained from teaching the rhythm method to Catholics, due to his disappointment with the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* which basically rejected the suggestions put forward in the *Majority Report*. Despite the confusion generated by McClory’s account, the archival research confirmed that doctor Potvin was indeed involved in couples’ education on temperature. *Example of Medical Discussion*, Fourth Meeting of the Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births (March 25th-28th 1965), CBCC, 1/05, UNDA.

³⁸³ Kaiser, *The Encyclical that Never Was*, 62-63.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁸⁵ The Canadian and the French couples, unlike their American peers, have not been a matter of extensive study and research by historians and authors. Therefore, the secondary sources which briefly covered their lives and activity can be found in Kaiser and McClory, in particular in the pages cited in notes 44 – 46. A probable reason for scholarly and journalistic focus on the Crowleys might be the impact and size of the CFM between the 1950s and 1960s and the progressivism which characterised the answers of American CFMers, which influenced a considerable number of Commission’s members.

for the Canadian couple. That their stance on contraception underwent major change and that a shift toward the liberalisation of birth control occurred sometime between the fourth and the final meeting can be inferred from their contribution to the Commission's debate³⁸⁶. During a March, 28th 1965 session, doctor Potvin affirmed that "he and his wife taught the temperature method, and were convinced of its efficacy and value as a help to self-mastery and control and the fulfilment of conjugal love. They will continue to teach this method even if the Church permits another method"³⁸⁷. However, when his wife Colette addressed the Commission during a session in 1966, hers was a speech which harshly and bitterly criticised those who maintained that periodic continence was the optimal method to regulate births and foster marital love, and who put emphasis on methods rather than on an all-encompassing vision of marriage³⁸⁸.

She did so not by virtue of her expertise in a particular field of study, nor as a scholar, but "à titre d'épouse, comptant 17 ans de mariage et 5 enfants". In her address, she immediately referred to her personal experience and, from there, she could develop her argument starting from downplaying the importance of methods: "Les methods prennent trop de place. On ne bâtit pas sa vie conjugale autour d'une méthode". Once their place in marriage was downsized, she proceeded to evaluate that of sexuality, synthesised by God's commandment "Aimez-vous les uns les autres". According to her, neither birth control methods, nor even procreation were at the core of marriage, but rather the spouses' ability to love one another, man according to his masculinity, and woman to her femininity. She maintained that this aspect of sexuality, male and female corporeality, were often overlooked, and she did so by portraying the vision of woman which, according to her, had been transmitted by the teaching of marriage for too long. She affirmed: "[P]our comprendre la femme, il faut cesser de la voir comme un homme manqué, une occasion de péché pour l'homme, une incarnation du démon de la luxure, mais bien plutôt comme nous la présente la Bible au chapitre de la Genèse, une compagne pour l'homme". She was effectively asking that less emphasis was put on women's representation as Eve's daughters, but rather that a more realistic one could emerge, which followed the model set by Genesis. As a matter of fact, this model had not been completely discarded by theologians and the Church. For example, *Casti Connubii* maintained that:

³⁸⁶ Also, McClory reported of an interview the Canadian couple gave to the Canadian press, in which they voiced their dissatisfaction with the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, and in particular, the fact that it did not propose a revision of the position on contraception. The couple altogether affirmed that it would no longer engage in any effort to instruct Catholics on periodic continence. McClory, *Turning Point*, 141.

³⁸⁷ *Example of Medical Discussion*, Fourth Meeting of the Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births.

³⁸⁸ The following quotations are all taken from the speech Colette Potvin gave at one session of the 1966 meeting. *Reflections et Commentaires en Marge de notre Enquête*, Speech by Colette Potvin at the Fifth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births (1966), RWL, 7/14, UNDA, 1-4.

[B]y matrimony, therefore, the souls of the contracting parties are joined and knit together more directly and more intimately than are their bodies, and that not by any passing affection of sense of spirit, but by a deliberate and firm act of the will; and from this union of souls by God's decree, a sacred and inviolable bond arises³⁸⁹.

In this passage, although femininity and masculinity are not openly mentioned, a clear reference is made to the spouses' free will in the formation of a loving companionship, and the wife is presented as a peer to her husband. Nonetheless, the physical dimension of marriage appeared to be debased and absent is any allusion to the spouses' desire to intimately unite. Consequently, Mrs. Potvin statement claimed for a theology which would not ignore a woman's physical desires and needs, but that, on the contrary, would consider the entirety of her inner life, and would not fail to see her as just a future mother, but also as a human being, whose nature was similar yet distinct to man's. Indeed, she maintained:

l'acte conjugal est pour la femme essentiellement un don et un tout. Un don total de son corps et de son âme à l'être aimé. Don d'un plaisir à son mari, d'un apaisement physique et psychique qui rend l'homme nerveusement heureux. Dans notre milieu on se marie d'abord pour vivre aux côtés de l'homme de son choix – les enfants étant la conséquence³⁹⁰.

According to her, the conjugal act could be described as a woman's "raison d'être", "le moyen par excellence de donner à l'être aimé", and "le plus beau geste d'amour"³⁹¹. Therefore, the physical component did not prevail over the spiritual and psychological outcomes of the union between the spouses. However, her remarks aimed at clarifying how they were all equally vital to the realisation of a perfect communion.

Once the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the conjugal act were discussed and their crucial role to foster conjugal love clarified, Mrs. Potvin put the accent on the outcomes of the communion established by the spouses. She claimed: "[L]e lendemain d'une telle communion avec son mari, la femme est plus sereine, tout lui deviant plus léger– elle est plus patiente avec les enfants– plus aimante avec tous– elle rayonne même au delà du cadre familial"³⁹². Aside from benefitting the connection between husband and wife, the conjugal act assumed another important

³⁸⁹ Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, par. 7.

³⁹⁰ *Reflections et Commentaires en Merge de notre Enquete*, Speech by Colette Potvin at the Fifth Meeting of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births, 1.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

³⁹² *Ivi.*

role, that of creating a loving community for the children. Indeed, the woman, satisfied by her intimate union with her man, was described as more amiable, patient, and caring. Therefore, Mrs. Potvin could affirm that the conjugal act played a crucial role, which was three-fold: 1) it concurred to the happiness of the husband, 2) it assured the fulfilment of the wife, 3) it fostered the creation of a loving community for the children.

Given the outstanding importance granted to the physical act, it became almost self-evident that periodic continence – which entailed the spouses’ abstinence for a considerable number of days during the month – could no longer be considered as the most efficient means to foster love, nor the most practicable for everyone. The positive value of this birth control method was not completely rejected. Indeed, Mrs. Potvin affirmed that “[U]n amour qui se veut attentive aux besoins de l’autre suppose évidemment des periods de continence”³⁹³. However, if the strict adherence to a method imposed a limit to conjugal intimacy and it altogether represented the potential to disrupt the family atmosphere, then it could no longer be proposed as the only viable solution by Church teaching.

In other words, Mrs. Potvin was questioning whether it was just to sacrifice the psychological and spiritual outcomes of a physical union to preserve the biological integrity of an act. To which she responded by developing the following argument. If, she maintained, an act could be procreative only during the fertile period of the month and if, as it often happened, even in this time frame procreation did not necessarily occur, thus a woman could effectively generate a relatively small number of children compared to the number of ova she was endowed with, what was the meaning of the acts which did not result in a child? According to her, their meaning was the fostering of conjugal love. But, she noted, there were circumstances in which a new pregnancy would harm the mother, or in which limitation in the number of children was desirable. Periodic continence had, according to her and her husband’s study, proved to be unreliable. Therefore, she demanded how could the biological outcomes of an act and the psychological and physical necessities dictated by human nature be harmonised whilst still following Church teaching. Without directly addressing the role of conscience nor mentioning it, Colette Potvin, at the end of her speech, clearly suggested that the only acceptable solution was that the Church modified her teaching to live the decision on the number of children to couples, that is, to their consciences. She stated: “[U]ne morale qui, avec les commandements de Dieu et l’esprit évangélique, lui [to the woman] présente les valeurs essentielles à conserver dans son foyer, l’atteindra davantage. Bien sûr, elle aura constamment à faire un choix, mais alors, elle posera des actes libres”³⁹⁴. By doing so, couples could unite both for the purpose of procreating and foster their

³⁹³ Ibid., 3.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

intimate and spiritual communion. In both cases, their relation would positively affect their children, both future and living ones.

The argument developed by Mrs. Potvin, that not all conjugal acts were procreative, and that therefore their purpose could not be limited to the generation of new offspring, was not new to the Commission. Liberal members, like Father Häring, had already come to the same conclusion. However, the novelty in Colette Potvin's words laid in the fact that her own personal experience and that of a considerable number of couples testified to the position she was defending. Furthermore, she was immediately joined by the other North American wife and mother-of-four present at the session, Patty Crowley, who affirmed:

We think it is time for change. We think it is time that this Commission recommend that the sacredness of conjugal love not be violated by thermometers and calendars. Marital union does lead to fruitfulness, psychologically as well as physically. [...] we do not need the impetus of legislation to procreate – it is the very instinct of life, love and sexuality. It is in fact largely our very love for children as persons and our desire for their full development as committed Christians that leads us to realise that numbers alone and the large size of a family is by no means a Christian ideal unless parents can truly be concerned about and capable of nurturing a high quality of Christian life³⁹⁵.

Patricia Crowley basically reiterated Colette Potvin's opinion on the multiple purposes of an act and on Catholics' willingness to procreate and educate the offspring, that is, to exercise their parenthood responsibly. In agreement with Colette's conclusions, Patricia too urgently demanded a change in Church doctrine which would allow parents to enjoy their marital life and conscientiously generate.

4.2.1. The Canadian Survey: scope, method, and respondents

The Canadian couple submitted to the Commission a forty-page study which comprehended a thorough description of its scope, method, respondents, as well as the content and results of the study and a selection of answers they received to the questionnaire³⁹⁶. The purpose of the Potvins' research was the collection of the experiences and opinions of practicing Catholics on conjugal morality, love, and the regulation of births. Moreover, the psychological effects of the use of natural birth control methods, in particular of temperature, on couples and on their family atmosphere were under scrutiny. In order to collect data on these topics, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed, which contained

³⁹⁵ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

³⁹⁶ Laurent and Colette Potvin, *Survey of Couples* (1966), CBCC, 2/07 M-9, UNDA. In this section, the scope, method, respondents, and the content of the questionnaire are covered. The results will be presented in the following section. A selection of the answers given by Canadian couples are included in the last four section, where they are discussed in relation to the four topics analysed in Chapter Three.

open-ended questions, five of which to be answered by both spouses, four by the husband alone, and four by the wife alone³⁹⁷. This approach is said to be preferred to a systematic statistical one, for it illuminated the psychological aspects connected to the practice of periodic continence.

The questionnaire was sent to 1000 couples and 319 responded. Couples were not randomly selected, rather, they were all actively involved in Christian movements and organisations established for the purpose of educating other Catholics on marital doctrine and natural birth control practices. Therefore, some were qualified instructors for “Serena” – a Canadian organisation for NFP – and other programs for the spreading of the temperature method; some others were committed to centres for conjugal counselling and NFP, like the Foyers Notre Dame³⁹⁸. Some of the participants were speakers at conferences or held courses in preparation to marriage, whereas others were selected among Canadian members of the CFM. In other words, respondents were carefully selected from the representatives of a lay élite involved in the field. This aspect is of important consequence as far as the object of this analysis is concerned and, indeed, in the study it is clarified that “[L]es témoignages doivent donc être étudiés en ayant toujours ces faits à la mémoire”³⁹⁹. On the one hand, a greater level of expertise and familiarity with marital doctrine and the physical, psychological outcomes of natural birth control practices should be reflected in the answers of respondents, compared to those non-educated participants might have provided. Therefore, the responses can be considered reliable as far as the data on which they are based are concerned. On the other hand, however, if the respondents, all involved in the education of other Catholics, were also members of an élite, “many of them highly educated”, they were probably associated with or aware of educated environments in which early dissenting voices were starting to be raised⁴⁰⁰. Furthermore, it has been maintained that some centres for conjugal counselling and NFP, like the Foyers Notre Dame, and large-scale movements, like the

³⁹⁷ The first set of questions examined attitudes towards the regulation of births, the positive or negative value of conjugal morality in relation to marriage, the role and meaning of Christian charity in marriage, the fundamental value of matrimony, and expectations about future statements and clarifications on these matters by Church authorities. The second set of questions examined the meaning attributed to self-mastery and periodic continence by husbands, the reasonable rate of conjugal acts to be posed each month, and the approximate number of acts posed by each respondent per month. The third set of questions examined the meaning attributed to self-mastery by wives, their role in men’s acquisition of this ability, the reasonable rate of conjugal acts to be posed each month, and the approximate number of acts posed by each respondent per month.

³⁹⁸ Data and testimonies on the activity lead by this particular Catholic counselling centre and other similar ones in France and Belgium are available. Crosetti clarified that, although they were not yet labelled as planned parenthood centres, they were effectively treating psychological issues and offering counselling on NFP whilst also dealing with couples who sought advice on contraception and abortion. Anne-Sophie Crosetti, “The ‘Converted Unbelievers’: Catholics in Family Planning in French-Speaking Belgium (1947-73),” *Medical History* 64, no. 2 (April 2020): 267–286, DOI: [10.1017/mdh.2020.6](https://doi.org/10.1017/mdh.2020.6). Apparently, Foyers Notre Dame groups were active even in French-speaking Canada, as testified by the Potvins’ study.

³⁹⁹ Laurent and Colette Potvin, *Survey of Couples*, 1.

⁴⁰⁰ Tentler, *Catholics in America*, 173. See Chapter One, 1.6.3.

CFM, were not unfamiliar with the debate in support of the liberalisation of contraception and abortion. This might suggest that, as maintained in the case of American CFMers, the answers of Canadian respondents, although based on plausible arguments, were nonetheless probably illustrative of a certain portion of North American Catholicism, namely of a well-educated laity.

4.2.2. The Potvins' Results

The analysis of the responses given by the 319 couples which participated in the Potvins' survey produced results into four areas. To begin with, a general impression of the couples' opinion on marital doctrine and birth control emerged. Indeed, an overwhelming majority, 303 out of 319, claimed to have confronted with the problem of regulating births and for 145 it still persisted at the time they received the questionnaire. Furthermore, a correlation was discovered between the level of difficulty couples encountered in regulating births and their appreciation of moral laws. It appeared that the more difficult the regulation of births, the lower the opinion on the latter. On the other hand, those who were not personally touched by the issue found that the laws of morality had enriched their married life. In addition, the vast majority of participants maintained that the main value to be appreciated and preserved in marriage was conjugal love, which they placed at the same level of fecundity or even higher. To them, a close and direct relation existed between fecundity, the education of offspring, and conjugal love, which could not be dissociated from one another. Almost all couples acknowledged the value of continence to foster conjugal love. However, they disagreed with the view that periods of continence should be dictated by the phases of the female menstrual cycle. From the responses it was also possible to determine that, although the frequency of marital acts performed on average was not below the reasonable number of acts to be expected from a couple, respondents were generally dissatisfied with their sexual life. The dissatisfaction was to be ascribed mainly to the preoccupation with the mechanics of the act and the constant effort devoted to ensure its integrity. According to the authors, this practicing and devout group of Catholics felt a sense of guilt when it came to their sexual life and Church teaching.

In addition to these general observations, detailed commentary on birth control methods is provided. Although an inquiry was conducted to ascertain the number of couples who made use of artificial contraceptive methods, those who took the contraceptive pill were not counted. Excluding, therefore, these cases, it appeared that only 11 couples utilised mechanical or chemical birth control. On the contrary, almost every participant claimed using or having used rhythm or temperature as a way of regulating births. Moreover, 34% of respondents affirmed that periodic continence impacted their marriage negatively, majorly because of its unreliability. 47% of respondents, however, maintained its positive influence. The acquisition of self-control, reciprocal respect between the

spouses, the betterment of sexual relations, and the improvement of family atmosphere were cited as positive outcomes of the practice of continence. Despite the substantial amount of appreciation of this method, an overwhelming consensus emerged over the impossibility of its widespread use. This impression was confirmed during a 1966 Serena conference, in which 125 couples participated. On this matter, the authors maintained that “l’utilisation de la méthode symptom-thermique n’est pas possible, n’est pas épanouissante pour tous”⁴⁰¹. The impracticability of this method was attributed to the frustration of one of the spouses with the method, its unreliability as far as the regulation of births was concerned, its negative impact of the family, or simply because of a couple’s acquisition of conjugal maturity and self-control.

Furthermore, the role of pastoral teaching in the diffusion of marital doctrine was evaluated. The analysis conducted by the Potvins illuminated on the lack of proper education on conscience and its place in the exercise of responsible parenthood. It is maintained that often Catholics followed Church teaching not by an informed choice but rather by faithful adherence and total submission to the Church. In addition, the instruction of believers by their families, schools, parishes, and priests was defined as equally insufficient. However, great emphasis was placed on the role performed by Catholic movements and organisations aimed at educating people on marriage and their positive contribution to the education of the faithful were openly praised.

Finally, a brief commentary on the following action to be expected on the part of Church authorities is provided. Considerable variation could be observed in the responses given by Canadian couples, which are reported and summarised in Table 3⁴⁰².

Table 3.

Suggested action	Foyers Notre Dame	Serena	Others	CFM
Clear, detailed, universal, practicable guidelines	55	8	11	–
Little to no law mitigation	16	5	4	–
Law mitigation	15	1	2	6
Permission to use the contraceptive pill	15	4	2	2
Primacy, place of conjugal love	31	7	3	6
Greater freedom to couples	26	16	10	5
Conscience on the number of children	23	11	3	11
Conscience on birth control methods	4	2	7	9
Practical, positive guidelines	19	5	6	1
Greater understanding of difficulties	33	6	6	1
More competent priests	11	1	3	–
Education to conscience	8	4	3	1

⁴⁰¹ Laurent and Colette Potvin, *Survey of Couples*, 4.

⁴⁰² The results showed in Table 3 are presented in the original report in Table 8.

The vast majority of respondents expected some change. Only a small portion recommended a statement on freedom of choice as far as birth control methods were concerned – 23 in favour of the contraceptive pill and 22 of other methods. A considerable number wished for more practical and detailed guidelines on marriage doctrine (105), many of which also demanded that they were presented in a more positive way (46). Numerous participants asked for a statement which would support a change in the doctrine as far as the hierarchy of ends was concerned (47). In particular, it should clarify the place of conjugal love, by stating its outstanding importance, if not primacy. Similarly, a doctrinal statement on conscience was deemed appropriate, which would grant freedom of choice about the number of children to call to life and, to a lesser degree, birth control methods – 48 and 22 respectively. Finally, it should be noticed that CFMers more than other participants from other groups and organisations explored practical ways to modify existing teaching, e.g. lawfulness of the contraceptive pill, primacy of conscience.

Concluding remarks on the milieu in which the study was conducted are included. It was noticed that:

on a rapidement évolué d'une position traditionnelle et légaliste, vers une morale qui met l'accent sur les valeurs, sur l'ensemble de la fécondité et non sur chaque acte en particulier, sur le progress dans la réalisation d'un amour conjugal vrai, sur les liens indissociables qui existent entre la fécondité, l'éducation des enfants, l'amour conjugal et la cellule familiale. Il est intéressant de noter que cette évolution s'est faite dans les milieu où l'on pratique et enseigne la régulation des naissances par la méthode Sympto-thermique⁴⁰³.

This last remark, in particular, seems to contradict what has been presented in Table 1, namely a call for some form of change in Church teaching, by drawing a direct connection between the teaching and practice of periodic continence and a growing appreciation of existing marital doctrine. However, the authors clarified that, despite the prevailing positive attitude towards periodic continence for the fostering of conjugal love, conjugal maturity, and family atmosphere, it was altogether true that the majority “la [this method] considèrent comme un moyen, excellent sans doute, mais pas comme le seul moyen”, thus negating its primacy and effectively supporting a lift of the ban on contraception⁴⁰⁴. Therefore, as seen previously in the analysis of the results produced by the questionnaires among American CFMers, the four subjects on which doctrinal development was demanded in the *Majority Report*, were also discussed by Canadian Catholics. In a similar way to the majority of the Commission, they recommended proper education on conscience, the assertion of the primacy of

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 6

⁴⁰⁴ Ivi.

conjugal love and the role of sexuality, as crucial aspects of marriage, and the exercise of responsible parenthood.

4.3. North American perspectives on education, conjugal love, sexuality, and responsible parenthood

As clarified at the beginning of this chapter, numerous similarities exist between the major areas of doctrine development demanded in the *Majority Report* and the suggestions of change advanced in the responses of North American married Catholics. This paragraph aims at supporting this theory by presenting evidence of such correspondence through extracts taken from the Crowleys' and the Potvins' questionnaires.

To begin with, in the previous chapter, the importance of education in spreading marital doctrine has been maintained. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that by the end of the 1966 meeting the majority called for educational renewal⁴⁰⁵. In particular, by shifting the focus from a merely scientific and demographic approach to the regulation of births to a theology-based one, it was demanded that lay Catholics could be properly instructed on the exercise of responsible parenthood and the formation of conscience to accomplish this task. Moreover, the development of pastoral programs on family life, marriage, and parenthood designed to address directly the laity and not for priests, was recognised as a necessity. Examples of lay suggestions and complaints of a lack of proper education on marital doctrine are present. These couples knew that the development of a pastoral action aimed at spreading Catholic teaching on family life was possible. After all, movements like the CFM and Catholic rhythm clinics had been doing so for more than 15 years. However, according to the majority of them, pastoral instruction should not be limited to reiterating an existing teaching. Some respondents openly supported the development of a theology of marriage which would respond directly to the questions, doubts, and distress of the laity. One couple said: "We hope for a theology of marriage that includes a greater understanding and appreciation of the essence of sexual union and the growth in grace and sanctity that it nourishes in the Christian vocation of marriage"⁴⁰⁶.

On the one side, then, couples were calling for educational renewal, on the other, however, they were also making some practical suggestions and were thus effectively demanding to be listened to and involved in the process. As suggested by the previous citation, the vast majority had come to the conclusion that not procreation, but rather conjugal love and a mature and fulfilling sexual life were at the core of marriage, for they occupied a central place within the hierarchy of ends, just as the begetting of children. Examples of responses affirming the primacy of conjugal love are

⁴⁰⁵ Chapter Three, 3.1.1.

⁴⁰⁶ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

numerous. Suffices to know that, when asked the question “Quelles sont les valeurs fondamentales que vous, en tant qu’époux chrétiens, vous croyez qu’il faille conserver à tout prix dans le mariage?”, all the testimonies but one included in the Potvins’ report, listed love as the most important value⁴⁰⁷. Another couple, reflecting on the dichotomy between fecundity and fruitfulness, insisted on the close connection between conjugal love and unitive acts and the creation of a loving community: “love within the family should be a constantly growing phenomenon. Abstention from physical love hinders this growth and adversely affects one’s charity toward those in the home and those outside the home”⁴⁰⁸. Therefore, the crucial role of conjugal love to the creation of a loving community was widely maintained.

Because the majority of respondents was placing greater emphasis on the role of conjugal love, but were also aware of the fact that this component had been overlooked by family moralists and theologians in the past, probably because they were less affected by the practical outcomes of the doctrine, they were quite outspoken about the meaning they attached to the expression. For example, one couple developed their argument starting from what, according to them, was the meaning of marriage; they affirmed: “[B]efore God said ‘Increase and multiply, He looked at Adam and said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone’ and he created a helpmate, woman, for him to love”⁴⁰⁹. Referencing the Scriptures, this couple maintained that prior to the commandment to generate new offspring, was that of loving one another. They added: “[W]hile we want to obey the Church, we feel this whole question about ‘Birth Control’ is ‘legalistic phariseism’. What’s rhythm with all its charts, temperature taking and calendars, if not contraception?”⁴¹⁰. Therefore, by placing conjugal love over procreation, thus giving prominence to the unitive character of an act over the procreative one, they supported the use of contraception. One can maintain, then, that conjugal love served a clear purpose.

Indeed, this concept was not new to moral theology. By preserving the link with tradition and enhancing the significance of existing teaching, couples were able to develop and support their arguments in favour of artificial contraception. The fact that rhythm already appeared to them and actually was a form of birth control, allowed them to support the argument in favour of all methods of birth control. The testimony of one woman on the harmfulness of periodic continence was that “[I]t is a strain on natural husband–wife relations”⁴¹¹. As seen in Table 1, reasons behind the general discontent with rhythm – some even cited the temperature method – were numerous and referred especially to the mental and psychological stability of the spouses. Many maintained that a newer,

⁴⁰⁷ Laurent and Colette Potvin, *Survey of Couples*, part. II, 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

⁴⁰⁹ Ivi.

⁴¹⁰ Ivi.

⁴¹¹ Ivi.

deeper understanding of the hierarchy of ends and the lifting of the ban on contraception would be a result of the integration between theological principles and the psychological, physiological, and emotional knowledge on the human nature. The response of one couple, in particular, clearly summarised this position:

[W]e believe that the Church can logically develop a change in its position on birth control. It should state that this change is based on a greater knowledge, understanding of the marital relationship, the emotional and psychological nature of man and woman. The new position should state that the primary functions of marriage are both conjugal love and procreation, and that the prudent use of contraception is permitted, according to the dictates of the individual conscience⁴¹².

The influence exercised by modern sciences, like psychology and physiology, and the impact of new discoveries on human nature, psyche, and body as far as Church position on contraception was concerned, were not acknowledged only by the laity. During the speech he gave at the fourth Commission meeting and during his June 23rd 1964 speech, Pope Paul VI too had already arrived at a similar conclusion⁴¹³. All the more reasons to support their stance.

The renewed interest in psychology took by some priests and religious scholars, an interest Paul VI himself did not disapprove of, drew attention to the role of sexuality in marriage⁴¹⁴. Indeed, the study of the human psyche had underlined the importance of having physical needs and desires satisfied by the spouses to foster healthy, stable relationships. This interest was not uncommon among American and Canadian couples and this aspect was highlighted by a significant number of couples in the questionnaires. Such interest in the role of sexuality highly characterised Catholicism in North America, for there it developed earlier than in other Western areas. For example, by the end of the 1950s Reverend Bernard Häring was already discussing its connection with conscience formation at CFM national conferences. Furthermore, the sexual revolution, which started in the US and then spread to other Western countries, probably prompted it⁴¹⁵. In general, the opinion of married couples on the meaning of sexual relations, not simply procreative, but also unitive, are best summarised by the following expressions: “love and fulfil[ment] of the two partners”, “constant communion of bodies and souls”, “uniting effect both spiritually and mentally as well as physical”, and “a higher

⁴¹² Ivi.

⁴¹³ Chapter Two, 2.6; 2.8.4.

⁴¹⁴ See Chapter Two, 2.6; 2.8.4. In his speech, the pope acknowledged the valuable contribution of modern and social sciences in the study of the human psyche and their relevance to the development of marital doctrine.

⁴¹⁵ See Chapter Three, 3.3.

form of this [conjugal] love [which] helps deepen the affection between the couples making them better persons as well as better parents”⁴¹⁶.

Once the role of sexual relations between husband and wife had been clarified and its importance for the creation of a loving community acknowledged, a considerable number of couples commented on how periodic continence negated them both. A Canadian wife wrote: “Les lits jumeaux, aussi, ont fait partie de l’expérience. S’ils semblent accorder une plus grande maîtrise de l’instinct sexuel, ils ont par contre un grave inconvénient: le détachement charnel relatif ne favorise pas toujours le climat de la bonne entente”⁴¹⁷. Another one, reaffirmed the importance of sexual relations and criticised the idea that acts of kindness and displays of affection between the spouses could be equated to the physical union of the bodies. She maintained:

[Q]uant à l’enseignement dans ce domaine, ce n’est pas son insuffisance qui nous estomaque, c’est son manqué de réalisme, d’une part, et son manqué d’idéalisme, d’autre part. En séparant le coeur et le corps, on a fait de celui-ci une entité distincte de la personnalité et échappant à celle-ci. Grave erreur. La poésie de l’amour charnel semble s’être réfugiée ailleurs que dans l’amour conjugal⁴¹⁸.

What is under attack, here, is a point of view on human nature which negated its physical and psychological exigencies in addition to spiritual and emotional ones. A significant number of American couples too expressed the limits imposed by the practice of periodic continence on sexuality and a satisfactory sexual life. One couple wrote: “it is impossible to regulate your mutual love to a date on a calendar. It then becomes an artificial act, a duty and is not conducive to true love and affection”; another one added: “[I]t [rhythm] interfered with spontaneous affection because of possible sexual culmination at the wrong time”; another pair claimed that rhythm led them to display “[U]nnatural physical love expression and repression due to artificial timing”⁴¹⁹.

Finally, the last doctrinal development demanded in the *Majority Report*, highlighted in the previous chapter, is the recognition of the right to responsible parenthood. As seen in Chapter Three, the expression responsible parenthood was understood by Conciliar fathers as the “harmonizing [of] conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life,” and thus it was not only justified from a moral point of view, but also encouraged⁴²⁰. However, within more liberal milieu, organisations or movements like the CFM, the expression was frequently used to refer to the regulation of births by

⁴¹⁶ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

⁴¹⁷ Laurent and Colette Potvin, *Survey of Couples*, 6.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴¹⁹ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

⁴²⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, par. 51. Chapter Three, 3.4.

means of contraception, both natural and artificial⁴²¹. Therefore, not only did it often appear – under these wordings or in other forms – in the responses of North American couples, but it was also used to promote the liberalisation of birth control methods deemed illicit by the Church at least until 1966, the year in which the questionnaires were distributed.

An American couple, for example, referred to responsible parenthood in order to criticise a theology of marriage and of the sexual act concerned with procreation, as opposed to the integration of this particular aspect, with the value of conjugal love, sexuality, and the education of the offspring over a lifetime span:

[T]he Church should ask only that the spouses love each other for the lifetime of the marriage, and should not seek to indicate that any act of sexual intercourse should or should not be directed toward parenthood. To do otherwise, is ultimately for the Church to develop a theology of the sperm and egg – both of which are parts of the whole, and are not the whole human being himself. Similarly, the married couple would also view their responsibility for bringing children into the world as one which obtains over a lifetime, and not for any individual act⁴²².

In other words, this couple was suggesting that Church teaching should have placed greater emphasis on the fostering of love between husband and wife and the creation of a loving family. Conversely, less importance should have been directed to the possibility of procreation each and every time the spouses united. Other couples demanded that married people could determine the size of their family according to their consciences and guided by medical advice: “[A]llow married couples to plan their families and take those measures necessary to meet the plans, given sound medical advice and the use of good common sense”; “[M]arried persons should be free to determine their own responsibility to society and to themselves”; and “[T]he decision to practice Birth Control or not, should be the responsibility of each individual family”⁴²³. The evolution of doctrine, therefore, would be the result of a deeper understanding both of conjugal love and its significance for family life. The response of one couple, in particular, clearly summarised this vision of marital doctrine. They affirmed:

[W]e both feel that there are two purposes to marriage – procreation and the mutual love and consolation of the husband and wife. Both are equally important and neither can be considered as ‘primary.’ Keeping both of these purposes in mind, couples should be allowed to form a right conscience and follow it, using birth control to space their children and to prevent adding to their family once they honestly feel

⁴²¹ Burns, *Disturbing the Peace*, 179.

⁴²² Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

⁴²³ Ivi.

they have as many children as they can raise to the best of their ability – spiritually, emotionally, physically and economically⁴²⁴.

Like conjugal love, responsible parenthood and its affirmation served a clear purpose. Once again, a concept not new to moral theologians was employed by married couples to maintain a link with tradition, on the one hand, and to support and liberalise birth control methods on the other.

4.4. The role of the laity

In the post-War period up to the years of the papal Commission establishment and meetings, premarital and marital instruction in American Catholic parishes were usually provided by priests⁴²⁵. However, these were often limited to a small number of lectures on marital doctrine, during which basic instruction on natural law, the rhythm method, and the hierarchy of ends were outlined. Thus, the pastoral activity on marital life certainly did not suffice nor did it satisfy the needs of young married couples. Scholar Tentler maintained that “[W]hat filled the gap for many priests were diocesan programs for the engaged”⁴²⁶. A primary example of one such program were Cana Conferences, the mostly lay-led movement for the advocacy and developing of Christian married life. Between the 1950s and the 1960s, lay Catholics had increasingly acquired a prominent role within parishes and priests more frequently delegated some of their tasks, like marital and premarital instruction, to them. Therefore, when in 1965 and 1966 North American couples, members of the CFM and other similar organisations, were asked to provide their insight into marital life, they were probably aware of how a considerable portion of the clergy relied on them and needed them, therefore, they also knew that theirs were powerful voices. Indeed, the majority did not refrain from clearly expressing their views and dissatisfaction with Church teaching and daringly put forward suggestions of change.

Some clearly stated that the time had come for Church authorities to work and collaborate with the laity in order to develop a new, more modern view on marriage. One couple stated: “[T]he Church, working together with married couples and listening to suggestions with an open mind, [could] prove to be the leading force in this matter” and they also claimed they felt “that the entire area [marital doctrine] [was] in need of revamping”⁴²⁷. Even among French-speaking Catholics, some asked the Church to work closely together with the laity to develop practical guidelines for marital doctrine: “[U]ne doctrine saine et vécue... donc pensée avec le laïcat. Une doctrine non pas ‘definitive’ mais

⁴²⁴ Ivi.

⁴²⁵ Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 189-190.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 192.

⁴²⁷ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

‘en quête’ d’amélioration. []”⁴²⁸. Another Canadian couple stressed the role of lay people in proper education: “[I]n the areas of conjugal love and fertility, full-time, specifically trained experts are needed to help handle, solve, and research the problems”⁴²⁹. The testimonies of many reflected the need and desire to have the laity involved in the process of developing new guidelines and shaping marital doctrine.

Another area in which lay couples highlighted their greater knowledge was that of sexuality and social changes which had come to influence it. Indeed, if the theoretical foundation to marital doctrine was a matter which pertained to theologians and moralists, its practical implications were fully grasped only by lay married people. Especially women, aware of their changed role in society and of the challenges posed to motherhood in a cultural context which demanded that greater attention was given to each child, underlined the negative impact of periodic continence and of existing marital doctrine in general. An American woman affirmed: “You just can’t expect to keep on saying ‘no’ to your husband and expect him to accept it gracefully which is putting it mildly. Also it tears at you internally”⁴³⁰. Periodic continence entailed long periods of abstinence, often not welcomed by husbands. Wives, too, claimed that this practice caused them great discomfort. The experience of another woman, supported this position; she claimed: “Emotional upsets to the wife sickness and primarily the fear of getting pregnant I believe can cause the cycle to fluxuate [presumably fluctuate]. This fear leads to abnormal sustaining which causes frustrations, both mentally and physically for both parties. Thus, causing quarrels and un[w]holosome attitude around the home”⁴³¹. The experience of one couple, for example, highlighted the disparity between husband and wife in the effort to be put into the practice to ensure its reliability: “[R]hythm hinders spontaneous ‘love making’, places a burden on the wife to determine whether intercourse is ‘safe’. It can, therefore, be at times very frustrating”⁴³². In general, wives seemed to have been under severe emotional and psychological strain, caused by periodic continence. One first reason has just been mentioned, that is the constant need on the part of the woman to continuously check the calendar before uniting with her wife. Another reason for women’s distress was represented by the fear of a new, undesired pregnancy. Indeed, rhythm proved to be an unreliable birth control method to many and, despite remaining obedient to Church teaching in practicing it, a large group of women wrote about their anxiety that it would result in another failure. This concern, in many cases, had an impact on the quality of sexual relations. As one woman explained, rhythm “added to tensions, uncertainties, worries over my

⁴²⁸ Laurent and Colette Potvin, *Survey of Couples*, 15.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴³⁰ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

⁴³¹ *Ivi.*

⁴³² *Ivi.*

becoming pregnant again [...]. And, my main objection is that it frequently increased sexual interest at a time when the sexual act was not intended, especially by the husband. This in turn increased tension and anxiety”⁴³³. Aware of the social and cultural changes which were taking place at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, conscious of their crucial role and irreplaceable presence within parishes, many North American lay Catholics answered the questionnaires openly demanding a change in the doctrine towards a lifting of the ban on contraception, probably positive about it.

4.5. The primacy of conscience

Another frequently recurring topic among the responses to the questionnaires is the primacy assigned to conscience in matter of birth control and birth regulation. That many American Catholics, both clerical and lay, were open advocate of freedom of conscience had already been discussed in Chapter One⁴³⁴. Here practical examples are provided to demonstrate how this concept and that of responsible parenthood were argued for in order to support the morality of artificial contraception.

For example, a Canadian couple confronted the moral dilemma between mere procreation on the one hand, and education of the offspring on the other. They said: “[I]n marriage we are responsible for having children and rearing them so they will ultimately see God” but they noticed that “[T]hese two obligations can conflict”⁴³⁵. Indeed, they wondered how many children could one procreate and educate properly. Their answer to this moral question was that there seemed to be “no magic number – each couples must be generous and prudent and must accept the final responsibility”⁴³⁶. Therefore, according to them, since there was no simple nor correct solution to this dilemma, ultimately, parents alone had responsibility on such choice. In other words, they seemed to suggest that, being the matter a private one, the solution essentially must be dictated by one’s conscience. Other respondents voiced the same opinion even more openly. The incipit to the response of an American couple reads:

[T]he decision on the number of children a couple should have is up to the conscience of the couple themselves. The purpose of marriage is that of mutual love and comfort as well as the procreation and education of children. Parents have an obligation in justice to each other and their other children not to have more children than they can care for and educate⁴³⁷.

⁴³³ Ivi.

⁴³⁴ See Chapter One, 1.6.2.

⁴³⁵ Laurent and Colette Potvin, *Survey of Couples*, 19.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴³⁷ Patrick and Patricia Crowley, *Survey of Couples*.

Another one strongly agreed: “[I]f, then, matrimony is a lifetime commitment of love, the commitment to cooperate with God in the birth, training and education of children should also be viewed from the standpoint of a lifetime. The Church [...] should not seek to indicate that any act of sexual intercourse should or should not be directed toward parenthood”; but, adding to the suggestions put forward by their fellow CFMers on the necessity not only to procreate, but also educate the children, they proceeded to explain that this teaching had been a constant in the history of the Church – in particular they referred to Noonan’s book, *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*⁴³⁸. Moreover, they underlined how even the Council strongly claimed “that the exercise of free will, following the dictates of conscience, is essential in any and all aspects of the marriage relationship,” even the responsible procreation and education of the offspring⁴³⁹. Another couple, placing the stress on the development of conscience, affirmed:

[T]he individual’s conscience should be developed to 1) have faith in God’s goodness and trust in His providence 2) know self control and self discipline 3) a sense of responsibility to spouse 4) a sense of responsibility to children 5) a knowledge of the advances of medical science. As a result of this development it would seem to us that the church could depend upon her married children to act with good will and honesty in using birth control⁴⁴⁰.

According to this couple’s opinion, a more personalist theology of marriage together with proper pastoral instruction on conscience would allow parents to love each other and help them make responsible choices about procreation. This, in turn, would also allow for a more mature laity, one capable of interpreting and putting into practice God’s teaching to love one another. Couples were effectively demanding to not only be guided and encouraged in the realisation of their marital vocation, but also that their own views on how to achieve independence and maturity in the exercise of parenthood could be represented by the doctrine.

⁴³⁸ Ivi.

⁴³⁹ Ivi.

⁴⁴⁰ Ivi.

Conclusion

In this thesis the influence of the historical background of the 1960s to the creation and the development of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births has been proven, as well as the internal influence exercised on its members, and on Catholicism at large, by a portion of the North American laity, which challenged the traditional Church stance on artificial contraception and exerted great pressure to have the birth control ban removed.

Starting from the aftermath of the Second World War to the end of the 1960s, Western societies underwent major cultural, social, and economic developments. The relative political stability and the economic wealth enjoyed by a greater portion of the population, if compared to the previous decades, partly accounted for the rapid population growth, witnessed between the mid-1940s and the 1960s. Exponential demographic increase, however, was often perceived by governmental authorities, philanthropic organisations, scholars, and industrialists as a hindrance and a threat to social progress. The action of birth control activists, like Margaret Sanger, and of birth control organisations, like Planned Parenthood, which were starting to develop research and educational programmes of fertility control – the development of the contraceptive pill in 1957 is a primary example –, gained the general approval from political authorities and prominent national figures. In addition, the sexual revolution, started at the beginning of the 1960s and which reached its peak at the end of the decade, supported the liberalisation of matters relating to the sexual sphere, including birth and fertility control. Eventually, a vast portion of Western societies, in particular the American one, came to support and employed birth control and birth control methods.

Political concerns over population growth, cultural and social movements for fertility control, and, in part, the distress of peoples from underdeveloped countries, urged the action of the Catholic Church. In 1959, Pope John XXIII called for the Vatican Council in order to address the outcomes of modernity in a spirit of *aggiornamento*. The birth control issue, by 1962 already discussed within Catholic circles in addition to political and secular arenas, constituted a delicate and divisive topic, which could polarise the debate among the Council fathers between those in favour – liberals – and those strongly against – conservatives. Thus, to avoid a split between the two fighting currents within the Roman Curia, probably advised by Cardinal Suenens, the pope decided to move the discussions on biopolitical issues outside the council, establishing a commission, later renamed the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births or Papal Birth Control Commission.

The early stages of the Commission's working were quite inconclusive, as its members limited the discussion to demographic data on population growth and international policies in relation to

Church teaching. As the public debate in Catholic milieu, scholarly articles, and clerical and lay publications in religious newspapers proliferated, though, a more thorough revision of Catholic doctrine of marriage could no longer be evaded. Indeed, scholars like theologians Charles E. Curran in the US and Edward Schillebeeckx in Europe, started to openly discussed and acknowledged the possibility of some form of birth control, e.g., the contraceptive pill, as well as the role of conscience formation to justify its use. In addition, lay Catholic experts, like Doctor John C. Rock, were publishing books which supported the morality of artificial contraception for Christians on the basis of scientific data and research.

Finally, and most notably, a well-educated, middle-class portion of North American Catholicism, loyal to the Church and whose dissent was not voiced before the 1960s, was raising awareness on the practical limits of traditional teaching, which permitted only the use of the rhythm method, which had proven as unreliable and a hindrance to the expression of mutual love. They also harshly criticised the centuries-old institution for its lack of understanding and knowledge of marital difficulties encountered by married Catholics who remained faithful to Church marital doctrine but were experiencing and witnessing a marked contrast with the marital and familial life enjoyed by their secular peers. On the basis of these arguments, a growing number of lay Catholics in the US and Canada maintained the morality of contraception, by virtue of a new appreciation of conjugal love, sexuality, and responsible parenthood, that is, the generous, yet prudent call to life of new offspring. Such lively debate and strong pressure exerted on the clergy and Church authorities mainly aroused in North American circles for there the laity served a prominent role within parishes and in pastoral instruction. Indeed, starting from the post-War period, and through the 1950s and 1960s, Catholic movements, like the Christian Family Movement (CFM), and organisations, like Cana Conferences, for the spreading of Christian principles of family life were proliferating. As these realities were growing, critical engagement on the part of the Catholic spouses and awareness of their active role in the shaping of consciences within the institution were encouraged.

Hence, when in 1965 the papal Commission, now constituted of 58 members, the majority of them from the laity, asked Patrick and Patricia Crowley, co-founders of the CFM, and Doctor Laurent Potvin, director of a rhythm clinic in Canada, and his wife, Colette, to conduce a survey on the efficiency of rhythm and possible developments of marital doctrine, the responses of North American couples were outspokenly against this method as the only one permitted and in favour of a lift of the ban on artificial contraception. Their arguments were based on four major themes. To begin with, many believed that marital teaching should not be binding in conscience, rather, it should provide guidelines for its formation to help couples make responsible decision about the number of children to call to life. In addition, the majority maintained that conjugal love – that is the creation of a loving

community – and not procreation was at the core of marriage. Therefore, they demanded that the traditional hierarchy of marital ends, which placed procreation at the top, was replaced with a more positive theology of marriage, which put greater emphasis on mutual love and the fostering of a healthy familial atmosphere. Furthermore, backed by psychological and scientific studies addressing the importance of sexuality, a considerable number of respondents defended the role of fulfilling sexual relations to a happy marriage and family. Finally, important considerations on the implications of generating and educating the offspring within the socio-cultural and economic context of the 1960s, led them to demand that the Church could ease the troubled consciences of parents whose desire was to generously, yet prudently call new children to life. In reality, the notions of responsible parenthood and of conscience formation served a clear purpose: concepts not new to traditional teaching on marriage were employed to maintain and justify artificial contraception.

At the end of the analysis of the surveys conducted among North American couples, of the four official reports produced by the Commission's general secretary, Father Henri de Riedmatten, and of the *Majority Report* signed by the majority of the Commission at the end of its fifth and final meeting, it is possible to attest that the role and impact of North American lay Catholicism on the Commission was considerable. Indeed, it is possible to establish an exact correspondence between the developments of Church marital teaching demanded by Catholic couples and the changes to marital doctrine advanced in the *Majority Report*. The international resonance of the 1960s debate about the morality of contraception, to which North American lay Catholics greatly contributed to, also provided proof of the great influence this portion of the faithful exercised on the entirety of the Church.

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