

Humanae Vitae and Birth Control: Practices and Perspectives from the Ghanaian Catholic

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Abstract

The Roman Catholic Church, through the Magisterium teaches the faithful the right way to Christian living. Controversial among these teachings was Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (On the Regulation of Birth) which indicates that the use of contraceptives is incompatible with the Christian message. This study situated the practices and perspectives of contraception in the context of *Humanae Vitae*. It then engaged students of the Catholic University College of Ghana on their practices and perspectives regarding the subject matter. The acceptance of the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* continues to be a critical test case for the Catholic and Christians not only in Europe and the Americas but also in Ghana.

Keywords: The Church³, *Humanae Vitae*, Magisterium, Contraception, Birth control.

Introduction

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's encyclical *Porta Fidei* (Door of Faith)⁴ and his subsequent declaration of the Year of Faith (*Annus Fidei*) reminded the Catholic faithful around the world of the essence of their faith. Catholics were reminded that the Christian message of following Jesus Christ has not always been a pleasant one, especially for the faint – hearted and those who seek an easy way out. It is a message that calls for the total denunciation of self to follow the example of Jesus⁵. It is indeed a message that calls all Christians, Catholic and Protestants alike, to imitate the example of Christ. The Christian message is one that contradicts the values of our time and world of cultural and religious relativism coupled with the consumerism that has engulfed the fabric of our social and religious perspectives and practices. The temptation, therefore, is that many a Catholic tend to be “nominal Catholics” (Catholic by name only) and or, “cafeteria Catholics” (Catholics who choose and practice some aspects of the Catholic Christian doctrine as they wish it). For Thomas J. O'Donnell, SJ in his book, *Medicine and Christian Morality*, the aforementioned tendencies of the modern Catholic are not only self – destructive from a religious point of view but also damaging to the people of God (p. 4)

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC), through the work of the Magisterium – the official teaching authority of the RCC⁶, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has over the course of the history of humanity, addressed and given direction in the light of faith, and has also addressed on almost every issue affecting the progress and growth of the human person, his environment and thereafter. Thus, the sacred teaching authority is as such not to be seen as a mere word of men, but truly the word of God⁷. All of these efforts have been met with various forms of opposition and acceptance in one way or the other – from *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor) by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 to Pope Francis' *Lumen Fidei* in 2013. Consequently, the Church continues to guard and explains the deposit of faith.⁸

In this paper, attention is paid to one of the controversial teachings of the faith which is recorded in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (On the Regulation of Birth). In this encyclical all forms of artificial contraception, excluding the rhythm method are banned. Whilst this issue of contraception has given rise to serious disagreement among the faithful and clergy in the Western world, the Church has insisted on its

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³ In this paper, The Church refers to the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

⁴ Acts 14:27

⁵ In Luke 14: 26, Jesus expounds on the cost on being a disciple

⁶ Cf. *Pastoral Guide*, vol. I, ed. 2003, no.26

⁷ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12; Cf. Th. 2:13

⁸ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no.5; *Dei Verbum*, no.4

past doctrine concerning the matter as correct and that “It is true because the Catholic Church, instituted by Christ to show men a secure way to eternal life, could not have so wrongly erred during all those centuries of history.....” (Ford, quoted in the National Catholic Reporter).

Anecdotal evidence points to the fact that the Catholic faithful in the West have had several opportunities to express their views on adherence to the Catholic teaching of birth control and other matters of life. This is supported by the many polls and studies done in that regard in the United States especially, and Europe. A number of polls (Gallup Poll, Pew Research, etc.) and research institutes (Guttmacher Institute, Hartford Institute for Religion Research, etc.) provide a justification to the matter. African Catholics and especially Ghanaian Catholics on the other hand, have had little or no such opportunities probably due to the paucity of studies and polls on matters of faith with respect to the Church in Africa. The only source of listening to the opinions and concerns on the Faith has been through the works of the laity week celebrations held once every year. These opinions and concerns, as expressed during the laity week, are however not published.

In response to the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the emergence of the Laity Council sought to increase the faithful’s participation in the liturgical and post – liturgical processes of the Church. The laity council in Africa has over the years discussed and taught the faithful on the doctrine of the Church and other pressing issues of the time. In Ghana for example, the laity councils dedicate a week in the year to afford the faithful an opportunity to ask, learn and share their faith. In 2013 the theme of the week was on the New Evangelization.

In America, woman’s preventive health service was to be covered in all health insurance plans without cost-sharing (such as co-pays or deductibles) under the new health care reform legislation. In response to the new health care reform legislation, the U.S. conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) led the change against the Department of Human Services responsible for contraceptive service and supplies. The Catholic hierarchy also opposes the use of contraceptive methods other than natural family planning (i.e. periodic abstinence, temperature rhythm and cervical mucus tests). In contrast, although no single entity claims to speak on behalf of U.S. Evangelicals on the issue of contraception, there is evidence that most Evangelical leaders and church members are open to the use of contraception, including hormonal methods and sterilization for married women, as a matter of personal conscience. However, most Evangelical leaders strongly oppose sexual activity and contraceptive use among unmarried women of all ages. Mainline Protestant denominations and their leaders, meanwhile, have historically supported contraceptive use, often for all women, or at the very least for married women¹.

The purpose of this paper therefore was to find out from the Catholic Faithful in Ghana, their knowledge, perspectives on birth control and willingness to adhere to the RCC’s teachings on birth control as spelt out in *Humanae Vitae*.

2.1 Related Literature

Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* banned contraception excluding the rhythm method. The issue of contraception has torn the Church apart to some extent. On the other hand, there is a hierarchy that insists contraception apart from the rhythm method is wrong. The Church has it that the Church doctrine in the past is correct, “It is true because the Catholic Church, instituted by Christ to show men a secure way to eternal life, could not have so wrongly erred during all those centuries of history.....” (Ford, quoted in the National Catholic Reporter). The magisterium – the teaching authority of the Church – insists that contraception blocks the procreative aspect of the marital act, and by doing so thwarts the plan of the procreative and unitive purposes of sexual relationship in marriage.

Quite a good number of the laity, a large number of the clergy, theologians and even a number of bishops disagree with the papal doctrine on artificial contraceptives. They claim the Church can and must admit it made a mistake, and should change its outdated rules governing contraception. They argue that if it is the purpose and goal of the couple to have children, conjugal sex while using contraception is an experience that can strengthen the relationship. It can provide a uniting experience that brings the couple closer without severing the procreative purpose of marriage.

“There is no commandment against contraception in any of the codes of the law.” These are the words of John Noonan in his book entitled “*Catholic Thoughts on Contraception throughout the Centuries*”, widely regarded by both the Church hierarchy and laity alike as an authoritative book on the subject. He asserts, the only reference the Bible makes to contraception is in the story of Onan, the son of Judah, who was required to have children with the widow of his elder brother, Er, according to the law. He practiced *coitus interruptus*, known as withdrawal, spilling his seed on the ground. God punished him with death. Taken literally, this can be interpreted as a condemnation of contraception. Most Biblical scholars do not take this literally, however, and agree that

¹Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Access to contraception, n.d <http://rcrc.org/issues/contra.cfm>. Accessed March 27, 2014.

Onan is punished for his disobedience to his father and his evasion of the obligations set forth by Hebrew values of propagation and fidelity. This notwithstanding, a number of biblical texts can be attributed to the Catholic way of life with respect to birth control and for that matter, contraception. A further survey of manuals by Noonan provides more justification to the teaching that contraception is sinful. Apart from the story of Onan¹ he makes reference to Paul's discussion of the natural and unnatural in Romans 1: 26-27². This is reiterated by the teachings of Pius XII in *CastiConnubii* where "intercourse even with one's legitimate wife is unlawful and wicked where the conception of offspring is prevented. Onan, the son of Juda, did this and the Lord killed him for it."³

2.2 The Second Vatican Council to *Humanae Vitae*

In 1962, the Second Vatican Council was convened for a "complete revision of the Code of Canon Law," and is described as "The greatest religious event of the twentieth century" (Broderick, 596). It was a huge undertaking consisting of hundreds of bishops and theologians from all around the world. For our purposes, we will focus on one part of the final document, namely, "The Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*). In it, the Church added to view on marriage. It described intercourse as "noble and worthy" and specifically did not say procreation was the primary reason for marriage. It emphasized love and procreating, and said it is the duty of each family to decide how many children to have. It did not make any decision about contraception, however, placing that decision in the hands of a future Vatican ruling. This ruling was to be heavily influenced by the findings of the Papal Birth Control Commission (PBCC). The PBCC, set up by Pope John XXIII in 1961 was to answer the so – called question about contraception that has plagued the Church over the years. It was diverse in its constitution (membership), that is, bishops, cardinals, theologians, doctors, sociologists and married couples. At the end of the work of the commission,⁶¹ as against 4 voted for the change of the doctrine. The PBCC therefore received a majority view that went against the doctrine of the Church. Contrary to popular expectation, the minority view was instituted by the papacy.

2.2.1 *Humanae Vitae*

In response to the findings of the PBCC, *Humanae Vita* was issued not giving in to any doctrinal change. Pope Paul VI completely ignored the findings of the PBCC, and upheld tradition. He extolled the virtues of the rhythm method, claiming "each and every marital act must remain open to the transmission of life." He claimed contraception would open a path to new and greater immoralities. He declared a man would "hold his wife in lesser esteem" if contraception were used. All these claims were supported by the argument, "For, as you know, the pastors of the Church enjoy a special light of the Holy Spirit in teaching the truth. And this, rather than the argument put forward, is why you are bound to such obedience" (*Humanae Vitae*, 13). At first, the public outcry was immense which could be attributed to the leakage of the PBCC's report which differed from the Pontiff's conclusion⁴. There was mass surprise and disbelief. Almost everyone was shocked and amazed that the Pope would disregard the PBCC completely. He did not even try to refute the arguments presented but based his teaching on Church authority. It is for this reason that George Weigel calls *Humanae Vitae* "the most controversial encyclical in history."⁵

In spite of the Church's total denunciation of artificial contraception, and for that matter contraceptives, many an effort has been made by the faithful and even Conferences of Catholic Bishops to seek areas of exemption. In 1987, the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops suggested that education on the use of condom could be an acceptable part of the anti – AIDS program. Specifically, the bishops argued that there could exist situations in which "educational efforts [...] could include accurate information about prophylactic devices or other practices proposed by some medical experts on a potential means of preventing AIDS" (U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1987). Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI responded that "even when the issue has to do with educational programs promoted by civil government, one would not be dealing simply with a form of passive toleration but rather with a kind of behavior which would result in at least the facilitation of evil". (Ratzinger, 1998). The same position was reiterated in 2009, by the then Pope Benedict XVI when he spoke on artificial contraceptives on his visit to Africa. According to the Pontiff, HIV was a tragedy that the distribution of condoms cannot overcome but would rather propound and promote (BBC, 2009a).

Amidst all these arguments, Green (2009) presents a more scientific rather than a theological explanation to the concerns raised. He argues that "in every African country where HIV infections have declined, this decline has been associated with a decrease in the proportion of men and women reporting more than one sex partner over the course of the year – which is exactly what fidelity programs promote". Green continues that

¹ Genesis 38:9-10

² Ford and Grisez, 166-167

³ Pope Pius XII, *CastiConnubii*, 55, quoting St. Augustine.

⁴ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 207

⁵ *Ibid.*, 206

the irregular use of condoms may actually contribute to higher levels of infection due to the phenomenon of risk compensation where people take greater sexual risks because they feel safer than they really ought to be because they are using condoms at least some of the time.¹

Archbishop Boniface Lele, the Archbishop of Mombasa, in an interview with granted by the Catholic Information Service Africa (CISA), addressed the issue of HIV and AIDS. Archbishop Lele argued that couples who are HIV – discordant may be allowed to use condoms to prevent reinfection. Lele told CISA “with some counseling – and this is what we don’t tell everyone – you can ask someone to use a condom, so that the rate of infection goes down” (CISA, 2005). It is important however to note that Lele’s statement was aimed at HIV – discordant couples, any extrapolation therefore to the unmarried would be invalid. Similar arguments are made by Bishop Kevin Dowling of South Africa, opposing the Church’s teaching on condom use (CathNews USA, 2009). In contrast to the latter, Bishop Kirima of the Nyeri Catholic Archdiocese exhorts Christians to practice chastity and maintains that abstinence from sex was “the surest way of keeping the virus at bay”. (UNWire, 1999)²

McClory in his 1995 book: *The Inside Story Of The Papal Birth Control Commission And How Humanae Vitae Changed The Life Of Patty And Crowley And The Future Of The Church*, reports a steady trend of polls that have been held since the release of *Humanae Vitae*. It reported that in 1970, 66% Catholic women were using birth control that contradicts Church doctrine; 1980 reported 94% of Catholic women of child bearing age using artificial contraceptives. In a 1991 poll, 87% of Catholics were reported to believe that couples should be allowed to make their own choice regarding birth control (McClory, 148).

Jones and Dreweke (2011), in their report, *Countering Conventional Wisdom: New Evidence on Religion and Contraception Use*, provide further evidence that the majority of the women of reproductive age (15-44) have a religious affiliation, attend religious services at least once a month and indicate that religion is very important in their daily lives. 83% report a religious affiliation: 48% identify themselves as Protestant, among whom 53% are Evangelical and 47% are Mainline Protestant (including Methodists, Presbyterians and other groups); 25% are Catholics and 11% identify with other religion (e.g. Buddhism, Islam, Judaism). The report further adds that most sexually active women who do not want to become pregnant, whether unmarried, currently married or previously married, practice contraception. The large majority use highly effective methods. This is true for women of all religious denominations, including Catholics, despite the Church’s formal opposition to contraceptive methods other than natural family planning. According to the report, among all women who have had sex, 99% have ever used a contraceptive method other than the natural family planning. This figure is virtually the same, 98%, among sexually experienced Catholic women. The overwhelming majority of sexually active women of all denominations who do not want to become pregnant are using a contraceptive method. Moreover, 69% are using highly effective method: sterilization (33%), the pill or another hormonal method (31%) or the IUD (5%). Only 2% of Catholic women rely on natural family planning; even among Catholic women who attend church once a month or more, only 2% rely on this method. Sixty-eight percent of Catholic women use highly effective method: sterilization, the pill or another hormonal method (31%) and the intrauterine device (IUD) (5%). Protestant women are more likely than Catholics to use highly effective contraception method, with 73% of mainline Protestants and 74% of Evangelicals currently using sterilization, hormonal methods or IUDs.

With all the aforementioned facts notwithstanding, the RCC maintains that “periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self – observation and the use of infertile periods is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC, 2370). It is therefore clear that popular opinion in matters of morality such as birth control is not supported by the RCC. Conclusively, the Church deems intrinsically evil, any action, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act or its accomplishment, that renders procreation impossible; thus the conjugal act should be open to life³. Consequently, the human person who emanates from the act must be seen as “the supreme gift of marriage” (CCC, 2378) and not an accident or a fluke of nature. Therefore, since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has continued to issue and to teach Christians especially Catholics on moral issues in addition to *Humanae Vitae*. For example, Pope John Paul II’s encyclicals, *Veritatis Splendor* and *Evangelium Vitae*; the Catechism of the Catholic Church and *Caritas*

¹Greenwood et al. (2010) make a similar point (They argue that when sex becomes less risky, people engage in more risky behavior along with several margins.

² Catholic clerics are not the only religious leaders opposed to condom use in the prevention of the spread of HIV. Moszynski (2008) cites Sheik Mohamud Ali of Garissa district in northern Kenya who argued that “a lot of money is being wasted to poison our community. [...] a huge amount of money is spent on buying condoms, buying immortality”.

³ The phrase “open to life” have proved problematic in the presentation of Church teaching. Clearly most acts of intercourse are not biologically open to life; *Humanae Vitae* requires that couples allow their intercourse to be the kind of act which in itself and insofar as it is up to the couple, is “ordered to procreation.” The official Vatican Translation now speaks of each and every marital act retaining “its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of Human life.”

in Veritate, Benedict XVI's encyclical on social issues in which "life issues" are placed at the center stage of the Church's social teaching are worthy of note.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Study Area and Study Population

The study was carried out at the Catholic University College of Ghana in Fiapre - Sunyani the capital town of the BrongAhafo Region in Ghana. This took place from February, 2014 to June, 2014. The Catholic University College of Ghana (CUCG) has five Faculties and a total student population of 4322 (Vice – Chancellor's Report and Statistics, 2013). The University runs a regular school (Monday - Friday) and a weekend school (Saturday - Sunday). Among the five Faculties that the University operates, all are run also at the weekend school with the exemption of the Faculty of Religious Studies. The University, therefore, draws students from all religious backgrounds in Ghana and countries contiguous to it. For example, the University has students from Togo, the Ivory Coast, Kenya and Nigeria.

The Catholic University has a Chaplaincy which was established in the 2002/2003 academic year and is headed by a chaplain. He is a Catholic priest of higher learning and supported by all Catholic priests – lecturers present at the university. The Chaplaincy organizes daily liturgies, weekend retreats and other religious activities which involve the University community as a whole and has since continued to build on the principle of highlighting and giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life. Central to the Chaplaincy is the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS). The IMCS is a group of all Catholic students in higher institutions of learning, for example at the universities and teacher and nursing training colleges who support their respective chaplaincies in their total formation, reaching out to the poor and evangelization, *inter alia*.

The University, grounded in the Catholic tradition, offers as part of its curriculum two courses on the teachings of the Church. They are Catholic Social Teaching (CST)¹ and Interfaith Encounter and Religious Dialogue (IERD).² These are offered as core courses to all Level 300 and Level 400 students respectively. Apart from this, there is a daily celebration of the Mass. There is also an Adoration Chapel for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and benediction which takes place every Wednesday after the Mass. The University Chaplaincy also offers catechesis and counseling sessions for both Catholics and non – Catholics.

3.2 Study Design and Sampling Techniques

Employing both quantitative and qualitative research study designs, respondent's views on the birth control as contained in *Humanae Vita* were sought. A quantitative questionnaire of closed and open ended questions was used for the first stage of the study. A follow - up interview was done among 24 respondents to probe further concerns associated with the RCC and birth control. With this method, the study moved beyond measures and numbers characteristic of quantitative techniques in capturing the thoughts and sayings of respondents (Malterud, 2001; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As a study that sought to generate data from persons in a Catholic institution of higher learning at a point in time, the study relied on a cross-sectional design. For Malterud, he argues that 'contextual issues are better studied with these methods (qualitative) than with quantitative approaches (Maltrrud: 398-399). It is in part of this reason that the qualitative approach was employed together with the quantitative approach to investigate the practices and perspectives on *Humanae Vitae* and birth control.

3.3 Recruitment of Respondents

3.3.1 Quantitative Survey

Participation in the study was on voluntary basis. Recruitment took place by invitation after the Catholic Mass was held on campus each day except for Saturdays. Class representatives of all levels (100 – 400) were notified and announcements made for the voluntary participation in the study. Students and staff of the University community who provided verbal consent were enrolled for the study. A random sample of the total population constituted respondents for the elicitations of quantitative survey responses.

A total of 600 questionnaires were administered. Questionnaires were distributed to class representatives through whom students collected, filled and returned. Class representatives in turn submitted completed and submitted questionnaires to the Chaplaincy. 508 questionnaires were completed and returned by April 30, 2014.

3.3.2 Qualitative: Semi – Structured Interview

Credibility (validity), dependability (reliability), confirmability (objectivity), transferability (generalizability)

¹CST provides insights into RCC's commitment to justice as constitutive to the proclamation of the Gospel. It focuses on the RCC's social teaching emerging from the theological and philosophical understanding of the human person and society as expressed in the encyclicals and other documents of the Church.

²IERD provides methods and approaches to encounter with other faiths. It shows the importance of Christian dialogue or interfaith encounter.

and insights generated by a qualitative inquiry depends on the richness of information shared by respondents and the analytical capacity of the researchers (Patton, 2002). Guided by these principles, the decision about whom to interview and when incoming responses answered the research questions were guided by the discretion of the researchers. For the purposes of this study 24 semi – structured interviews were conducted at the Catholic University College of Ghana. Respondents were drawn from all levels of study and interviews conducted in April, 2014 at the Chaplaincy and Adoration Chapel based on the convenience of the interviewee. Every interview is an interpersonal drama with a developing plot (Pool 1957, cited in Holstein and Gubrium 1999, p.112) thus; a written set of flexible worded topics on the subject matter served as the conversation guide and at the same time allowed respondents to participate in their own style and expression.

3.4 Data Analysis

Initially quantitative data was entered, cleaned and analyzed with the aid of the Social Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Consequently, results were presented in charts and tables. For the analysis of semi – structured interview scripts, data was initially analyzed separately by researchers. The sharing and reconciliation of findings provided the next phase of the analysis. The analysis involved reading, coding, displaying, reducing and interpreting data gathered (Ulin et al; 2005).

4.0 Presentation and Discussion of Survey Results

Out of 600 questionnaires that were administered, 508 out of 600 completed and returned their questionnaire thereby achieving a response rate of 84.7 %. In the survey, males constituted 50.6 percent (257) and females 49.4 percent (251). 23.6 percent (120) of respondents reported as first year students; 27.4 percent (139) reported as second year students; 22.0 percent (112) reported as third year students and 27.0 percent (137) reported fourth year students.

With regard to respondents' religious affiliation, 31.3 percent (159) belonged to the Catholic Faith, 49.0 percent (249) reported as Christian (non – Catholic); 15.4 percent (78) reported as Muslims; 3.9 percent (20) reported belonging to the African Traditional Religion (ATR) whilst 0.4 percent representing 2 respondents reported sharing other faiths which were not specified.

The representation of the above respondent characteristics provides evidence that 96.6 percent of respondents shared at least a religious affiliation. Given the great number of respondents who shared at least a religious faith or tradition, an appropriate ground was set to the discussion of the issues arising from *Humanae Vitae*. On the awareness of the RCC's teaching on birth control, 52.2 percent reported an awareness whilst 47.6 percent (243) reported of no awareness. On the appropriation of sexual intercourse only in marriage, 80.1 percent (407) respondents answered in the affirmative whilst 19.7 percent (100) respondents reported otherwise. 2 percent (1) respondent reported as undecided to the question.

It is interesting to observe that Pearson's chi square analysis found a significant relationship between respondents' religious affiliation and their awareness of the RCC's teachings on birth control ($p=0.29$). Thus, respondents' religious affiliation contributes statistically to their awareness of the RCC's teachings. Also, the religious affiliation of respondents also impacted significantly on their decision as to the appropriation of sex only in marriage. A statistically significant chi – square value of 0.15 was recorded.

5.0 THEMES EMANATING FROM SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

This paper sought to investigate respondents' knowledge, perspectives and practices with respect to *Humanae Vitae* and other matters arising from it. This section comprises a synthesis of 24 semi – structured interviews. Selected quotes are presented to illustrate the themes among interviewees.

The themes that arose from the interviews included:

- a. Cohabitation preceding marriage
- b. Contraceptives as evil/wrong and responsible parenthood
- c. Condom use among HIV discordant couples
- d. The RCC as a major contributor of the spread of the HIV pandemic
- e. What, if I am not a Catholic?
- f. Papal predictions as announced in *Humanae Vitae*? How far have they been realized?

5.1 Co-Habitation Preceding Marriage

The RCC teaches that co-habitation that precedes marriage is intrinsically not a good practice for marriage¹. Co-habitation, growing in current times as a way of life or preparation in many instances for marriage, has led many modern couples to have used contraceptives with multiple partners before marriage. In the words of one

¹ Glen T. Stanton's *Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society* (Mehasha, Wis.: Navpress, 1997)

interviewee:

"...Indeed it is not just that the RCC says it is wrong to cohabit. This is a basic Christian principle. We are all aware that sex before marriage is intrinsically evil however we do it. (Female, Level 400)

Recounting a personal experience, a male respondent reported that:

"Co-habitation and the use of contraceptives are not mutually exclusive practices. Our partners get pregnant by accident sometimes in spite of the artificial contraceptives used and you know what we do to itand many times these cohabitating pair do not end up in marriage" (Male, Level 200).

Another also said:

"... to live together provides an avenue to know each other better. But from my experience it comes with its own problems..." (Female, Level 100)

The words of a male respondent, *"our partners get pregnant by accident sometimes in spite of the artificial contraceptives"* are out of place in the teachings of the Church. For the Church, it is not possible to get pregnant by accident. Thus to get pregnant as a result of sexual intercourse means something has gone right and not that something has gone wrong.¹ A major source of concern was the reported trend of co-habitation present among university students today. All interviewees admitted at least knowing fellow students who are cohabiting. *"Some of us collect our hostel fees from our guardians and, or parents to go to the hostels but end up renting a room where we live with our boyfriends and girlfriends"*, said a Level 300 female student. It is, therefore, recommended that further studies be conducted to investigate the trend of co-habitation, its causes and implications for the vocation of marriage and the chaste life.

5.2 Contraceptives as Evil/Wrong and Responsible Parenthood

In her talk *"Contraception: Why Not?"* Janet Smith advanced reasons why contraceptives are not only wrong but evil. She reported that contraception is wrong because it damages our physical well-being, psychological well-being, marital relations and our relationship with God. Central to her claims was the imminent danger of sexual promiscuity and the damaging effects of contraceptives to marriage². Consequently, she presents the fact that contraceptives have led many to think of having sex with no preparation and or the expectation of the responsibility of parenthood. Some interviewees shared Janet Smith's proposition:

".... As for me, and many others, contraceptives have led to the 'norm' of having sex as a mere pleasurable experience. For the responsibility of childbearing, forget about it, not for now" (Female Level 300).

Furthermore, the proposition of contraceptives as evil, contradicting the unitive and procreative purpose of the conjugal act received mixed responses. Out of the 24 interviewees, 16 provided responses in the affirmative – that contraceptives are evil; 8 respondents associated no evil to artificial contraceptives. The position of the Church, that contraceptives separate the unitive aspect of sexual intercourse with the procreative (CCC, 2366) has long been established. Sexual union is meant to be the high point of the human love need to reflect a complete and total gift of self between spouses and not for the unmarried. Thus, when the love and life aspects of the conjugal act are separated, it becomes possible for each person to view the other as a mere object of pleasure. This has presented a significant distortion in the sexual revolution. At least, Immanuel Kant, no theologian, knew that people should be treated with respect and honor and not as objects. The postmodern man has seemingly forgotten this. It is worthy of note that, even among Christian denominations, many see nothing immoral with contraception. The 1930 Anglican Lambert Conference rejected the Christian teachings of the immorality of contraceptives. The RCC, propagating the truth that contraception is immoral, based it on Natural Divine Law³, the Holy Scriptures, Positive Divine Law⁴ and the Magisterium⁵.

5.3 Condom Use among HIV Discordant Couples

A controversial point in question was that of the morality behind HIV discordant couples using a condom. The magisterium has no definite statement on this matter. However, many a theologian and persons have offered suggestions that based on the principle of double effect⁶, a justification could be provided for the use of condoms among HIV discordant couples to prevent transmission. Contrary to this proposition, the RCC holds that all condom use without exception is contraceptive and is therefore immoral. Only completed acts of sexual

¹ Janet Smith and Christopher K. (2007) Life Issues, Medical Choices: Questions and Answers for Catholics. Pp. 76 77

² Janet Smith. Contraceptives: Why Not? https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=19imaevdeIE.

³ Natural Divine law is the divine design of the Creator (the eternal law of God) imprinted in the nature of creation itself, and able to be recognized. It comes from the Latin *"nascor, nasci, natus sum"* denoting what is given, what is inborn.

⁴ Positive Divine Law is the law added by God to the natural law in order to direct the actions of man to his supernatural end, to assist him to a better observance of the natural law and to perfect that which is wanting in human law.

⁵ The Ecclesial Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Church

⁶ The principle of double effect governs actions that have two or more morally significant effects. This reasoning originates from Thomas Aquinas's reflections on self – defense (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae II*, 2, question 64, art.7, www.newadvent.org).

intercourse are moral thus, the use of condoms contradicts sexual intercourse as a completed act. A male level 100 respondent said: “do you think to tell these couples not to use a condom is realistic? They may agree with the teaching but in practice I doubt how many couples will practice abstinence even when the other partner has HIV”.

Another retorted:

‘ ‘ ...the good Christian and for that matter a good Catholic will agree that even though the condom is intended to prevent the transmission of HIV, it blocks the transmission of life. Let them learn to abstain, after all sexual intercourse is not the entire purpose of marriage.’’ (Female, Level 200).

Disagreeing with the above, an interviewee said:

“How can the Church be that cruel? What if the other partner insists rapes or even threatens to divorce or assault the other” (Female, Level 400).

5.4 The RCC as a major contributor of the spread of the HIV pandemic

Following the preceding theme of condom use among HIV discordant couples, allegations leveled against the RCC arose. Principal among them was the blame leveled against the RCC as a major contributor to the spread of the HIV pandemic in Africa. The RCC’s opposition to the use of contraceptives is seen as calling for a stoppage of the use of condoms. Some people see this stance as a contribution to the spread of HIV in many developing countries especially in Africa (Reuters, 2007; BBC, 2009b). The Church has stated without equivocation that contraceptives are not only evil, intrinsically, but also will promote sexual promiscuity that could lead to risky sexual behavior and the consequent spread of HIV.

The Church maintains that condoms are not a solution to the HIV pandemic. A glaring evidence of the position of the Church is the success story of Uganda. In Uganda, HIV programmes placed utmost emphasis on abstinence before marriage and marital fidelity. This has become the solitary success story of reducing the HIV pandemic through the promotion of chastity – a message the Church believes as effective and encourages governments to emulate.

A female interviewee had this to promote:

“The RCC’s message of chastity will be the best, however are our governments ready to support it? ... look at the amount of millions of dollars the global community spends on HIV campaigns only compared to the millions of people whom could have been provided other health care services and even potable water.” (Female, Level 200, Protestant¹)

Another added that:

“Indeed! The Church is right. See how the contraceptives we use fail many times. It has never been 100% and we know that. So why not promote that which is 100%, that is, chastity and not the condom and other contraceptives” (Male, Level 100, Muslim)

Fact, therefore, is that in spite of the allegations made against the RCC on the transmission of HIV, many a respondent disagreed with the proposition. Only two interviewees supported the claims of the allegation:

“Why can’t we blame the Church? People will definitely have sex without the use of condoms because of the RCC’s teaching so she cannot be excused totally in this matter” (Female, Level 300, African Traditional Believer)

5.5 What if I am not a Catholic?

A question that emerged strongly at the end of the interviews was who the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* may apply to. The theme “what if I am not a Catholic?” emerged. Even though some Protestants, Muslim and African Traditional Believers share in the message of *Humanae Vitae*, the emerging question was raised by Protestants (Christian, non-Catholics). Out of the 24 interviewees, 7 out of 9 Protestants posed the above question; only one Muslim asked the same question. No African Traditional Believer asked the question. A Catholic interviewee, however, asked whether *Humanae Vitae* refers to and applies to all Christians, Catholics and Protestants alike?

The interventions expressed in the Papal encyclical are an indispensable body of teachings which addresses the threats towards marital happiness, family wellbeing, and respect for life and above all the dignity of the human person. The pope, as successor of St. Peter – “the rock on which I shall build my Church”² therefore, exercised this ministry as *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher) to clarify the mission of marriage and the service married couples give to God-as collaborators of creation, to each other and the society (*Humanae Vitae*, 2). Sharing therefore in the *imago Dei* (image of God), all of humanity regardless of creed, race or religion are called to be image of the characteristics of God’s love freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully. It is, therefore, not just a Catholic thought or way of life to respect the dignity of the human person, the vocation of marriage and the

¹ Protestant here is used to mean all Christians who are not Catholics.

² Cf. Mathew 16. 13 – 20.

living of a chaste life.

5.6 Pope Paul's Predictions; how far have they been achieved?

Presented with great clarity and explicit care, the Church has taught that marriage is a 'communion of persons'. She teaches respect for love and life and allows for the responsible spacing of children. In *Humanae vitae*, Pope Paul VI made some predictions amidst the disagreements at the time with regard to artificial methods of birth control. He predicted that acts of artificial birth control will lead to the following:

- a. An easy path to marital infidelity,
- b. Moral degeneration,
- c. A loss of man's respect for a woman, thereby he would no longer care for the physical and psychological well-being of the woman,
- d. Governments imposing coercive methods of control that inhibit freedom in one of the most sacred acts,
- e. Mankind thinking that he has unlimited power over his body (*Humanae Vitae*, 17).

Interviewees shared totally in the predictions made by the Supreme Pontiff in his encyclical. They expressed with different sentiments how far these predictions have been realized. Central to their responses was how far predictions (a) and (b) above have become a reality in the Ghanaian society.

A female level 300 student reported that:

'Even though I am not Catholic, one only need to look around for the evidence so far. Women in our time are less respected because we have allowed ourselves to be used as mere instruments for the selfish enjoyment of men. ... we are all to blame'.

Contributing to the concerns raised above, another added:

'...Moral degeneration in our day has become a part of us. Just listen to the news, walk in town or sit in a bus. Corruption has been institutionalized, children and adults alike are watching pornographic movies and pictures especially on their phones. Worst of all, contraceptives are promoted instead of preaching abstinence and marital fidelity. so it is not new that our most of our Junior High School and Senior High Schoolgirls are on family planning and this provides the license, you know that?' (Male, Level 200)

There was no comment on the prediction of governments imposing coercive methods of control that inhibit freedom on one of the sacred acts (the conjugal act). Fact, however, remains that in the United States of America, the Obama led administration's Health Care Bill with regard to the designation of contraceptive practices and supplies provides a good example. African governments which rely many a time on donor support to support their national budgets have followed directives from these donors to promote among other illicit moral measures such as the promotion of contraceptives, abortion, and homosexuality.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Presented with the many themes that emerged from the study, it can adequately be added that Paul VI's encyclical was and continues to be a sign of contradiction until today. The Christian life has turned to a life of suitable choice-making. Hence, the issue of being "nominal Catholics" (Catholic by name only) and or, "cafeteria Catholics" (Catholics who choose and practice some aspects of the Catholic Christian doctrine as they wish it) is gaining roots in our developing part of the world just as is being experienced in Europe and America. The RCC undoubtedly, has a vast collection of resources ranging from the Holy Scriptures, papal encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and other liturgical and post-liturgical events that provides an avenue for the continuing and complete understanding and practice of the Catholic faith.

Fact, however, is that a good number of Catholics and Christians are ignorant of their faith, even at the university level. Cardinal Arinze, in his book *Meeting Other Believers*, provides a personal account of U.S. Christians who have become Buddhist monks and nuns in Thailand and in Taiwan. For him many Christians are fascinated by these oriental religions and their methods of meditation. He, however, regrets that:

"... especially among the young, who are abysmally ignorant of the major tenets of Christianity. They do not know about the riches of Christian asceticism or mysticism. For them, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Catherine of Sienna, ... are mere names whose spiritualities are largely a closed book for them." Pp. 39 – 41.

For Arinze therefore, the 'spiritual shopping'¹ witnessed in recent times among Catholics could be as result of the unawareness of the faithful of the asceticism or mysticism of the RCC. The Church in Africa and especially Ghana cannot be immune to the spiritual shopping expressed by the prelate.

Recommendations

Relying on the many themes explored in the study, the following are recommended.

- a. Initiation of religious opinion polls

¹ Spiritual shopping refers to Catholics who abandon their faith to test that of the Oriental religions, new sects or even other esoteric groups all in the name of satisfying their spiritual hunger.

- b. Publishing of Laity Week Celebration discussions
- c. Catechism as a lifelong Catholic life of instruction and not just a spot kick of instruction for the sacraments of initiation.
- d. Catholic bishops could initiate fora and presentations in their dioceses on Papal encyclicals which touch on the signs of the time.
- e. The role of the family (the domestic church) in the propagation of the faith should be re-emphasized.

Areas of Future Research

- a. Factors accounting for the alleged loss of the Catholic Faith in Africa among the youth especially.

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