





Birth Control and the Catholic Church: Implications for Some Selected Churches in the Kumasi Archdiocese, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the implications of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on the Catholic faithful in the Kumasi Archdiocese of Ghana. The purpose of the study was to assess the effectiveness of natural family planning methods, such as abstinence and the rhythm method, endorsed by the encyclical, and to explore how these teachings align with the reproductive health goals of Catholic women in the region. A mixed-methods approach was employed, using questionnaires and interviews with Catholic Parish Priests, Catechists, Church leaders, and healthcare practitioners. Data were thematically analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of the Catholic community regarding birth control. The findings reveal that many Catholics in the Kumasi Archdiocese lack sufficient knowledge of *Humanae Vitae* and its promotion of natural birth control methods. This awareness gap has led to varied interpretations and practices, with some Catholics resorting to methods that better suit their personal and family needs. The study concludes that the Catholic Church needs to step up its efforts in educating the faithful on the ethical considerations of birth control, aligning religious teachings with the practical realities of the community. This research contributes to scholarship by highlighting the disconnection between papal teachings and the everyday experiences of Catholic laity, calling for a reassessment of *Humanae Vitae* to better support the reproductive health and well-being of Catholics globally.

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INTRODUCTION

Contraception use is one of the four direct predictors of fertility according to Bongaarts. The other three are married status, induced abortion, and lactational infertile period.¹ According to Lee, the sense of faith can range from a general religious attitude to personal acceptance of a specific set of beliefs on the other.² Asiedu et al. discovered an unexpected result under the category of religion, namely that female adherents of the Catholic Church in Ghana use contraceptives sixty times more than women of

¹ John. Bongaarts, "The Role of Family Planning Programs in Contemporary Fertility Transitions.," 1995,209 .

² James Michael Lee, *Handbook of Faith* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1993), 23.

other religions.³ The actual situation is such that things have shifted in recent years. Thus, the natural methods of family planning, such as abstinence during the woman's fertile period and the rhythm method stated by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, are ineffective and frequently fail among their users, leaving the majority of Ghanaian Catholic faithful women unable to meet their reproductive health goals. This is because the ideal situation has identified the Catholic faith as taking a strict stance on artificial means while remaining flexible on natural ways.

This study which falls under the discipline of religion and birth control has gained prominence in the area of the beginning of life with scholars using their scientific lenses in making submissions. This research however stems from a religious background to make a case on the implications of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* among members of the Catholic Church in the Kumasi Archdiocese. It focused on leveraging the comprehension of these phenomena from the Catholic faithful's perspectives and the practices of birth control methods, theological and ethical evaluations of methods of birth control, and the contribution of the Roman Catholic Church to the perspectives and practices of birth control in the selected Churches in the Kumasi Archdiocese.

At the time of the study, the targeted population was men and women of the ages of eighteen to fifty (18-50) years and above of the Roman Catholic Church, Parish priests, Catechists, Church presidents, healthcare professionals such as doctors and midwives in the Offinso Municipality in the Kumasi Archdiocese through the use of questionnaires and interviews respectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brief Historical Overview of Methods of Birth Control

Contraception has been in existence since time immemorial according to research. Opoku *et al*, explain the concept of birth control as the restriction of the number of offspring through contraceptive measures.⁴ Birth control may mean the act of managing and controlling one's way or method of childbearing through the use of either natural or modern methods of contraception.

Tietze asserts that "*coitus interruptus*," or the removal of the penis before ejaculation, is the earliest method of birth control known to man, based on references in the Old Testament (Genesis 38) and anthropologists from around the world.⁵ Contemporarily, in sub-Saharan Africa, recent research has proven that there are the existence of several methods of traditional and scientific techniques of birth control which contribute largely to their health which invariably enhances their quality of life. However, despite several factors that influence the use of these methods, it is left for individuals as well as couples to assess the disadvantages and advantages in terms of their own needs and preferences. This is because right from the historical background, there is an obvious inadequacy of knowledge of the methods of birth control among consumers which has caused inconsistencies in its trends of usage among countries including the sub-Saharan African countries causing unwanted pregnancies and health challenges. Respective disciplines regarding birth control, such as the theological and ethical reflections as far as this study is concerned are subsequently discussed.

Theological Reflections on Birth Control

Birth control is intimately concerned with human life. The Bible, according to Saylor *et al*, does not specifically forbid birth control, but it establishes positive abiding principles such as the sanctity of life, the commandment to multiply, and the common duty of husband and wife to fulfill each other's sexual needs.⁶ Primarily, there have been some Biblical texts that apply to the moral rejection of the consumerism of the forms of contraception and its addition of current modernized devices: An example is Genesis 1:28 which declares,

³ Daniel, Jacob Owusu Sarfo, and Michael Asiedu. Adjei, "Predictors of Contraceptive Use in Ghana: Role of Religion, Region of Residence, Ethnicity and Education.," *Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education* 1, no. 1 (2014): 3–8.

⁴ John Opoku and Peter Addai-Mensah, "*Bioethics in the Theological context: Beginning and the End-of-Life issues*," (Kumasi: Legacy Prints, 2013).

⁵ C. Tietze, "History of Contraceptive Method.," *Indian Journal of Public Health* 12, no. 1 (January 1968): 37–46.

⁶ Walter Spitzer and Carlyle Saylor, *Birth Control and the Christian: A Protestant Symposium on the Control of Human Reproduction* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1969), 24.

“Then God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

With this text, it can be deduced that God universally directed mankind to procreate. Another claim for the rejection of birth control is the story in Genesis 38:8-9:

“Judah married a Canaanite woman and had three sons. His oldest son became married, but before he had any children (an heir), the Lord put him to death because of his wickedness. Judah commanded his second son to “fulfil his duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother. However, because Onan knew that this child would not be his, he “spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother.”

The act performed by Onan which is referred to as Onanism by other Christian scholars, is often said to be a preventive means of childbirth (withdrawal method) which resulted in his death. However, this is not the case.⁷ The Biblical textual content demonstrates that the purpose of the tradition was to produce an heir for his departed brother. Hence, his refusal to produce an heir for the departed brother by spilling his semen on the ground led to his death.

Ethical Reflections on the Methods of Birth Control

Ethics refers to a term used to describe the process of examining a principle to be right or wrong. Birth control, just like most bioethical issues, has been subjected to debate regarding the issues of ethics. According to Opoku and Addai-Mensah, Some of the reasons given concerning the use of artificial methods are that it is unnatural, is anti-life, against religious norms and values, and aids in immorality.⁸ Ongesa and Mwongela argue that the theory of human sexuality on procreation is primarily the bedrock of the ethical meaning of the methods of birth control.⁹

Concerning the cultural grounds of most African tribes for example in Ghana, it is observed that the Akan community rewards couples who give birth to triplets, as well as multiple children with the form of gifts and honor like goats and money among others.

Grisez also opines further that as unnatural techniques of preventing conception were being considered morally evil or wrong (contra life), usually at every place during the same time, the natural methods of birth control were accepted.¹⁰ Therefore the natural and the non-natural methods of birth control are considered to be naturally wrong since the purpose of these two is to prevent conception which the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* only argues that the artificial methods of controlling birth are against the will of God.¹¹ Why then was the natural method accepted and the non-natural methods not accepted while both original intentions are to prevent the coming of a new life?

From scholars of bioethics, it can be deduced that there is no concrete reason to forbid the concept of birth control methods. The reason is that birth control methods whether natural or unnatural forbid the natural value of life of mankind as having a dishonored life since there is no formation of conception. Ongesa *et al*, argue that the acceptance of the rhythm method as permissible in the *Humanae Vitae* encyclical letter while the unnatural or artificial techniques not being permissible cannot be embraced with bioethical debate.¹²

The need and obligation of responsible parenthood has ever more been recognized by theologians during the past decades and always more clearly stated in the official documents of the

⁷ He spilled the semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother.

⁸ John Opoku and Peter Addai-Mensah, *Bioethics in the Theological context: Beginning and the End-of-Life issues*, 72.

⁹ Cosmas M Ongesa and Mwongela Francis, “The Moral Evaluation of the Contraception Debate,” *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* 6, no. 10 (2019): 54–60.

¹⁰ Germain Grisez et al., “‘Every Marital Act Ought to Be Open to New Life’: Toward a Clearer Understanding,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 52, no. 3 (1988): 365–426.

¹¹ Encyclical of Pope Paul, and Giovanni Battista Montini. Vi, *Humanae Vitae Encyclical of Pope Paul Vi on the Regulation of Birth* (Contraception , 1968).

¹² Cosmas M. Ongesa and Mwongela Francis, “The Moral Evaluation of the Contraception Debate.” 24

Catholic Church.¹³ Parents are obliged to give birth to their children in a responsible way. Opoku *et al.* opine that the justification for birth control is based on limiting the number of children and further includes the mother's health and life, eugenic considerations in cases of hereditary defects, or the mother's inability to deliver a live child, spiritual and material welfare, and economic interests.¹⁴ The researcher agrees with Opoku *et al.* because the above conditions necessitate the need to control birth among couples and the associated implications.

METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to find the empirical implications of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on the perspectives and practice of birth control among members of the Catholic Church in the Kumasi Archdiocese, the researcher analyzed data based on a study and administered close-ended and open-ended questionnaires to one hundred and forty (140) adherents who fellowship at Offinso- Maase St. Agnes Parish, Adankwame Saint Dominic Parish, and Koforidua Saint John's Roman Catholic Church in the Offinso Municipality in the Kumasi Archdiocese to probe their knowledge on Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on the perspectives and practices of birth control and its implications for them. The questionnaires mentioned above elicited answers based on the faith and belief of the participants in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (on the regulation of birth) of the Catholic Church's teaching on methods of controlling birth, understanding of the methods used in the prevention of pregnancy, endorsements on the use of non-natural methods (condoms, pills, IUDs, etc.) as a means of preventing pregnancy. This tool revealed the implications of birth control methods and the understanding of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. The quantitative approach to this research aimed to verify the theory of science and spirituality/Religion among Catholic adherents.

The study also considered the location of these Churches within the Municipality of Offinso in the Archdiocese of Kumasi due to the different economic activities of the people residing in these areas which inform their understanding and the challenges they pose concerning the use of the natural and non-natural methods of birth control use in the prevention of pregnancy.

A follow-up face-to-face interview was conducted among 15 key respondents to probe further concerns associated with the Roman Catholic Church and birth control. This method, according to Rubin *et al.*, moves beyond measures and numbers characteristic of quantitative techniques in capturing the thoughts and sayings of the key respondents. These involved 3 Catholic Parish Priests, 6 Catechists, 3 Catholic Church presidents, 1 Catholic obstetric doctor, and 2 midwives, who worked at the Offinso Saint Patrick's Catholic Hospital in the Kumasi Archdiocese at the time of the study.

Finally, the researcher considered other secondary sources of information which included published works in the field of science and spirituality/religion. The results of the field study and discussion are presented below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theme 1 - Methods used in the prevention of pregnancy among respondents

The methods or ways used in the prevention of pregnancy are paramount among Catholics in the Kumasi Archdiocese. This was from the responses of the participants about the research question "What ways of preventing pregnancy do you use". Out of one hundred and forty (140) respondents, thirty-four (34) respondents indicated that abstinence was their choice in the methods of birth control. Thirty (30) respondents indicated that the use of the menstrual cycle or calendar method is what they used in the prevention of pregnancy or controlling birth. Twenty-five (25) respondents indicated that they use pills in the prevention of pregnancies after sexual affairs with their partners.

Out of the one hundred and forty (140) respondents, twenty-four (24) respondents indicated that they use of condoms in their prevention of pregnancies. Twelve (12) respondents indicated that they use injectables for their prevention of pregnancy. Seven (7) respondents indicated that they use "*coitus interruptus*" popularly known as the withdrawal method in the prevention of pregnancy.

¹³ Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, (New Delhi: Theological Publications, 2010), 533.

¹⁴ John Opoku and Peter Addai-Mensah, *Bioethics in the Theological context: Beginning and the End-of-Life issues*, 72.

Of the one hundred and forty (140) respondents, two (2) respondents indicated that they use intrauterine devices (IUDs) for the prevention of pregnancies. Two (2) respondents indicated their use of the lactation method (breastfeeding) to control their birth. However, four (4) respondents did not answer the question.

It appears from the finding that, respondents of the Roman Catholic Church in the Offinso Municipality in the Kumasi Archdiocese are aware of the preferred natural methods of birth control as indicated by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* as abstinence and the use of the menstrual cycle or calendar method also known as the rhythm method. However, the findings indicate that out of the one hundred and forty (140) respondents, sixty-three (63) respondents use artificial methods of birth control which includes the use of pills, condoms, injectables, and intrauterine devices (IUDs) in the prevention of pregnancy as at the time of the study.

Sixty-two (62) respondents use *Humanae Vitae*'s preferred natural method of birth control, such as abstinence and the calendar or rhythm method of birth control in the prevention of pregnancy.

Notwithstanding, the findings from the theme under study considered that the majority of respondents use the periodic abstinence method of birth control in the prevention of pregnancy in the Offinso Municipality in the Kumasi Archdiocese. One Respondent who is married and uses the periodic abstinence method asserted that “it is an agreement between my wife and me to use such method whenever we are not ready to give birth and also when there is an irregularity in the periods of her menstrual cycle for some time”. One respondent also indicated that “I am not yet married and hence need to abstain until I get married and have a partner.”

Theme 2: The influence of preferred birth control methods

According to Blakes, the Roman Catholic Church has a strict stance on artificial methods but has been flexible on the natural methods.¹⁵ However, several socio-demographic factors influence the use of natural methods of birth control among respondents in the Offinso Municipality in the Kumasi Archdiocese.

Responding to the question, ‘What influences your decision in the use of the means of prevention of pregnancy?’, out of the one hundred and forty respondents (140), forty-eight (48) respondents indicated that the belief and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church influence their decision in using a preferred method of birth control. Thirty-two (32) respondents indicated the content of knowledge they have on their preferred method of birth control. Twenty-four (24) respondents indicated the less expensive of their preferred method of birth control as the reason for their use.

Out of the one hundred and forty (140) respondents, fourteen (14) respondents indicated their own decision and choice in the use of their preferred method of birth control. Sixteen (16) respondents indicated their concerns about health and safety as a reason for the use of their preferred method of birth control. Six (6) respondents did not answer the question

Table 1. Respondents' reasons for their preferred utilization of birth control methods

Reasons	Frequency
Church Beliefs and Teachings	48
Knowledge about it	32
Less expensive methods	24
Health Safety	16
Personal decision	14
Did not answer the question	6
Total	140

Source: Field study (2021).

¹⁵ Judith Blake, “Catholicism and Fertility: On Attitudes of Young Americans,” *Population and Development Review* 10, no. 2 (June 1984): 329, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1973085>.

The table above depicts respondents' influences on their preferred methods of birth control at the time of the study. It appears from the table that, the majority of respondents in the Offinso Municipality in the Kumasi Archdiocese use their preferred methods of birth control. One respondent indicated, "the teachings of my Church admit only to abstinence and the use of the natural methods of birth control in limiting one's birth". However, a minority of respondents also indicated that it is their personal decision to choose their preferred method of birth control and not from any external group influence.

Theme 3: Biblical knowledge of the preventive methods of pregnancy

Saylor *et al*, argue that the Bible does not expressly restrict birth control; however, it does set forth positive abiding concepts which include the sanctity of life, the command to multiply, and the mutual duty of husband and spouse to meet each other's sexual needs.¹⁶ According to the field findings, how the Church understands birth control is influenced by the Bible which is the major sacred book of the Church. Some questions were then asked to solicit participants' views about their understanding of the bible and birth control.

A reflection as in whether the Bible identifies a clear specific reflection of a preferable method of prevention of pregnancy has been very delicate among Catholic Church members in the Offinso municipality in the Kumasi Archdiocese. This was obvious based on the responses from the participants about the research question "Does the bible condemn the use of the artificial methods (condoms, pills, IUD's, etc.) in the prevention of pregnancy?".

Out of the one hundred and forty (140) respondents, eighty (80) cited "Yes". Fifteen (15) cited "No". Thirty-eight (38) cited "Not sure" and seven (7) did not answer the question. Findings infer that the majority of the participants considered that the Bible condemns the use of artificial methods such as condoms, pills, and IUDs among others in the prevention of pregnancy. However, a minority of the respondents are not sure as to whether the Bible condemns the use of artificial methods in the prevention of pregnancy since there is no specific scripture indicating or suggesting that the use of the natural methods of birth control is right and the artificial methods of birth control is evil. However, the global community of this world at least has a hold to open to the opportunity of an ethical form of birth control. It is feasible to offer protection of birth control if such techniques do not depict the natural way of evil.

To probe further, the researcher asked some selected Church leaders a similar question concerning their general understanding of what the Bible says about the methods of birth control in the prevention of pregnancy for descriptive explanations. On the question "What does the Bible say about pregnancy prevention through the various methods of birth control."

Rev. Fr. Francis Abebrese, Catholic Priest for the Koforidua Saint John's Catholic Church, in an interview indicated that in moral theology, the concept of onanism whereby a man called Onan out of sexual exploits emitted the sperms on the ground deliberately because of his evil intention of preventing the natural course of pregnancy to take place. His actions however attracted the wrath of God and God punished him. He continued that the Bible speaks vehemently against the artificial methods of birth control. For example, the book of Leviticus talks about ritual purity such that any natural and carnal desire that does not follow what God has naturally planned for humanity becomes a sin. In the natural sense, God has ordained that when a man and a woman meet during sexual intercourse, the fluid should flow from the man and fertilize an egg of the woman. Out of all this, engaging in something to prevent pregnancy is against God's command.¹⁷

Yaw Amoako, the Church president for the Koforidua Saint John's Catholic Church also indicated that the Bible frowns on measures taken by man to prevent conception and an example of such is when Onan in the Bible omitted the sperms on the floor when going into his brother's wife and this led to his death. Also, God takes care of His children when they are being produced if a man tries

¹⁶ Walter O., and Carlyle L. Saylor. Spitzer, "Birth Control and the Christian: A Protestant Symposium on the Control of Human Reproduction.," 1969. 24

¹⁷ Rev. Fr. Francis Abebrese, (Roman Catholic Priest for Koforidua Saint John's Catholic Church), interviewed by Akonnor Michael during field work at Koforidua on April 04, 2021.

to prevent that, it seriously incurs the wrath of God.¹⁸ This assertion confirms that of Cambell who cited St. Augustine indicating that sexuality becomes a sin if not geared toward procreation.¹⁹

However, the majority of the Catholic Church leaders who gave their responses through interviews indicated that the Bible is silent on the rightful or acceptable methods of birth control. It was posited by the majority of Church leaders, for instance, Rev. Fr. David Ampofo, the Catholic Priest for the Adankwame Saint Dominic Catholic Church, that “the Bible does not specifically introduce any methods of birth control because the use of either the natural or artificial method of birth control was not an issue as at that time the Bible was written. The Bible is silent on the rightful methods. Also, it only tells us to multiply, procreate, and fill the earth.”²⁰

Kissi Acheampong, the Church President for the Offinso Maase Saint Dominic Roman Catholic Church further stated that “when it comes to birth control, the Bible is very silent on the specific methods of birth control to be used among Christians in the prevention of pregnancy but emphasizes procreation or fruitfulness in terms of Childbirth.”²¹

Paulina Afriyie Arhin, a Catechist of the Adankwame Saint Dominic Catholic Church also stated that the Bible is silent on the right method of birth control. Notwithstanding, the Bible speaks against a parent who brings forth children and refuses to take care of them despite its endorsement of procreation and fruitfulness. She continued that the Bible speaks of Onanism but did not specifically introduce the rightful methods of birth control.²²

Per the researcher’s analysis of the above views of respondents, it can be deduced that the Bible is silent on the exact methods of birth control. Despite Onan’s death, which came about because he refused to emit his sperms into the wife of his late elder brother for pregnancy to take place to ensure generational continuity, the Bible is also against bad parenthood. That is parents who produce children but refuse to take full responsibility for their wards before they come of age in terms of supporting them in their education, finances, shelter, food, spirituality, and emotional well-being, among others.

However, it appears that the members of the Roman Church in the Offinso Municipality in the Archdiocese of Kumasi fairly understand that the Bible is against artificial methods of birth control and endorses the natural methods but have little understanding of what the bible admits concerning birth control and procreation. These findings can be considered a result of the inability of the Church leaders to educate members through effective and consistent teachings and counseling on the Catholic Church’s preferred methods as stated by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. Among the youth and married couples, education is needed to help combat the necessary challenges couples will possibly face in the successful use of the natural methods of birth control and also the effects one is likely to encounter in the use of the artificial methods of birth control in the prevention of pregnancy.

Theme 4- The Catholic Church's preferred method of birth control

Almost all the Key informants interviewed indicated that the Catholic Church admits to only the use of the natural methods of birth control such as abstinence and the rhythm or calendar method in the prevention of pregnancy to be used among members. Their views collaterates with the encyclical of Pope Paul VI’s, *Humanae vitae* which admits to the use of natural methods of birth control (rhythm methods) but objects or frowns on the use of artificial methods such as the use of pills, condoms, intrauterine devices, diaphragms, hormonal implants and among others.²³

Some key respondents went further to share similar views which confirms the views of Cambell who believes that the prevention of conception in sexuality is a sin and is only permitted for procreation. For instance, in an interview with Rev. Fr. Francis Abebrese, the Catholic Priest for the

¹⁸ Yaw Amoako, (Roman Catholic Church President for Koforidua Saint John’s Catholic Church), interviewed by Akonnor Michael during fieldwork at Koforidua on April 04, 2021.

¹⁹ Flann Campbell, “Birth Control and the Christian Churches,” *Population Studies* 14, no. 2 (1960): 131–47, 135

²⁰ Rev. Fr. David Ampofo, (Roman Catholic Priest for the Adankwame Saint Dominic Catholic Church), interviewed by Akonnor Michael during fieldwork at Offinso-Maase on March 28, 2021.

²¹ Kisi Acheampong, (Roman Catholic Church President for the Offinso-Maase Saint Agness Catholic Church), interviewed by Akonnor Michael during fieldwork at Offinso-Maase on March 28, 2021.

²² Paulina Afriyie Arhin, (Roman Catholic Catechist of the Adankwame Saint Dominic Catholic Church), interviewed by Akonnor Michael during fieldwork at Adankwame on April 11, 2021.

²³ Vi, *Humanae Vitae Encyclical of Pope Paul Vi on the Regulation Of Birth*, 10

Koforidua Saint John's Catholic Church, he opines that the artificial method of contraception is frowned upon by the Catholic Church because the natural methods of birth control have to do with God-given capacities by which human beings procreate at a certain point in time and can also be free at a certain point in time. The Catholic Priest explained further that the Church endorses the natural methods of birth control because its usage is very excellent and does not have any side effects unlike most artificial methods of contraception which are bound with a whole lot of effects.²⁴

Again, in an interview with Rev. Fr. David Ampofo a Catholic Priest for the Offinso-Maase Saint Agnes Catholic Church, he posited that "the Catholic Church believes that birth must be spaced and should be spaced by only the natural method of birth control. This is because that is what God has introduced and nobody knows when conception takes place in the womb."²⁵

However, other key informants had different views which disagreed with the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* preferred method of birth control. Their views agreed with those of Newcomer who has argued that birth control is very crucial and parents have a notable duty or task to attend to families when one gives birth. Hence, when couples limit the number of children they produce either by natural or artificial methods, they are able to appropriately satisfy the needs each child's (emotional, physical and spiritual upbringing).²⁶ For instance, in an interview with the Koforidua Saint John's Roman Catholic Catechist, Sarah Amobe, she mentioned that the acceptable method the Catholic Church endorses in the prevention of pregnancy is the natural method. She advised that if one can not afford to use the natural methods due to difficulties or challenges in their use, that person or couple to use the artificial methods to have proper care and good parenting of one's family. She continued further that this is because proper care and grooming of children is often dependent more on parents as a prime responsibility than that of the Church.²⁷

Paulina Afriyie Arhin, the Adankwame Saint Dominic Roman Catholic Catechist also shared a similar view that the acceptable method of birth control the Church endorses is the natural method. However, if one can not afford to use the natural methods due to some difficulties in their usage, for example, couples having challenges in the calculation of the free menstrual period and others, using the artificial method to have proper care of one's children is not wrong. She continued further that if the motive in the use of the artificial method of birth control is to have proper care for one's children and family and also to avoid difficulties in the standard of living which in a way can positively affect the nurturing of the offspring in terms of their education, feeding, and others, she sees nothing wrong with it. This is because the grooming of the children is most often highly dependent on the parent.²⁸ Her position affirms Peschke's assertion that the number of children a couple chooses to have should be left to the discretion of the couple involved and not by the decrees of public authorities.²⁹

Analyzing the submissions of the participants infers that there is a fair awareness of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humani Vitae*'s acknowledgment of the natural methods of birth control to be used among Catholic leaders and members in the prevention of pregnancy. However, it appears some informants admit to the use of both the natural methods of birth control since all forms of birth control methods are geared towards the prevention of pregnancy.

Given this, some members are very concerned about the appropriate support or nurture that should be considered towards procreation or giving birth. This is in terms of the provision of quality education, food, shelter, spiritual, and emotional support, among others as the prime necessity and not necessarily giving birth to multiple children because the Bible also endorses or preaches about good

²⁴ Rev. Fr. Francis Abebrese, (Roman Catholic Priest for Koforidua Saint John's Catholic Church), was interviewed by Akonnor Michael during fieldwork at Koforidua on April 04, 2021.

²⁵ Rev. Fr. David Ampofo, (Roman Catholic Priest for Offinso-Maase Saint Agnes Catholic Church), interviewed by Akonnor Michael during fieldwork at Offinso-Maase on March 23, 2021.

²⁶ Elise Newcomer, "To Conceive or Not Conceive: A Christian Perspective on Family Planning," *CedarEthics: A Journal of Critical Thinking in Bioethics* 13, no. 1 (2013): 2.

²⁷ Sarah Amoabea, (Roman Catholic Catechist for the Koforidua Saint John Catholic Church) was interviewed by Akonnor Michael during the field work at Koforidua on April 04, 2021.

²⁸ Paulina Afriyie Arhin, (Roman Catholic Catechist for Adankwame Saint Dominic Catholic Church), interviewed by Akonnor Michael during the field work at Koforidua on April 11, 2021.

²⁹ Karl H Peschke, "Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II, Vol. 2," *Bangalore, Theological Publication in India*, 1996, 533

nurturing in children's upbringing. This position further represents an ambivalent view of the methods of birth control used among Catholic members in the Kumasi Archdiocese. This is because there is a general awareness (as revealed in the data) of the natural methods that the Catholic Church preferred. However, there are cases where members use both the artificial or scientific and natural methods in the prevention of pregnancy in the Catholic Church.

This phenomenon could be a result of the inability on the part of the church leader in the study area, to teach and properly introduce members to Pope Paul's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* preferred methods of birth control, to be used among members, as well as provide the reasons why such preferred natural methods are chosen above the artificial methods in the prevention of pregnancy in the Catholic Church.

The Theological and Ethical Implications of the Practices of Birth Control among Catholics in the Kumasi Archdiocese

One of the emergent facts the research revealed among the majority of Catholics in the Offinso Municipality in the Kumasi Archdiocese is their thought that the Bible is silent on the right methods of birth control in the prevention of pregnancy. Catholics in the Kumasi Archdiocese admitted that the Bible considers children as gifts and a blessing from God, and they are the fulfillment of human matrimony and the pride of parents as well as giving absolute joy and happiness to parents. Nonetheless, godly nurturing of children involves many conditions such as emotional maturity, a sense of duty and responsibility, good parenting, and economic resources for parents to responsibly take care of their children. Absence of needed support burdens some parents, leading to most parents becoming sad and miserable.

Therefore, regardless of the condemnation of artificial contraception in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the majority of Catholics seem to think that using artificial birth control is better than having an abortion. This has led the majority of Catholics in the Offinso Municipality in the Kumasi Archdiocese to support and patronize artificial methods of birth control to limit their birth rate.

In the Kumasi Archdiocese, Catholic adherents approach the ethics of birth control pragmatically, considering factors such as health, family well-being, and societal responsibilities. The perspective encompasses both natural and artificial methods, emphasizing responsible family planning and diverging somewhat from indigenous Catholic doctrine by suggesting that neither method is inherently ethically wrong. This viewpoint reflects a localized interpretation within the community, illustrating the complex considerations surrounding reproductive health within a religious context.

The study reveals that since the grooming of the children is most often highly dependent on the parent, effective use of either the natural or artificial method of birth control will ensure proper care for one's children and family. This will help avoid difficulties in the standard of living which in a way can positively affect the nurturing of the offspring in terms of their education, feeding, etc. Therefore, the number of children a couple chooses to have should be left to the discretion of the couples involved and not by the decrees of public authorities.

RECOMMENDATION

Although some Catholics are aware of the types of birth control, the majority have little knowledge about the methods and their relevance as well as the papal documents of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and other Papal encyclicals that emphasize the birth control methods in the Roman Catholic Church. It is thus recommended that Catholic laity week celebrations should consider discussions on the concept of birth control and thoroughly inform Catholics of the implications of various methods.

It is highly recommended that there should be a reshaping of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*'s teaching on birth control, as well as other papal teachings concerning methods of controlling one's birth. This will help harmonize the church's teaching with the actual lived experiences of the Catholic Laity in the Kumasi Archdiocese in Ghana, and other dioceses across the country and throughout the world, many of whom share similar difficulties and concerns.

It is also recommended that the diocese regularly organize conferences, debates, and seminars on the use of birth control methods and their effectiveness for Catholic members. This will go a long way for Catholics to open up to Church leaders about the methods of birth control they have been using in their sexual and marital lives, the challenges related to such methods, and the relevance of such methods patronized as well.

Another recommendation is that the papal encyclicals, most especially Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, be discussed often through presentations by Catholic bishops in the various dioceses which will help throw more light on the methods of controlling birth in the Catholic Church.

On health, it is recommended that as long as tubal ligation, which is an artificial method of birth control is being done at the Catholic Hospital, more clinics and hospitals should be built in most of the remote villages and towns in the Offinso Municipality in the Archdiocese of Kumasi to help introduce to patients from nearby villages and towns on the methods of controlling their births.

Finally, published manuals or documents, which vividly elaborate on the methods of controlling birth in family life, should be made available to members of the Catholic faith in the Archdioceses for them to be aware and appreciate ethically, the various methods used in birth control.

CONCLUSION

The experience of humanity is considered greatly in the shaping of ethics. Catholic sexual ethics ought to consider the experiences of the laity regarding birth control methods as Catholic social ethics has taken seriously the historical experiences of changes and movements in society in terms of freedom of conscience, slavery, and others. The natural and artificial methods of birth control are aimed at the prevention or control of births and do not elicit or depict any evil reflections and aim at one purpose such as the prevention of birth (contra life), taking into account the health of the parents, the spiritual and material welfare of the family and the interest of the society, there is a justification on limiting the number of children through various methods of birth control.

Due to overpopulation and the high rate of transmission of infectious diseases in most developed and developing countries, the use of an effective and comprehensive method of controlling birth will go a long way to reduce the challenges in maternal and induced abortion as Ghana seeks to achieve the millennium development goal 5 (Improve maternal health) and Sustainable Development Goal 3 (good health and wealth) for respective individuals to also improve their lives and prospects.

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- Cf. Likewise the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) by Paul VI, nr.37.
- Cf. Pastoral Guide, vol. I, ed. 2003, no.26
- Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12; Cf. Th. 2:13
- Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no.5; *Dei Verbum*, no.4
- Pius XI’s *Casti Connubii*, no.19.
- Pope John Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968).
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