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Turning Point, by McClory

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Book Reviews



Turning Point. By Robert McClory. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company. xiv, 202 pages.

It has been twenty-seven years since Pope Paul VI issued his most controversial encyclical *Humanae Vitae* banning any form of artificial contraception as intrinsically evil. What has been written and said against and for the encyclical can fill volumes, but it seems that Pope John Paul II's 1993 encyclical *Splendor Veritatis* has put an end to all dissent on this moral and theological issue. Today, it also appears that full and explicit agreement with *Humanae Vitae* has become the foundation stone of John Paul II's papacy and a prerequisite for anyone nominated to become a bishop.

If Rome has spoken and the case of artificial birth control is closed, the reader may ask: Of what value, then, is this book on the inside story of the Papal Birth Control Commission (PBCC), and how *Humanae Vitae* changed the life of Patty Crowley (a married woman member of the Commission) and the future of the Church written by an award-winning professor of Journalism at Northwestern University?

The author gives us the dramatic story of the watershed events behind the Papal decision in *Humanae Vitae* to go against the majority report of the PBCC. McClory brings to life the inside story that took place in four initial meetings and the last three final meetings of the PBCC from 1963 to 1966 through the experience of lay people, especially Pat Crowley, one of the most respected women in the Catholic Church today.

In April 1966 Patty Crowley wrote: "We think it is time that this commission recommend that the sacredness of conjugal love not be violated by thermometers and calendars." Today what bothers Patty Crowley most is the deeply entrenched double standard at the Church's institutional level. "I just can't stand the hypocrisy," she said. In April 1966 she wrote: "It is now time that the full story of what happened be told."

The Appendices of the book contain the Majority Report "Responsible Parenthood" of the PBCC and the official list of all the members of the Commission. The omission of the Minority Report which Pope Paul VI followed in his encyclical clearly shows the bias of the author against *Humanae Vitae*.

The author provides a very interesting account of the difficult issues and the protagonists in the drama of the birth-control debate, the aftermath of

Humanae Vitae, the sentiments of the surviving members of the PBCC, the hitherto unknown events behind *Humanae Vitae* which historians will consider as the turning point and lost moment in the history of the Church. All these come alive as if the reader were present. But of what positive value is this book now that the Church has spoken the last word?

Since Vatican II, the important role of the laity in the Church has come more and more to the fore. This book is by a layman and gives the viewpoint of significant dissenting voices of what is called today "sensus fidelium," or the sense of the faithful which more and more will play a crucial role in the evolution of Church doctrine, morals, and Christian life. The Epilogue of the book entitled "What if" is noteworthy. It states forcefully some perplexing questions on the use of Church authority to exact assent and obedience to Catholic truth whose answers will be a long time coming.

McClory concludes, "On the basis of what happened between 1963 and 1968, if the Holy Spirit was the inspiration of *Humanae Vitae*, then the Spirit in that case worked in and through a small minority who fervently believed the old way was the only way, who operated in nearly total secrecy, who denied that the witness of the faithful could have any connection with theology, who bypassed the intent of the Commission they served on, and who achieved their goal in the end by playing on the fears and hesitations of the Holy Father."

Many of the members of the PBCC have since died, but among the survivors is our very own demographer Mercedes Concepcion, now retired from the Population Institute of the University of the Philippines. She has not lost faith and hope because she believes there will always be room for enlightenment in the Philippine Church.

One may not totally agree with the author's conclusion or one could have wished that this book were written instead by a Catholic moral theologian of international repute or that the side of the minority had also been presented. Be that as it may, McClory has asked serious questions that the Church authorities cannot ignore forever.

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Where Only the Moon Rages. By Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo. Pasig, Metro Manila: Anvil Publishing, 1994.

It is helpful to recall Coppard's distinction between the modern short story and the tale when one reads *Where Only the Moon Rages* by Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo. The one form belongs to a written tradition; the other harks back to a preliterate past. As such, their conventions and demands are different.