

# Spiritual Responses to the Regulation of Birth (A Historical Comparison)

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## ABSTRACT

Over 30 years ago the founders of the Christian Family Movement (CFM), a worldwide Catholic family action group, conducted a survey to investigate the marital effects of practicing “rhythm.” Their final report indicated that many participants felt that periodic abstinence was harmful to their marriage and caused spiritual and religious distress. The CFM survey results were thought to have been influential in convincing the 1966 Papal Birth Control Commission to recommend a change in church teaching. The purpose of this paper is to report a re-analysis of the 1966 archived data (in the light of the Papal Encyclical *Humane Vitae—On the Regulation of Birth*) and to compare that study with responses from married couples using modern methods of NFP, i.e., methods that purport to be more effective and to have fewer days of periodic abstinence. This paper will provide an examination of the original study within its historical context and report on the responses relating to spirituality from the 1966 couples in comparison with couples currently practicing periodic abstinence through the Billings Ovulation Method.

## SPIRITUAL RESPONSES TO THE REGULATION OF BIRTHS

In the mid-1960s, Patrick and Patricia Crowley, the founders and executive secretaries of the Christian Family Movement (CFM), conducted several international surveys to determine how the practice of the calendar-rhythm method of family planning affected marital life.(1) The Crowley’s were members of the Papal Birth Control Commission that was studying the question of population and family planning and ultimately considering the question whether the Catholic Church should change its teachings on birth

control. In 1966 the Crowley's distributed a questionnaire to members of CFM throughout the US and Canada that asked them how "rhythm" either helped or harmed their marriage. The responses that they received from the participating couples were mostly negative in that the majority felt that the practice of "rhythm" somehow harmed their marriage. The results of this study were never published but rather were submitted as a written report to the Papal Birth Control Commission.

According to Robert McClury, a journalism professor from Northwestern University, this report influenced the members of the Papal Commission to recommend that the Catholic Church change its position on the use of contraception.(2) McClury indicated that the report and the negative responses to the practice of rhythm contributed to the "turning point" in the deliberations of the Papal Commission. The written responses (data) from the 278 couples who completed Crowley's questionnaires are on archive at the University of Notre Dame. The qualitative data have never been analyzed using modern qualitative research methods. A re-analysis of the Crowley's qualitative data using modern methods of analysis would be of interest to historians, to individuals involved with Church policy, and to health professionals interested in family planning issues. The purpose of this paper is to present a re-analysis of the spiritual responses from the 278 couples who were practicing calendar-rhythm in the Crowley study and to provide a comparison analysis of the spiritual responses from 192 contemporary couples that are currently using a modern method of natural family planning, the Billings Ovulation Method.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the 1940s and 1950s a number of Catholic and Christian "family life" organizations or movements emerged in the United States.(2-6) The purposes of these organizations were to support and strengthen family life in the United States. They were in part a response to the aftermath of World War II and the rise of communism, which both posed threats to traditional American

family life. One of the largest and most successful of these family movement organizations was the Christian Family Movement (CFM). Patrick and Patty Crowley founded the CFM in the Archdiocese of Chicago around 1946 with the encouragement of Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand, their spiritual advisor.<sup>(4)</sup> The CFM started out as a local movement of small groups or “cells” of families who would meet on a regular basis to discuss religion, scripture and current topics that pertained to family life. Following the study, discussion and reflection on scripture, they would focus on how to take action on issues that were raised. This is why the CFM can be termed a Catholic action group. In the 1950s and 1960s, one of the topics of concern was birth control. Largely due to the efforts of the Crowleys, the CFM movement grew to an international organization of over 145,000 members by the mid-1960s.

The 1960s was a decade of tremendous social change for the world. In the Catholic Church, that change was stimulated by the Second Vatican Council (called by Pope John XXIII in 1962). One of the key members of the Council was Bishop, and later Cardinal, Leo Joseph Suenens from Belgium, who convinced Pope John, and subsequently Paul VI, that the question of birth control should be taken out of the purview of the entire council and studied instead by a special commission.<sup>(2,5)</sup> Thus, the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Births (less formally known as the Papal Birth Commission) was created in 1963 by John XXIII and continued by Paul VI. The Commission began with six members and conducted six meetings from 1963 to 1966. By 1966 the commission grew to have over seventy members.<sup>(2,5)</sup> The largest group of these was added in 1965. Within the 1965 group there were three married couples Dr. Charles and Elisabeth Rendu from France, Dr. Lourent and Colette Potvin from Canada, and Patricia and Patrick Crowley from the United States.<sup>(2,5)</sup>

The original purpose of the Commission was not clearly defined. It was given the broad purpose to study the questions of population, birth control, and the effects on the family.<sup>(2)</sup> The

problem of population and birth control was among the major topics addressed by the United Nations at that time.(2,6) As the Commission evolved, its members eventually saw the possibility of influencing Church teaching on the matter of birth control. The leader of the commission, Fr. Henri de Riedmatten, who was aware of the possibility of change in the Church's teaching, asked the Crowleys to survey members of the CFM on their opinions of birth control, the Church's teaching, and the effect of "calendar-rhythm" on marriage and family life.(2,6) The Crowleys then conducted a series of three surveys among CFM members in the United States and other countries.(1) The survey questionnaire asked the participants to comment on the effectiveness of the rhythm method and on the question whether the practice of rhythm was helpful or harmful to married life. The data from of the surveys were analyzed with the help of Professor Donald Barrett, a sociologist from the University of Notre Dame, and one of the members of the Birth Control Commission. Professor Barrett and the Crowleys presented the results to the Commission in 1966. Patti Crowley also gave a short paper called "Feminist Response," in which she explained that the practice of rhythm was harmful to married life and that no good could come from it.(1)

As is well known, the Birth Control Commission eventually recommended that the Church change its teaching on birth control. However, there was no consensus among the members of the Commission and, eventually, a majority and minority report was presented to Paul VI. The majority report provided criteria for couples to make a responsible decision for limiting family size. It referred to the principle of totality by stating that as long as the couple is open overall to having children, each and every marital act does not have to have a procreative intent.(2) The majority report is also thought to have more of an emphasis on the importance of the marital relationship and individual conscience (i.e., the personalist response). The majority report was intended to be a private recommendation to Paul VI, a report that he alone was to consult in making a decision about Church teaching.

However, the report was leaked to the press and subsequently published in its entirety by the *National Catholic Reporter*.<sup>(7)</sup> Following the publication there were great expectations that the Church would change its teachings on birth control.

#### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The historical context of the commission and the Crowley's survey was one of change. Of note is that the first birth control pill (Enovid) was approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1960. John Rock, M.D., a Catholic obstetrician and gynecologist from Harvard University, was one of the clinical investigators who gathered data to obtain FDA approval for the pill.<sup>(8)</sup> In 1963 Rock published *A Time For Change*, which challenged Church teaching on birth control and called for change.<sup>(9)</sup> Catholic theologians (including Cardinal Suenens) began to openly question Church teaching on birth control and *America* magazine had a series of articles on the topic. The secular media also fueled the expectation for change in popular magazines (e.g., *Time*, *Look*, *Life*, *Newsweek*) and in television programs. A popular religious magazine, *St. Anthony's Messenger*, and the March 1966 issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal* had articles about the Crowley survey, the damaging effects of rhythm, and the expectation for change in Church teaching.<sup>(6,10)</sup> Furthermore, the national CFM conferences had speakers from Planned Parenthood and articles in its newsletter (ACT) that called for change in Church teaching and illustrated stories of personal distress alleged to flow from the damaging effects of rhythm on marital life.<sup>(2, 6)</sup>

Coincidentally, the 1950s and 1960s were the decades when the "modern" methods of natural birth control (i.e., the sympto-thermal method and the ovulation method) or what later was called natural family planning (NFP) were being developed. The sympto-thermal (or a multiple-indexed method) utilizes the changes in basal body temperature, the cervix, and cervical mucus as key indicators of the fertile window. The ovulation method is a single-indexed-method that utilizes only the changes

in cervical mucus and the resultant sensations as the marker for the window of fertility. The Billings ovulation method (developed by Drs. John and Evelyn Billings) is the most widely known type of ovulation method.(11) Both the STM and OM are thought to be more effective than the older rhythm calendar method and to result in fewer days of periodic abstinence.

#### THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S RESPONSE

Paul VI shocked the world on July 25, 1968 with the release of the encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, usually translated as "Of Human Life" but sometimes titled "On the Regulation of Birth."(12) The reason that this short (fourteen-page) document caused such great commotion was that it did not change Church teaching, but rather confirmed Catholic Church's position on birth control—the same position that all Christian churches held up to 1930. *Humanae Vitae* is much more than a condemnation of birth control. It is a document that affirms human life and marriage. The document is protective of conjugal life and love, and the necessary elements of faithfulness, fidelity, totality, and fruitfulness for successful married life. *Humanae Vitae* points out that the marital act must not be violated by means that are not truthful to these elements and that these acts must be faithful to their original (natural) purpose of being both unitive and procreative. The document predicts that the violation of this totality will result in grave consequences, such as marital infidelity, objectification of women, and a weakening of the marital bond.

Section 21 of *Humanae Vitae* is especially of interest in that it seems to be a response to the Crowley study and to the majority report. It states that periodic abstinence (as practiced in NFP), far from being harmful to marital life, actually confers upon it a higher value and produces spiritual gifts. These spiritual gifts include self-mastery, the full development of one's personality, favoring the spouse, selflessness, peace and harmony, and being better educators of one's children. Critics might argue that a celibate pope could not know about these marital/spiritual gifts or how the practice of "rhythm" affects marital life. However, one of the

members of the commission, Karol Wojty\_a—the current Pope John Paul II but then bishop of Krakow—ran natural family planning clinics in his diocese. Using a phenomenological approach, he studied couples and their responses in published papers and in his subsequent book *Love and Responsibility*.<sup>(13)</sup> Both Tad Szulc and George Weigel in their respective biographies of the pope speculated that Bishop Wojty\_a, though never attending a meeting of the commission, was responsible for influencing Pope Paul VI in writing *Humanae Vitae* to the extent that he may be responsible for up to 75% of its content.<sup>(14,15)</sup>

If the gifts of practicing periodic abstinence (as expressed in section 21 of *Humanae Vitae*) are true, then one should find them expressed in couples that practice NFP. So too, if the practice of periodic abstinence and NFP is harmful to marriage, this harm should also be expressed by couples practicing NFP. This paper presents a re-analysis of the Crowley survey results and a comparative analysis of responses from current couples that are practicing a modern method of NFP (i.e., the Billings Ovulation method). The couples' remarks are analyzed to determine their spiritual responses, i.e., how the practice of periodic abstinence affects their relationship with God, how it affects their relationship with the Church, and finally whether the couples experience the spiritual fruits of practicing periodic abstinence as expressed in *Humanae Vitae*. A comparison will be made between the American CFM couples practicing calendar-rhythm in 1966 with modern-day American couples practicing the Billings Ovulation method of NFP.

#### METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPANTS

*Crowley Study.* In 1966 Crowley and Crowley mailed a final “rhythm” survey to 266 couples in 153 diocese in the United States who were members of CFM and who used the “rhythm” or basal body temperature method of family planning.<sup>(1)</sup> They received responses from 158 couples (a 59% return rate) residing in 97 dioceses. The couples for the Crowley study were not randomly selected but rather the questionnaires were sent to

“Leader Couples” in each diocese and they in turn were asked to distribute them to members. The average age of the husband respondents was 34 years and the wives 31.2 years. The couples had an average of 4.9 children.

*Current Study.* The current participants for this descriptive comparative study were married couples who were taught the Billings Ovulation Method (OM) of NFP to avoid pregnancy. The couples were randomly selected from a list of 1,000 couples who were members of two national natural family planning groups. This paper presents only a partial analysis of the results of 191 (19%) couples who were members of the Billings Ovulation Method Association. The average respondent was 38 years old, married 13.5 years, used NFP for 10 years and had an average of 3 children. The majority were Roman Catholic (98% husbands and 91% wives), Caucasian (84% husbands and 85% wives) and (71%) had combined incomes above \$40,000.

Each participant (husband and wife) was mailed a set of psychological questionnaires adapted from the 1966 Crowley and Crowley survey and included these two questions: (a) has your current method of family planning helped your marriage in any way (please illustrate how) and (b) has your current method of family planning harmed your marriage in any way (please illustrate how). Approximately two weeks after they received the questionnaires, the participants were sent a postcard to remind them to complete the questionnaires or thank them if they already had returned them.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data were coded for themes by each of the investigators. If any discrepancies in the interpretation occurred, the original written responses were consulted. The spiritual responses were broadly categorized into three areas: (1) responses that reflected a relationship with God; (2) responses that reflected a relationship with the Catholic Church; and (3) responses that reflected the spiritual fruits as delineated in section 21 of *Humanae Vitae*.



## RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

*CFM Couples:* About 64% of the respondents in the Crowley study stated that periodic abstinence “rhythm” was helpful to their marriage in some way, but 74% felt that it was harmful in some way. The Crowley couples felt that the practice of rhythm helped in spacing of children (30%), contributed to the harmony of husband and wife (18%), and was important to their spiritual lives.

However, 28% reported that it led to frustration of love, 13% reported a loss of spontaneity, 12% arguments and irritability, and 5.5% a fear of pregnancy.

*BOMA Couples:* Over 80% of the current study couples felt that the practice of NFP was helpful to their marriage, 15% indicated that it had no effect and only about 5% felt that it was harmful in some way. Greater than 70% of BOMA couples felt that NFP increased their spiritual well-being, their relationship with God, satisfaction with life, and openness to new life. Over 50% also reported increased communication, increased self-control, and increased sexual pleasure. Over 90% reported an increased understanding of their human sexuality.

## QUALITATIVE RESULTS

*Relationship with God:* The prevailing themes that the CFM and BOMA couples expressed as to how the use of NFP affected their relationship with God are found in Table 2. The major theme for the CFM couples was that of questioning whether the use of rhythm was God’s will. For example, one couple asked: “Did God really intend this to be so complicated” and another couple responded: “Is this what God wants? I thought that God was love?”

Yet, some CFM couples expressed positive affects that “rhythm” had with their relationship with God. For example, one couple felt that rhythm “made two people more mature and more in partnership with God” and another couple reported “feeling that God always took care of us.”

Other CFM couples felt that “rhythm” somehow frustrated God’s intention for their marital union and interfered with their free will to express their love without limitation. For example, a couple stated that “Rhythm does not allow a husband his God given rights to show his wife love for her 365 days of the year.” And another expressed that “God gave us a free will we should be able to use it” (i.e., contraception). The overall theme emerged of questioning God’s will for them and of wanting their own will to determine their expressions of love.

The BOMA couples, by contrast, seemed to have more confidence that using NFP was God’s plan for them. They also felt that fertility was a gift from God, and that in following God’s will or plan in this area, God bestowed grace upon them. There is a strong sense that the BOMA couples felt that they were cooperating with God. For example, one couple said: “I can see the graces of God poured out to us for our efforts in using NFP.” And another felt that the practice of NFP helped them to stay “close to God” and that it “brought special graces that blessed our family.”

Others expressed how they viewed fertility as God’s gift. For example, one couple stated that, “God has blessed us with a great gift of fertility” and another stated that NFP helped them to “appreciate how wonderfully we are made by God.” One couple put the two themes together and stated that the “respect for how we are made helped us to embrace that God is the master of our lives, live more obediently.”

*Relationship with Church:* There seems to be two groups of responses to the Catholic Church and the use of rhythm among CFM couples. There were a number of couples who reluctantly accepted Church teaching on contraception because of Church authority and, as a result, expressed that the acceptance helped ease their conscience. For example, one couple said they use rhythm only because “it is the only method accepted by our Church we continue.” Another couple was more poignant stating “safety takes on an aura of grudging obedience to Church law

with rebellion in the heart.” Or another said: “Rhythm was harmful in that we still wanted to be good Catholics and still we were having babies every year.”

Others CFM couples obviously felt that the Church’s teaching was an imposition that was out of date and that it certainly interfered with their marital relationship. Some responses demonstrated anger in the harshness of their language. For example, one couple said that “our use of rhythm could be directly attributed to the Church’s obsolete stand on family planning,” and another expressed that “I feel that the Church has overemphasized this angle to the detriment of the personal relationship of marriage.” One couple responded in as sarcastic way that, “I feel that any priest that advocates rhythm should take a rectal temp.”

In contrast, the BOMA couples expressed more of a pleasure or comfort of knowing that they were living in accord with Church teaching on birth control. They felt that by living out this teaching with the use of NFP, they had a deeper understanding and appreciation for the teaching and for being Catholics. One BOMA couple expressed that the use of NFP helped them to “appreciate more the Catholic Church’s teaching regarding human life and the transmission of life”. Another said that NFP enabled them to abide by Church’s teaching” and another that “it literally enables me to be a Catholic.” Two couples expressed that it made them stronger Catholics and “more understanding of Church teaching.”

*Spiritual Responses:* Both the CFM couples and the BOMA couples expressed that the use of rhythm/NFP required prayer and sacrifice. However, the CFM couples did not express a deepening of their spirituality and at times seemed to feel that although rhythm kept them out of sin, it also was an occasion of sin and temptation. For example, one couple stated, “we found through prayer and a spirit of sacrifice this (i.e., rhythm) can become less harmful” and another responded that “there was a frequent exposure to temptation and or sin because of religious teaching.” The sins and temptations that they refer to are

masturbation and adultery—usually on the part of the husband. Many of the CFM couples felt that the positive effect of practicing rhythm was the development of discipline and self-control. One couple stated that “we have gained a limited amount of will power and discipline” and another stated “it has helped us to know each other and develop self control in difficult times.”

As mentioned, the BOMA couples also thought prayer and sacrifice were essential to the practice of NFP. One couple stated that “our prayer life as both an individual and a couple has grown tremendously through our sufferings and cemented our marriage and the use of NFP as a way of living and loving.” Another stated that the practice of NFP “caused us to be more prayerful in our marriage.” Unlike the CFM couples, the BOMA couples expressed a deepening of their spirituality. One couple mentioned that NFP “brought us closer together spiritually knowing that we are following the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church,” and another stated that “increased depth of our spirituality and blossomed open to the beauty and love in the Church’s teaching on marriage, sex, and chastity.” Some of the couples also expressed a spiritual peace and harmony through the use of NFP. One couple stated that NFP created a “physical and spiritual harmony in marriage” and another responded, “It is part of the peace and happiness we feel about our marriage.” Other couples also expressed that NFP allowed the total gift of self, deepened their love dimension, and helped them to be more generous.

#### DISCUSSION

The overall gestalt of the responses from the CFM couples certainly was one of frustration with the use of rhythm, a feeling that the use of rhythm was harmful to marriage, and that Church teaching needed to change. Part of the frustration was from the lack of effectiveness of the rhythm method, the lack of confidence in its use to avoid pregnancy and the extended amount of abstinence required when cycles were irregular. The responses also reflected the lack of sexual maturity on the part of some

couples, in that sexual intercourse was used as a stress release for some couples and a need for intercourse to be available at all times (just in case). There also seemed to be jealousy that Protestant couples had use of contraception and therefore had this freedom. The Church was out of date and a barrier to marital love. Furthermore, when there was the greatest desire for sexual contact—especially on part of the woman—they were usually in the fertile time. During these times the husband was forced, or tempted, to find other avenues of sexual expression.

However, some CFM couples felt that through prayer and sacrifice they were able to cope with the abstinence and the difficulties, and that this led to tenderness and affection. The most frequent positive affect of the use of abstinence mentioned was that it helped with self-control and with spacing of children. Certainly the CFM couples questioned whether rhythm was part of God's plan for human sexuality and there was a reluctant obedience to church teaching among them.

The BOMA couples experience with NFP was altogether different. Although there was difficulty with abstinence and a feeling of a lack of spontaneity and sexual imbalance, for the most part they felt that NFP was helpful to the marriage. NFP stimulated greater understanding of human sexuality, and it increased communication, self-mastery, and a sense of a shared responsibility. It also deepened their spirituality. Most couples felt that their fertility was a gift from God and that learning to live with their fertility was following God's plan. Many expressed that although the practice of NFP required prayer and sacrifice at times, that there were many graces that came from this. The BOMA couples also expressed a love for the Catholic Church and its teachings on human sexuality. The practice of NFP made them appreciate Church teaching on human sexuality and helped them to feel more Catholic.

Previous quantitative and qualitative studies also have indicated that NFP couples felt that NFP somehow enhanced their spirituality (16,17,18). Couples using NFP have reported that they felt in step with Church teaching, that they are doing God's will,

they are allowing God's will to take place in their lives, they appreciate God's gift of fertility more, and that they allow themselves to be co-creators with God. There are only two quantitative studies on spirituality among users of NFP. (18, 19) Both of these studies showed that NFP couples had statistically higher levels of spiritual well-being than couples using contraceptives. The results of these two studies, as well as the current study, could be explained by selection bias, or that the NFP couples had higher levels of spiritual well-being before they used NFP. Many couples that seek to use NFP do so for moral, ethical and religious reasons.

The themes that were found in the qualitative responses by the BOMA couples in the current study are similar to the themes found in the McClusker (16), Borkman and Schivanandan (17) and Fehring and Lawrence (18) studies. These studies reported that the practice of NFP for the most part enhanced their personal relationships and deepened their spirituality. Furthermore, many of the reported themes are similar to those predicted in both *Humanae Vitae* and a later papal document on the family, *Familiaris Consortio* (20); see Table 2.

As previously indicated, the responses from the CFM couples vary in distinct ways from contemporary NFP couples. Many of the CFM couples' responses reflected the historical context of the year in which the study was completed. In 1966 there was an expectation of change and media reports that rhythm was not effective and was probably not very good for your relationship. Furthermore, the CFM's own newsletter "ACT" had stories and articles about the harmful effects of rhythm and the need for change in church teaching on birth control.(1) CFM conferences also had speakers from Planned Parenthood and other groups calling for change that certainly would bias the responses of their couples.(4,6) Additionally, the couples in the Crowley study were not randomly selected but rather "lead couples" in various districts were asked to distribute the surveys, giving them the opportunity to distribute them to couples that favored the group's perspective. From a scientific standpoint, the information from the Crowley

study is interesting but not very valid. Many of the stories of distress from the couples are compelling but can lead to a false impression of the dynamics of periodic continence.

Of interest is that the French couple, Dr Charles and Elisabeth Rendu, who participated in the Birth Control Commission also conducted a poll among hundreds of couples that attended their NFP center.(21) The French couples were using a rhythm and temperature method of family planning from 2 to 13 years. The Rendus categorized the hundreds of responses from the French rhythm couples into the following themes: “A deeper love; meaningfulness of the effort; it is more natural; the wife admires her husband; fosters respect for the partner; improved conjugal harmony; partners are better prepared for the conjugal act; discovery of other means to express love; meaningfulness of continence.”(21, p. 50) These are hardly themes that one would describe as harmful to married life—but rather themes that elevate the marital bond, themes that are also reflected in *Humanae Vitae*. The results from the Rendu survey did not get press like the Crowley study, arguably because the Crowleys reflected the popular opinion of the era. Thus, the Crowleys are considered to be the only voice of “couples” on the Commission when in fact the Rendu husband and wife team had just as much contact with couples, but offered a different conclusion.

*Abortion Contraception Connection:* After *Humanae Vitae* was proclaimed by Paul VI and Church teaching on contraception was affirmed rather than changed, the Crowley’s and other members of the papal birth control commission were very disappointed and discouraged.(2) The Crowley’s did not accept *Humanae Vitae*; rather, they viewed the document as political, something that would change and certainly not an infallible statement. Some claim that the dissent to Church teaching by the Crowleys, and their focus on liberal issues that did not directly involve the family led to the rapid decline in membership of CFM from over 40,000 nationally to under 3,000 today.(4)

As the abortion issue became prominent in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the leadership of the CFM was also soft on the issue and questioned whether it is a woman's reproductive right or choice. In his history of the CFM, Jeffrey Burns explained that "despite the clear commitment of CFM at the grass roots to the pro-life movement, many accused the CFM leadership of dragging their feet on the abortion issue, or, more troubling, they accused CFM of being soft on abortion." (4, p. 185) As in the 1960s with contraception, the ACT newsletter had an article questioning the ban on abortion and the issue was addressed at the CFM conventions. Burns explains that the CFM was inevitably soft on abortion because they had aligned themselves on the birth control issue with groups that were supporters of abortion. Thus, the Crowley's stance on birth control left them unable to respond to the moral challenge of the abortion debate. This serves as an example from history of the inevitable link between the two issues.

The majority report also emphasizes that the couple themselves are the ultimate source in deciding what is truly good for them, an argument later used to support abortion.

For abortion to become a right in this country, contraception had to first become a right. Contraception paved the way for abortion. The last state law against the use of contraception was argued before the Supreme Court in 1963 in *Griswold vs. Connecticut*. (8) The attorney defending the state law was weak in his convictions; the Connecticut ban on contraception was thrown out due to the right to privacy. In 1973 the last law banning the sale of contraception to non-married couples and minors (because of the right to privacy) was thrown out in the state of Wisconsin. (8) And the right to abortion as expressed in the 1973 *Roe vs Wade* decisions was essentially based on the right to privacy. Of interest is that the CFM couples in the 1966 Crowley study also cited freedom of conscience and a couples' free choice as reasons for changing Church teaching on birth control. The Church was supposed to get out of the bedroom!

There are many other reasons why there is a connection of abortion to contraception. One of the most compelling is that the



dividing line between contraception and abortion is very unclear. There are reasons to believe that hormonal contraception and intrauterine devices might be the biggest source of early abortion in this country.(22) The use of post-coital emergency contraception is being promoted as over the counter medicine and is certainly thought to work through abortion.(23) The need for this in turn arose in part from the widespread use of barrier contraception. Currently, the Planned Parenthood website (June 15, 2002) (<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc/condom.htm>) explains that in the case of condom breakage, to contact them to receive emergency contraception. Thus, they claim condoms provide “100%” protection. Furthermore, there is evidence the promotion and use of contraception does not decrease but rather increases the incidence of abortion.(24, 25)

One could ask and speculate what would have happened if the Catholic Church did change its teaching on contraception in 1968 and followed the recommendations of the Majority Report. The report’s claim that abortion and sterilization would be excluded by “responsible” couples has not proven to be true. So too the document emphasized that the whole meaning of mutual giving and of human procreation should be kept in a context of true love. Thirty-four years later we find that Catholics constitute one of the largest group of women who procure abortion, use contraception at a higher percentage than the general US population, and use sterilization as the number one method of contraception.(25, 26) We also find that Catholic couples are not being generous with having children, Catholic countries like Italy and Spain are not even at replacement rates.(27) Catholics are for a large part ignoring church teaching on human reproduction and sexuality. The results are devastating. The current pope has developed a theology of marital love that involves the whole meaning of mutual giving called the theology of the body. Contraception in the context of this theology is clearly a violation of true and total love. George Weigel has stated that he believes that the pope’s teaching on the theology of the body is a time bomb ready to go off in the third millennium.(15) Let us hope that

it goes off before it is too late.

To end, we would like to quote from Jesuit theologian John Ford, who was a member of the Birth Control Mission and who vigorously defended Church teaching. He said that "Contraception was a violation of human life and Christian chastity.... Your conception is your very origin, your link to the community of living persons before you, the first of all gifts received from your parents, your first relationship with God as he stretched out his finger to touch you." (2, p.124) Contraception is a violation of human life and a violation of our relationship with God, consequences of which cannot be ignored.

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TABLE 1: SPIRITUAL RESPONSES TO NFP

1960s Rhythm Couples	2000s Modern NFP Couples
<i>Relationship with God</i>	
(10 responses)	(33 responses)
“Is this the right way?”	“This is God’s way so it is the right way”
Questions if this is God’s plan/will	Fertility as God’s Gift
Difficult but it is God’s will/plan	Cooperating with God’s will/plan
Disrupting of God’s given freedom	Graces will flow
<i>Relationship with Church</i>	
(23 responses)	(11 responses)
“Grudging obedience–rebellion in the heart”	“NFP is a perfect fit for our religion”
Grudging acceptance of Church teaching	Consistent with Church teaching
Ease of conscience	Increased understanding of Church teaching
Church teaching is imposition	Increased understanding of Church teaching
Church teaching is obsolete	Increased love and appreciation for the Church
Church teaching is harmful to the relationship	
<i>Spiritual Fruits/Thorns</i>	
(19 responses)	(17 responses)
“All things worthwhile involve “sacrifice”	“NFP as a way of living and loving”
Increased self-discipline/control	Increased prayer and sacrifice
Prayer and sacrifice helped to cope	Helped to grow spiritually
	Spiritual peace and harmony

Occasion of sin/temptation/  
frustration

TABLE 2: CATHOLIC CHURCH PREDICTED RESPONSE TO PRACTICING  
NFP

*Humane Vitae (1968)*

Requires continual effort  
Fully develop the personality  
Enriched with spiritual values  
Fruits of serenity and peace  
Fosters attention to one's partner  
Drives out selfishness  
Deepens sense of responsibility  
More efficacious in education  
of children

*Familiaris Consortio (1981)*

Accepting cycle of the woman  
Accepting dialogue  
Reciprocal respect  
Shared responsibility  
Self-control  
Enriches values of tenderness &  
affection  
Helps with fidelity  
Sexuality is respected