The Opposition of Traditionalist Catholics to Sex Education in the 1970s

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ON 1st January, 1970, an outraged mother of nine published a brief plea in her local newspaper, the *Leyland Guardian*, encouraging parents to join her campaign against the expansion of sex education in British schools.[1] At the time, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was planning to introduce into schools a series of sex education films which it had produced for children aged eight and upwards.[2] These short but graphic films caused a backlash from some parents who felt that information about sex ought to come from parents directly through the paradigm of their moral and religious values rather than shown in what those opposed to the films described as pornography.[3] The campaigning mother was Mrs Irene Taylor, a traditionalist Catholic whose religious conservatism was exacerbated by the ecumenical and liturgical shifts occurring in the Catholic Church following the Second Vatican Council, which took place from 1962 to 1965.[4]

This article conveys the fervent opposition to sex education in British schools among a proportion of parents by using the case study of a traditionalist Catholic couple whose religious faith clashed with the changing social attitudes towards sex in the 1960s and beyond.[5] This article follows on from one in the 2023 edition of *North West Catholic History*, exploring the opposition of Mrs Irene Taylor (1932-2015) and her husband Derrick (1930-2011) to the changes implemented following the Second Vatican Council which led the couple to join the conservative traditionalist movement spearheaded by Swiss Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.[6] Mr and Mrs Taylor saw the revisions to the Tridentine Mass not merely as changes to the liturgy but in a wider context as a threat to their system of morality.[7] Thus, the focus of this article is on the political and social dimensions of Mr and Mrs Taylor's determination to

preserve the old Catholic liturgy and its customs and how these manifested in their anti-sex education campaign.[8] This will be achieved by exploring how the changes in British attitudes towards family life, relationships and sex, which accelerated during the 1960s, intersected with the rise of traditionalist sentiment among a relatively small group of Catholics in the 1970s.[9] To contextualise the views of the Taylors in the broader anti-permissiveness movement in England, some time will be devoted to explaining the campaign led by Mary Whitehouse and the Nationwide Festival of Light that reached its peak in 1971.[10]

The social conservatives and traditionalists with whom Mr and Mrs Taylor conversed were opposed by those who wished to see social progress and thus supported the introduction of sex education in schools.[11] Meanwhile, moderate politicians supported the view that sex education should begin at home before it is introduced in schools as a means of appeasing both conservatives and liberals.[12] This dispute sits within a broader debate about the reasonable limits of parental consent, to avoid the parent's right to withdraw their child contravening the right of the child to receive an adequate education.[13] At the outset, it is important to make a disclaimer that the author of this article is Mr and Mrs Taylor's grandson who, over the last few years, has conducted research on his grandparents' traditionalist views and their involvement in the St Pius V Association as some of its earliest members.[14] Since the author grew up at the home of Mr and Mrs Taylor, his insight on the subject makes him an appropriate candidate for explaining his grandparents' opposition to introducing sex education into British schools as well as how their beliefs stemmed in part from the escalating tensions between modernists and traditionalists within the Catholic Church at the time.[15]

On 21st March 1931, a decree published by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith condemned sex education, stating that 'no approbation whatever can be given' and that precautions ought to be taken to ensure that young people avoid all occasions of sin.[16] Twenty years later, Pope Pius XII insisted that only parents should give sex education and in the 1954 encyclical *Sacra Virginitas* he condemned immodest sex education, urging parents to push back

against supporters of sex initiation or those that emphasise sex for pleasure rather than procreation.[17] Amid the debate on sex education reaching its peak in the 1970s, Pope Paul VI made an address on 13th September 1972 in which he categorised sex education with erotic literature and pornography, condemning all three as 'evils of the day.'[18]

Then in 1981, Pope John Paul II issued an Apostolic Exhortation in which he affirmed the 'basic right and duty of parents' to provide sex education for their children and that education carried out by others must be conducted under the guidance of parents.[19] For instance, in 1983, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education published *Educational Guidance in Human Love* in which the Congregation affirmed that sex education is 'in the first place, the duty of the family' which is 'the best environment to accomplish the obligation of securing a gradual education in sexual life.'[20] Pope John Paul II affirmed that chastity in sex education is essential, a sentiment that Catholic media outlets such as the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) have continued to promulgate.[21] For example, Mother Angelica, an American Roman Catholic nun of the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration who founded EWTN in 1981[22], became one of the faces of Catholic conservatism on her television show *Mother Angelica Live* beginning in 1983, on which she regularly voiced her opposition to contraception and sex education while simultaneously indicating her preference for the Tridentine rite.[23] Mother Angelica's presentation of the Catholic faith on her show attracted traditionalists like Mrs Taylor who often watched EWTN's Catholic programming and responded to the network's requests for donations.

The Taylors gravitated towards friends, organisations and television programmes that affirmed their conservative stance as Catholics. In turn they carefully crafted an echo chamber for themselves and their family to live in, which is why they became particular about with whom they associated. For example, Mrs Taylor kept in frequent contact with Mr and Mrs Irwin of Bridgwater who were a traditionalist Catholic couple and early members of the St Pius V Association who introduced the Taylors to the traditionalist

movement in 1973. In a letter to Mrs Taylor from 1977, Hélène Irwin writes about her efforts to spread awareness of the changes taking place in the Church, including her struggle to sell the now-defunct publication *The Keys*, while perhaps inadvertently revealing that the views held by Mrs Taylor and her were in the minority among Catholic congregations:

> I am not allowed to sell openly in the parish. You can only give *The Keys* to people more intellectual, who study a bit about what is going on in the Church and are rather disturbed today by what is happening. But the majority of the people do not trouble themselves to find out about it, so it is hopeless trying to sell this to them. Only teachers and people who follow closely the situation in the Church will be more interested in buying them. But it is difficult to find these people. And these days, you never know people's opinion, as a lot of people are rather progressive.

Traditionalists like the Irwins and the Taylors struggled to grow in numbers, in part due to the broader changes in Western society in the 1960s that altered the perspectives of members of the younger generation at least on matters of contraception, premarital sex and sex education.[24] This change in belief is perhaps no more evident than in the lack of adherence among Catholics to the 1968 papal encyclical *Humanae vitae* which, amid the sexual revolution, reaffirmed the Church's teachings on the rejection of artificial contraception based on the moral teaching of the sanctity of life and the procreative purpose and unitive nature of conjugal relations.[25] In a 1978 journal article for example, the American priest and theologian Father Joseph Komonchak made reference to a study from 1975 which claimed that nearly 77% of Catholic wives were practising birth control, 94% of whom were using contraceptive methods condemned by the Church.[26] This suggests that the traditionalists have been in the minority on matters of birth control since the debate accelerated in the 1960s but this lack of adherence to *Humanae vitae* does not necessarily equate to an embracement of sex education among Catholic parents, with voices such as David Paton

of the *Catholic Herald* continuing to voice their concerns over the sex education lobby.[27]

Concurrent with the traditionalist view of the Catholic faith came a set of values that reflected a reactionary standpoint to most progressive social issues of the era including abortion rights, contraception and sex education.[28] These values were based on a complementarian understanding of male and female roles in the household and led traditionalists like Mr and Mrs Taylor to reject liberal views.[29] It seemed the more liberal society became, the more stalwart in their conservative views the traditionalists became.[30] The Taylors felt it was their privilege and responsibility as parents to provide information to their children about sex rather than this be a subject matter taught in schools with insufficient parental oversight.[31] Thus, Mr and Mrs Taylor viewed the introduction of sex education in schools as an intrusion into their family life from which they would try to protect their children.

Based on their writings, there seemed to be a distrust of the schools by Mr and Mrs Taylor that teachers would fail to educate their children on matters of relationships and sex that were in alignment with their Catholic values despite their children attending Catholic schools.[32] This eventually led to Mr and Mrs Taylor pulling their children out of school, opting instead to have them homeschooled by nuns and teachers whom they believed shared their traditionalist Catholic values.[33] Amidst the eruption in the debate surrounding sex education in 1970, the Pope appealed to Catholic parents to educate their children on emotional and sexual maturity. In his speech, Pope Paul VI warned of 'ravaging eroticism' pursued by 'avaricious industries' that was damaging the youth.[34] For Mr and Mrs Taylor, Catholicism was integrated into every aspect of their family life which meant they viewed this intrusion as impeding the way they wished to raise their children.[35] Of the changes taking place in the Church, Mr Taylor, during a 1995 interview, recalled his feelings during the 1970s:

> Indeed, for some time I believed the Church was being destroyed and she no longer appeared like the Church I loved with all my heart and soul.[36]

One might question what connection Mr and Mrs Taylor's opposition to the *Novus Ordo* has with the introduction of sex education in schools. However, the changes brought about following the Second Vatican Council did not take place in a vacuum but instead occurred during a time of broader social liberalisation.[37] The Taylors and other traditionalists viewed what was taking place in the Church as a microcosm of what was taking place in society. As Mr and Mrs Taylor saw it, if the Church could change such an immutable aspect of the Catholic faith as the way the Mass is celebrated, then every other Catholic belief and practice would be vulnerable to being watered-down or abandoned.[38]

Hence, their concern did not end with the specific changes to the liturgy following Vatican II, but with the fact that change was possible at all and the foreboding negative effects these changes would have on future generations.[39] Essentially, the traditionalist fear was that modernising the Mass would lead to a modernisation of Catholic social teaching altogether, including on matters of sex and relationships.[40] Traditionalists like the Taylors associated the Church with several conservative political and social values and as the last institutional stronghold against modernism which had already taken hold in society.[41] This association is rooted in integralism[42], the aim of which is for the Catholic Church to ascend to a position of authority in political and social spheres, not only on spiritual matters.[43]

The heart of the traditionalist campaign was to preserve the Tridentine Mass, but closely connected to this pursuit was a set of values that stemmed from traditional interpretations of Catholic social teaching on areas such as gender roles, marriage, sexuality and the rights of women.[44] In essence, Mr and Mrs Taylor saw their Church caving-in to outside pressures to change doctrine they regarded as sacred. To support this research's aim to understand the political and social implications of traditionalist Catholicism, an interview was conducted on 9th August 2022 with Fr Peter Morgan, the former Superior of the St Pius V Association. During his interview, Fr Morgan shed some insight on how traditionalists felt

when the changes from Vatican II were announced and their dissatisfaction with how they were implemented:

> A lot of Catholics were shocked by the changes that were being made. Your grandparents, along with thousands of other people, were highly offended and saw heresy everywhere and when the Church made these changes, inevitably, there were many nonsenses and mistakes that happened during their implementation.

There was an indication among some traditionalists that changes to Church doctrine and practices might be inevitable, but their main contention was with how the changes were implemented and their fear that some modernists were taking the Pope's words too far by including additional changes that had not been explicitly stated in the Council's initial declarations.[45] This view was indicated by Mr Taylor when he stated the following in his 1995 interview:

> I returned to praying for those misguided people who try to alter the doctrines and moral teachings of the Church to fit in with their own frustrations.[46]

For the Taylors, preserving traditional Catholic social teaching involved ideals about complementarian gender roles, familialism (i.e. an ideology that emphasises traditional family values, including the view that the nuclear family is a central component of any functional society), marriage as holy matrimony and sex for purposes of procreation only,[47] specifically, the belief that the family consists of a man and a woman and that their children belong to God. Thus, parents have the responsibility of teaching their children right from wrong and how to develop a relationship with God. Under this view of family life, the father and mother have different but complementary roles.[48] For instance, the father is responsible for providing for, protecting and leading his family while the mother willingly accepts her husband's leadership and collaborates with him in his endeavour to lead their family by managing the household and nurturing children.[49] Marriage is the seal that acts as the foundation of family life while sex is reserved for procreation as opposed to sensual gratification.

Further characteristics of traditionalist Catholics may or may not include a distrust of technology, an aversion to modern music due to the view that music has become overly sexualized as well as films deemed blasphemous or as worshipping the Devil. Traditionalists saw these aspects of modernism as encroaching on their religion, fears that they felt were confirmed when they witnessed various aspects of Catholic belief watered-down or left out completely from the *Novus Ordo*, including the emphasis on Mass as a sacrifice, the invocation of the saints, the need for grace, the hostility of the outside world, penance and sin, the judgement of God and references to damnation.[50] Confusion and dissatisfaction with the changes were reflected in a letter written by the second eldest of the Taylor children sent in March 1973 to a priest with whom her mother had been in contact, Fr Ivo Tonelli, a Portuguese Dehonian, a member of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. In the letter, the teenage girl expressed her frustrations with the ineptitude of priests in explaining the changes taking place in the Church:

> Here in England, the Catholic Church is so confusing, I ask advice from two priests and get two contrary answers and so you see how difficult it is for us.

Beyond the alterations to the liturgy, other significant changes that represented an opposition to the values the traditionalists held were ecumenism and the recognition of religious freedom.[51] The traditionalists continued to view Protestants and all other non-Catholic Christians as heretics, but the ecumenical approach adopted by the Second Vatican Council advocated warmer relations with other Christian denominations. This opposition to ecumenism stemmed from a broader opposition to pluralism and the rejection of any non-Catholic worldviews. As traditionalists tend to view society as having been pervaded by the Devil, the Taylors held distrust for government institutions including the education authority whose new pluralistic curriculum they deemed unsuitable for their children.[52] Moreover, the changes taking place in the Catholic Church at the time exacerbated the concerns of the Taylors and forced them to cling more tightly to the version of Catholic doctrine and practice widespread before the 1970s by joining organisations such as the

Society of St Pius X (SSPX) which affirmed their beliefs and advocated taking a stand against the mainstream Church to reinstate traditional teaching.[53]

In 1970, the BBC took the bold step to create sex education programmes for children as young as eight to be shown during school time as teaching aids to help explain the human reproductive system.[54] The BBC film strips were titled 'Where Do Babies Come From' and 'Growing Up'.[55] The films ignited an uproar among some conservative parents who interpreted them as pornographic as they displayed male and female genitalia through anatomical animations with a voice-over to explain their reproductive functions but did not refer to sensual gratification.[56] The production and distribution of the sex education films were at the centre of Mr and Mrs Taylor's campaign during the early 1970s to put an end to sex education in schools altogether. The BBC films revealed three strata of opinions of parents on sex education during the era from abolitionist to 'permissionist' to 'retentionist'.[57]

The abolitionists sought to have the BBC films never shown to children and to give full control of sex education to parents, thus removing it entirely from the curriculum.[58] Meanwhile, although not completely in favour of sex education, 'permissionists' were more moderate as they agreed with showing the BBC films to children as long as schools sought the consent of parents beforehand and that parents were given the opportunity to see the films in advance.[59] Finally, the 'retentionists' embraced the BBC films as a step forward in introducing education about positive relationships and sex into primary and secondary schools by demystifying sex and removing its label as a taboo topic.[60]

Underlying this spectrum of opinions seemed to be a struggle between parents giving consent and the power of schools to teach children the way the education authority deemed suitable.[61] However, the main contention among those opposed to the BBC films was that they did not make any mention of the role of marriage and so objectors believed the education authority had failed to take into consideration the religious beliefs of parents regarding the need for marriage before sex.[62] In response to the criticism over the

omission of marriage, the BBC explained that this topic was left out to avoid excluding unmarried mothers.[63]

To quell the uproar that the anti-sex education campaigners had been causing, some schools invited parents to meetings where they could air their concerns over the BBC films and sex education more broadly.[64] During these meetings, the aim of the films and their value in educating children and teenagers was explained to parents, including supporting awareness and understanding of sexually transmitted infections.[65] For instance, the headmaster from Leyland St Mary's Roman Catholic Junior School, the school which some of Mr and Mrs Taylor's children attended at the time, supported the films being shown to students of appropriate age. In response, Mrs Taylor wrote the following comments in a public letter:

> I have protest sheets waiting for the signatures of any persons, feeling that this teaching is the parents' responsibility and privilege. Some people are not aware of the powers they have to influence those who, like the BBC, think they can get away with anything. I believe that pornography to innocent children is disgusting and can do untold harm to our young in later years. Mothers concerned should act now before it is too late.[66]

Mrs Taylor was not alone in her views as other parents also publicly expressed opposition, mainly based on beliefs grounded in religious and social conservatism.[67] There was perhaps no louder voice standing in opposition to the new ways sex education was being taught in British schools than former teacher turned campaigner Mary Whitehouse.[68] Despite being a sex education teacher herself since 1960, Whitehouse began campaigning against sex education in British schools in 1971 due to the BBC sex education videos which she also interpreted as pornographic.[69] While Mrs Whitehouse was not a Catholic, she was an evangelical Christian whose social conservatism corresponded somewhat with the views of traditionalist Catholics like the Taylors.

In 1964, Whitehouse, alongside Norah Buckland, the wife of an Anglican vicar, launched their 'Clean-up TV' campaign which became formally organised when a large meeting was held at

Birmingham Town Hall in May of that year.[70] Buckland and Whitehouse's manifesto, which they aimed at British mothers, garnered over 366,000 signatures of support and was submitted to Parliament in June 1965.[71] At this time, the campaign organised itself as the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVALA) which aimed at influencing broadcasters to refrain from producing programmes that did not assimilate to Buckland and Whitehouse's ideology, namely, social conservatism framed by traditional Christian morality.[72] Essentially, the NVALA was opposed to the representation of liberal views on-screen.

Shortly before founding her 'Clean-up TV' campaign, Whitehouse had been a senior mistress at Madeley Modern School in Shropshire where she taught relationships and sex. During the 1963 Profumo scandal, in which the Secretary of State for War John Profumo was found to have been engaging in an extramarital affair with a nineteen-year-old model since 1961, Whitehouse was appalled to find her students mimicking sexual intercourse while in class.[73] The students claimed they had been prompted to do this by a television programme they had seen about the model involved in the affair named Christine Keeler. The next year, Whitehouse left her teaching career behind to work full-time on her campaign to reverse the declining moral standards in British society which she saw broadcasters as guilty of instigating.

The full force of Whitehouse's campaign targeted the depiction of abortion, profanity, promiscuity, pornography, and violence as well as the use of satire. Whitehouse believed British society was lapsing into a state of moral corruption which was being accelerated by the low moral standards represented on television. Whitehouse organised letter-writing campaigns and petitions to push back against the growing permissiveness in society and concentrated much of her time on suing the BBC and various other publishers for libel.[74] Perhaps the most notorious of such cases was when Whitehouse had Gay News fined £31,000 and its editor personally fined £3,500 for publishing a poem in which a Roman soldier held homoerotic and masochistic feelings towards Jesus on the cross.[75]

In 1970, in the wake of the public dispute over the BBC sex education films, Whitehouse redirected some of her efforts towards the debate surrounding sex education in schools. Although she saw sex education as legitimate as long as it takes into consideration 'ethical matters and supports the Christian interpretation of sex'[76], Whitehouse opposed 'contraceptive education' due to her concern that teaching teenagers about contraception would lead to higher levels of promiscuity in society.[77] About the BBC films specifically, Whitehouse viewed them as 'educationally and psychologically unsound' and so campaigned to have them banned. During the early 1970s, as one of the leaders of the Nationwide Festival of Light, Whitehouse spoke out on how television programmes have a significant impact on the course a society takes in its standards and values which she did not wish to see lowered by the introduction of what she interpreted as pornographic sex education.[78]

Mary Whitehouse represented hundreds of thousands of parents during the 1970s who, whether for reasons stemming from their religious views or secular concerns around safeguarding their children, opposed the introduction of the BBC sex films and other forms of graphic sex education.[79] Whitehouse and her 'Clean-up TV' campaign constituted a reaction to the changes taking place in Western society at the time that involved an increase in secularisation and sexual liberation spearheaded by feminists and LGBT rights activists who wished to see social progress on issues such as abortion, contraception and the assumption of heteronormativity.[80] Mr and Mrs Taylor were supporters of Whitehouse as they shared her concerns for the declining moral standards they witnessed on television and in society combined with the changes taking place within their Church which prompted them to take action to preserve their beliefs and values.

It seemed that such vehement opposition worked for a time to stall the rollout of sex education in schools as several teacher associations and education committees across Britain rejected the films and refused to show them.[81] To appease the moderate parents, many schools agreed to show them the sex education films before they were introduced to their children.[82] The underlying concern for

Catholics stemmed from their view that parents hold the primary responsibility to teach their children about relationships and sex to ensure these sensitive matters are communicated in ways that correspond with Catholic values and understandings of family life, marriage and procreation.[83]

While some individuals opposed the films altogether, others were concerned about showing the films to children of primary school age.[84] For instance, George Parsons, Councillor for the town of Adlington, stated in February 1970 that the BBC was taking a 'diabolical liberty' by producing the sex education films for children as young as eight and instead thought that the films should be shown only to children from age eleven.[85] However, for abolitionists like Mr and Mrs Taylor, their view was that even showing teenagers such films was problematic because they believed more education on sex would lead to higher levels of promiscuity among the youth, especially given the rise in access to abortion and birth control at the time.[86] Moreover, the abolitionists sought to retain their control over what their children were taught regarding sex to ensure they were not exposed to information or materials their parents felt were inappropriate.[87] On this matter, Mrs Taylor stated the following in another public letter:

> As a mother of nine children, I believe there is no better way of a child receiving this knowledge than from its parent surrounded by the love between parent and child. I am supporting prominent people in their efforts to fight for our privileges and responsibilities not to be forced from us.[88]

However, with Mrs Taylor framing her concern as being her parental right to educate her children on matters of relationships and sex, the same argument could be made from the perspective of children and teenagers regarding their right to an education on such matters that do not include implicit notions of shame but instead promote bodily integrity, equality within marriage, safe sex and reproductive health, including reproductive rights.[89] Despite her vehement opposition to the BBC films, Mrs Taylor's anti-sex education campaign was only partially successful as the Lancashire

County Education Committee decided to show the sex education films, albeit on two conditions.[90] Firstly, the headmaster of the primary school must write to parents to inform them what day the films were scheduled to be shown to their child and secondly, parents were granted the right to withdraw their children from all showings of the films if they wished.

A couple of years later, on a spring day in 1973, Preston Magistrates' Court was left astonished as Mr Taylor, against the recommendation of his solicitor, Mr Williams of Deepdale Road, challenged the judge over fines he had received from the education authority regarding keeping his children from attending school.[91] The dispute erupted from how schools were intending to teach sex education in classes to primary school children from age eight upwards, a decision to which Mr Taylor was opposed. Earlier that year, Mr Taylor had arrived outside the Roman Catholic Junior School in Leyland to demand his children be removed from the school because he opposed the introduction of sex education classes. Reflecting on his court hearing during an interview in which he participated in 1995, Mr Taylor recalled the following:

> There is one famous story when I was hauled up before the local magistrates hereabouts because I had gone to the local school to take away my children from the sex education classes. Sex education is for the home, and this is where it should be taught. I received a severe reprimand from the bench on that occasion. However, that was not before I explained to the judges on the bench my feelings about my own responsibilities to my wife and to my children, above all before God.[92]

At the time, Mr Taylor characterised his treatment by the education authority as a matter of religious discrimination based on the authority's refusal to consider his Catholic views on religious instruction and sex education. After some of his children had returned to normal schooling, Mr Taylor penned a public letter in 1975 to express his views:

> Our home is far happier when our children are on holiday from school because we have experienced that

> discrimination exists in today's education against families who believe deeply in God and hold a very high moral standard, as we do. We have experienced that the current type of education destroys everything which responsible parents try to build up in their children's characters. Thus, the parents' task is a difficult one.[93]

By 1975, tensions had risen between the local Catholic school and Mr and Mrs Taylor not only over sex education but regarding the religious education at the school which by this time had become pluralistic rather than exclusively instructing children in the Catholic faith. For instance, in the October 1975 front page *Lancashire Evening Post* article addressing their Latinist house chapel, it is mentioned that the Taylor children of both primary and secondary school age had been removed from their religious instruction classes as Mr and Mrs Taylor believed the education to be 'inadequate'.[94] The 1944 Education Act established a parent's right to withdraw their child from collective worship and religious education.[95] However, from the mid-to-late 1970s, Mr and Mrs Taylor had removed their remaining children from school altogether, opting instead to homeschool them with Catholic teachers of whom they pre-approved. During this time, amid several visits made by officers from the education authority to the Taylor home, Mr Taylor made the following statement in the local newspaper:

> I claim the educational system is yet another threat to family life and, rather than give the parents freedom of choice and parental rights on faith and morals, now the authorities are shouting for higher fines for parents without any reasoning or understandings, which makes the conditions to live under, more hellish than ever.[96]

Mr Taylor's comments demonstrate his disgruntlement towards the situation regarding sex education and what he saw as his and his wife's mistreatment by the education authority. This stemmed from his dissatisfaction with the authority's supposed lack of concern for parents who oppose their children being taught about religion and sex in ways incongruous with their beliefs and values. Following the

departure of the Taylor family from the Society of St Pius X during the 1980s, Mrs Taylor turned to the Catholic organisation Opus Dei whose aim to re-establish Christian ideals in society corresponded well with her integralist views.[97] As part of the research for this article, an interview was conducted on 28th July 2022 with Mrs Taylor's confessor Fr Peter Haverty who recalled the following about Mrs Taylor:

> She was every day concerned about the modern trends and was appalled about the way things were departing from tradition which is why she liked to come to me and the other priests of Opus Dei.

By opting to have her children homeschooled by Catholic teachers of whom she approved, it seems Mrs Taylor withdrew from campaigning on problems she saw in the British education system. However, a letter Mrs Taylor sent to her friend Hélène Irwin two decades later in December 1995 reveals her renewed concern, this time regarding the education of her grandchildren:

> What a mess the younger generation is in. I do hope we get the catechism taught in our R.C. schools again. There is no "teaching method" so simple and clean as the penny catechism. It is a treasure. I thought I had finished with the 'schools' problem but seeing the dangerous things happening to my grandchildren, this prompts me to get into the fight again. We have many R.C. comprehensives but the education is <u>not</u> R.C. so they only turn out to be baptised pagans.

In the space of a decade or so, Mr and Mrs Taylor had themselves become the iconoclasts and rebels in a social landscape that had transformed around them which they used every resource at their disposal to try to reverse but had limited success. Mrs Taylor forged ahead with a campaign opposing sex education in schools while Mr Taylor was called to appear in court for removing his children from school to prevent them from being taught subjects that did not correspond to traditional Catholic values and social teachings that emphasise marriage before sex, protecting the sanctity of family life and eschewing all forms of contraception. However, since the 1970s,

sex education has become a staple subject in the British public education system under headings such as 'sex and relationships'.[98]

In response to the criticism levied against them regarding their refusal to allow their children to attend sex education classes, Mr and Mrs Taylor claimed that they informed their children at home about sex and related issues. However, as part of the research conducted for this article, an interview was conducted with one of Mr and Mrs Taylor's daughters, during which she recalled the following memory from when she was a young teenager which indicates the limited knowledge that Mr and Mrs Taylor had imparted to their children:

> I remember screaming one day while I was in the bathroom at home. My elder sister came in and I explained to her that I was bleeding. I thought I was dying. She calmed me down and explained how this happens to all teenage girls. I had never been told by either of my parents what a period was.

This article has provided a timeline of Mr and Mrs Taylor's campaign against the BBC's sex education films, their attempts to remove their children from religious instruction they deemed inadequate as well as their response to sex education as traditionalist Catholics. This article has highlighted an intersection between traditionalist Catholicism as it emerged in the post-Vatican II era, the liberation movements that began in the 1960s and the reaction of traditionalist Catholics to forms of liberal views which they saw as intruding on family life. Capturing Mrs Taylor's feelings as a Catholic reflecting on the events that changed British society over a single generation, the following quotation comes from a letter Mrs Taylor wrote to her son's fiancée in October 1998:

> Since the priorities of our Nation are no longer 'ONE', (as your parents would remember), but more confusing, then the outlook can appear, as a persecution towards the faithful. Thus, misunderstandings, assumptions, and wrong ideas arise so quickly. Recently, politics has deprived some, of true freedoms, and so, like the martyrs of yesteryear, a few, seeing much at stake,

desire to 'stick their neck out' and rise up to be counted.[99]

List of Interview Participants

1. Monica Ann Bolton (11 March 2022)
2. Judith Sheehan (12 July 2022)
3. Joan Marita Morris (13 July 2022)
4. Father Edward Black (14 July 2022)
5. Father Joseph Evans (16 July 2022)
6. Father Michael Lowenthal (18 July 2022)
7. Father Jonathan Cotton (27 July 2022)
8. Kate Jordan (27 July 2022)
9. Father Peter Haverty (28 July 2022)
10. Susan O'Donnell (28 July 2022)
11. Father Peter Morgan (9 August 2022)
12. Father Vianney Vandendaele (10 August 2022)
13. Father Peter Morgan (11 August 2022)
14. Father Simon Henry (15 August 2022)
15. Geoffrey Townshend (25 August 2022)
16. Father Peter Morgan (29 August 2022)
17. Geoffrey Townshend (31 August 2022)
18. Geoffrey Townshend (9 September 2022)
19. Bill Adams and Theresa Swan (28 September 2022)
20. Theresa Swan (8 October 2022)
21. Rory White (16 October 2022)
22. Joseph Shaw (27 February 2023)

Notes

[1] 'Mother of 9 campaigns against sex education in schools', *Leyland Guardian*, 1 January 1970, p. 1.
[2] "TV 'danger is growing warns Mary Whitehouse", *Chorley Guardian*, 1 October 1970, p. 5.

[3] M. A. McCarthy & R. A. Moodie, 'Parliament and pornography: the 1978 child protection act', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 34 (1) (1981), pp. 47-62, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.pa.a054188 [Accessed 20 November 2023].
[4] R. R. Reno, 'The Latin Mass', *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, October 2021 (1) (2021), pp. 1-12, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/10/the-latin-mass [Accessed 20 November 2023].
[5] L. Black, *There Was Something About Mary: The National Viewers' and Listeners' Association and Social Movement History* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2009), pp. 182-200.
[6] B. R. Taylorian, 'The Struggle of Traditionalist Catholics in 1970s Northern England', *North West Catholic History*, 50 (1) (2023), pp. 45-65, https://philarchive.org/archive/TSOEEX [Accessed 20 November 2023].
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