



From Onanism to Humanae Vitae: a Catholic Journey into Modern Sexuality - Lucia Pozzi, nagranie seminarium Katorep #5

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For centuries, the Catholic church has regulated sexual behaviours. Everyone is prone to think that the Catholic church has always opposed birth control and abortion. This is commonly interpreted as a form of resistance to modernity. However, the Catholic encounter with modern sexuality has a more interesting and complex history. And this history began long before the issue of the encyclical *Casti connubii* (1930), which was the first papal pronouncement on eugenics, birth control and abortion.

What is really modern in the Catholic various conceptions of sexuality? How did medical understanding affect religious view of sexuality? How did scientific and religious thought interact in the construction of discourse on sexuality? What are the historical roots of Catholic contemporary attitudes towards sexuality?

My hypothesis is that over the nineteenth century a new combination of scientific and political discourses moulded Catholic discourses on sexuality into something new. In particular, a new medical interpretation of sexuality changed the religious way to look at sexual sins.

In this paper I will discuss the meaning of onanism, its origin, and its impact on modern Catholic ideas of contraception and marital sex. I will then focus on sexual purity as a modern religious response to the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates on sex education and sex reform.

Lucia Pozzi is a member of the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) at the University of Queensland. She has published articles and book chapters on the history of the Catholic encyclical *Casti connubii*, on Catholic sexual morals, eugenics and birth control. Her research interests include the history of medicine, the Society of Jesus and the history of Fascism. Her recent book (*Catholicism and Sexual Knowledge in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke Palgrave Macmillan 2021) investigates how Catholicism modified and adapted itself to scientific modernity, through an exploration of its encounter with nineteenth- and twentieth-century medical discourses.

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Links

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