

## THE CHANSON AFFAIR (1950-1952): MARITAL CONTINENCE OR CATHOLIC EROTICISM?

[Translation of Martine Sevegrand's paper from 1993]

**Summary** - The publication at the end of 1949 of a booklet by Paul Chanson, a well-known Catholic intellectual, which sang the praises of "the reserved embrace", provoked a heated debate in the French Catholic world. The work divided the clergy and the laypeople preoccupied with morality within marriage. It was published by the Christian Marriage Association and had a lengthy afterword by a professor of theology of the Dominican convent of Saulchoir. Thanks to abundant archival material, the article studies the controversy which lasted more than two years: until the publication of a *Monitum* by the Holy Office in June 1952. The case reveals both questions about sexuality and pleasure and the Church of Rome's will to suffocate Catholic attempts to reconcile traditional morality within marriage with the physical enjoyment of spouses.

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[439]. [Note: the figures in square brackets refer to the pages in the French version]

At the end of 1949, Paul Chanson published a small work, *Art d'aimer et continence conjugale*, which was to cause a real storm in the French Catholic world between 1950 and 1952. In advocating the reserved embrace, i.e. the sexual act not completed by ejaculation, Chanson thereby proposed a new solution to the painful problem of the birth control. After the Ogino method, which had disappointed so many Catholic households, Chanson claimed to offer an effective sexual technique of birth control.

But at the same time, Paul Chanson was asserting that his method made it possible for spouses to achieve physical harmony between them. As a fervent Catholic linked to the Christian Marriage Association (A.M.C.), he proposed an "art of loving" in lyrical terms that would allow Catholic couples to feel sexually fulfilled. The work, which had appeared with the *Imprimatur* of the Archdiocese of Paris and which had a lengthy end section by a renowned Dominican, Father Henri-Marie Féret, immediately triggered strong passions. For nearly three years, there was a debate which engaged the clergy as well as the laity<sup>2</sup>.

Behind the question of the legitimacy of the technique of the reserved embrace, other, more fundamental, ones emerged. What is the [440] place of the physical dimension within Christian marriage? What about pleasure, and in particular, female pleasure? Wasn't Chanson advocating a form of 'Catholic eroticism'?

### I. Paul Chanson: A Catholic patron

Paul Chanson (1890-1964) was born in Calais into a middle-class family. His father ran an import-export house; but Fr. Bourgeois, a parish priest of a very poor district of Calais, opened up the young Paul to social issues along with his brother Albert. After the baccalaureate, Paul went to Lille to study law at the Catholic Faculties where Eugène Duthoit, the future president of *Social Weeks*, was teaching. He frequented the Sillon in Lille and read about the French Socialists. After the First World War, while his brother Albert was destined for the priesthood, Paul Chanson reluctantly had to take over the management of the family business. In 1928, he was elected president of the Maritime Federation of the Port of Calais, where he promoted himself as a patron of social issues<sup>3</sup>.

In 1932, at his initiative, the Maritime Federation created a professional social insurance fund. In 1934, after the death of a dock worker, Paul Chanson called for the creation of a port infirmary managed by a joint commission and a joint board of inquiry for industrial accidents. He negotiated a charter of the inland waterway industry with the C.G.T. Chanson irritated the local employers who saw him as a revolutionary while at the same time was respected by the workers but labelled an "incorrigible calotin".

But Paul Chanson was more of an intellectual than a businessman<sup>4</sup>. He set out his social ideas in two books published in 1934 and 1937: *Workers' Rights and Corporatism*<sup>5</sup> and *Communism or Corporatism*<sup>6</sup>. Chanson referred to [441] the work of La Tour du Pin and extolled the virtues of a communal corporate regime, the only humanist alternative to totalitarian communism. At the same time, Paul Chanson was writing for Christian

Democrats such as *L'Aube*, contributed to *Sept* and *La Vie Catholique*. Before the war he therefore appeared as an original figure among Catholic employers in the North, an intellectual preoccupied with social issues.

As for his brother Albert, he was ordained a priest in 1923 and remained vicar at Notre-Dame de Boulogne until 1932. He was then called by Monsignor (Mgr) Dutoit, bishop of Arras, to teach moral theology at the major seminary in Arras. As we shall see, Albert Chanson's ecclesiastical career played an important role in Paul's action. The two brothers, in fact, never ceased to discuss matters together and to support each other. As a result of his responsibilities in the diocese of Arras, Albert Chanson consolidated and considerably extended the relations and influence of his brother in ecclesiastical circles in the North region.

Paul Chanson was also a father. He married in 1920 and five children were born between 1921 and 1932. The question of birth control quickly arose for the couple. On two occasions, Paul Chanson imposed total continence on himself: first for four years, then for three years. And it was in 1940, in the midst of the exodus, [fleeing German occupation] that Chanson received the revelation of the reserved embrace from two religious advisers: "During the exodus, first in Brittany then in the Basque country, two elderly and pious priests revealed to him the embrace of which the deacons had spoken: he hesitated, and a third, a Belgian priest who had taken refuge in Saint-Germain, confirmed the fact and encouraged him to do it. After many tests and trials, he overcame his struggles with it." <sup>7</sup>

The couple then found joy and peace. But there was no question of keeping such a secret for their household alone. At the same time, Father Albert Chanson was returning from captivity. In his Oflag [prisoner of war camp for officers], he had listened to the distressing secrets of his companions who were fathers and realized the extent of the difficulties within marriage. The decision was quickly made: Paul Chanson was now going to get involved in family matters to help Christian households. In 1942, Paul Chanson began to work at A.M.C. He gave lessons to young people and Father Viollet, director of the A.M.C., asked him to write [442] a first essay on marriage: it was *L'Œuvre de chair*, published by A.M.C. publications <sup>8</sup>

Being very aware of the marital difficulties and the failures of the Ogino method, Father Viollet encouraged Chanson to continue his research. The clerics who directed the A.M.C. did not hesitate to refer spouses in difficulty to him <sup>9</sup>. Paul Chanson thus became the A.M.C.'s marriage counsellor. He also made use of his numerous contacts in the ecclesiastical circles of the dioceses of Lille, Arras and Cambrai. Thus, on the evening of a conference given in Arras, on July 17, 1948, he noted "the understanding and the extreme generosity of the young clergy.... All are waiting to be in a position to advise their parishioners about my art of loving" <sup>10</sup>

Chanson was therefore convinced of the need to respond to a pressing expectation in Catholic homes (and from their religious advisers) during his preparation of two publications on the art of loving.

The discovery of oriental techniques that equally advocated the reserved embrace enabled him to broaden his perspective to take into account the physical dimension more widely. The confidences he received made him realise really quickly that "the number one problem was not birth control, but physical harmony." <sup>11</sup>. But it was thanks to the urgent need to control births that they finally took care of the better understanding and education of spouses.

### **The Art of loving**

In 1948, Paul Chanson wrote his first work, *The Art of Loving* <sup>12</sup>, which deliberately did not deal with the reserved embrace. With the support of the *Imprimatur* of the Archdiocese of Paris, the brochure was published at the beginning of 1949 by A.M.C. publications. This first publication seemed to operate as a test. In the absence of negative reactions, the rather favourable or neutral reports, [443] like that of *L'Ami du Clergé* <sup>13</sup>, encouraged Chanson to continue his offensive. In the summer of 1948, he finished writing a second, otherwise daring manuscript that openly advocated the reserved embrace. But Paul Chanson did not act as a solitary intellectual, even less as a libertine. This tall, thin man of ascetic appearance, who recited his rosary every day, was above all a Catholic militant. Before venturing to publish, he sought to secure ecclesiastical support. In August 1948, Canon Tiberghien, professor at the Catholic Faculties of Lille, wrote to him to approve <sup>14</sup>. His brother Albert actively seconded him, and in 1948 the moralist of Arras published a guide

intended for religious advisers entitled "*Pour mieux confesser*" (How to profess one's faith better, PMC)<sup>15</sup>. This guide was very successful; circulation exceeded thirty thousand copies and was reprinted six times between 1948 and 1958. However, from the first edition of the "P.M.C." - this is how many priests referred to the work - Albert Chanson made an allusion to the reserved embrace, albeit a cautious one, that was well known to moralist theologians and often mentioned in their textbooks under the name of *Reservata*<sup>16</sup>.

As early as January 1949, *L'Ami du Clergé*, in its review of "*Pour mieux confesser*", zoomed in on the passage on the *Reservata* and claimed that "it goes against the common teaching of all the authors who, since St. Alphonsus de Liguori (book VI, n° 918), have taught that '*per se*', this process causes pollution, by its very nature."<sup>17</sup> Chanson knew therefore that he would encounter hostility from the most influential journal aimed at the clergy. On the other hand, Albert Chanson had received the support of a renowned moralist, Alfred Martin, professor of moral theology at the major seminary of Rennes and author of an authoritative treatise on marriage<sup>18</sup>. Finally, at the beginning of [444] November 1948, Paul Chanson met Father Féret, a Dominican, a professor of theology at the Dominican convent of Saulchoir. This theologian who provided spiritual direction in households was particularly aware of marital difficulties<sup>19</sup>. At the request of Father Viollet who had hesitated to publish Paul Chanson's manuscript, Father Féret read the document and in February 1949 returned his verdict:

"Subject to a few editorial details for which I have suggested some corrections to the author, and which do not touch on the essentials of his doctrine, not only do I see nothing to question in these pages from a theological point of view, but I even believe that they positively conform to the deepest demands of Christian faith and morality. I also believe they offer a real opportunity in the current circumstances."<sup>20</sup> Paul Chanson had found the theologian he was looking for and who supported him without fail despite intimidation.

#### **Father Féret's afterword**

Paul Chanson immediately asked Father Féret for a "foreword". A few months later, the Dominican supplied the A.M.C. with a long text which was published as an afterword to Chanson's text. This 28-page afterword, in addition to a 130-page work, was in fact much more than an academic homage or a clerical blessing. Father Féret developed an authentic theology of marriage there, breaking with traditional clerical discourse.

Father Féret first underlined that the problems of morality within marriage had too often been considered according to the personal intentions of each of the spouses, whereas it is "the married union and their requirements as a couple" which must be "the source of the rules of their moral behaviour."<sup>21</sup> And the Dominican underlined "the long awkwardness- that without doubt goes back to Saint Augustine - that one has commonly made subject to the text in Genesis concerning the crime [445] of Onan."<sup>22</sup> Father Féret, broke with the current interpretation rehearsed in all manuals and articles on morality within marriage, and asserted that Onan's fault, that was punished by God, was neither about seeking erotic pleasure while refusing to procreate, nor "to have contravened the natural finality of the sexual act with which it is obvious that the inspired author absolutely does not concern himself with in this account;"<sup>23</sup> but indeed to have refused to submit to the community demand by the family of Juda to create an heir for his childless dead brother. Criticizing an individualistic morality which claims to judge the act of each spouse individually, Father Féret replaced it with the marital union, which must grow in love, at the centre of all morality. From then on, certain personal acts, while still undesirable personal weaknesses, "are pardonable, and secondary to the interests of the need to strengthen the marital union."<sup>24</sup>

Father Féret thus sketched out a theological problem that was radically different to the cautious legalism of his colleagues. This Church historian had not intended to create anything new but, on the contrary, sought to reconnect with the most authentic biblical and theological tradition. Far from seeing in Paul Chanson a dangerous educator, an apostle of carnal pleasure, Father Féret stated that the author opened the way to true Christian temperance. Carefully distinguishing between temperance and continence, the Dominican saw in the Chanson method an invitation to Christians to live the married state, without cutting each other off but by mastery of instinctual drives.

Father Féret admitted to being very dissatisfied with the solutions usually offered to Christian spouses who are forced to control births. But he also said that he was struck, through his faith in divine revelation, by a "common and rarely expressed, if not conscious, presupposition that man, by which I mean this moral being who has a conscience and freedom, cannot be master of the sexual instinct in this physical union of man and woman."<sup>25</sup> Father Féret emphasized that the moral doctrine usually taught was based on a [446] principle: apart from [total] abstinence, the sexual instinct cannot be mastered and "moral effort can do nothing against the inevitability of its release."<sup>26</sup> And asserted forcefully that believers should never have to resign themselves to admitting this presupposition, we ended up, in fact, with a strange paradox: with the grace of God, man is capable of reabsorbing disorder within and outside himself, of dominating the cosmos; but one thing, and only one thing escapes him: the mastery of sexual instinct! For Father Féret, there was in that a "fundamental incompatibility with the most foundational teachings of our Christian tradition."<sup>27</sup>

By demonstrating the possibility of controlling the instinct in the sexual act itself, Paul Chanson appeared, in the eyes of Father Féret, as a "liberator" and was doing Christian work. The sexual initiation necessary for such mastery became "the very first obligation of being concerned with temperance, as it must be, is not to kill instinct, but to channel it with its own riches into the service of the higher ends of marital union."<sup>28</sup>

### **Art of loving and conjugal continence**

This masterful afterword outlined the main lines of a theology of marriage which swept aside casuistry. The work entitled *Art d'aimer et continence conjugale* succeeded in producing a text of a very different kind. Not only because Paul Chanson tried to describe a sexual technique, a skill, very concretely; but also, and above all, because its approach is part of the most traditional theological problem and strives to satisfy the pickiest of casuists.

What did it in fact consist of? It demonstrated to the clergy as well as to the most scrupulous spouses that "loving intercourse" does not necessarily lead to "male emission." For it was indeed the "risk of nearing orgasm" which had led moralists to consider "*Reservata*" as a morally perilous practice, that one could only advise discreetly to a few exceptional couples. Indeed, if the husband cannot counter the ejaculation and if this takes place outside the vagina, this "pollution" (according to the vocabulary of theologians) amounts to this famous and severely condemned onanism. [447] Paul Chanson's objective in this work was to demonstrate that the dreaded 'pollution' can be avoided by simple and systematic learning, and that it was within the reach of the great mass of couples.

The husband will therefore have to teach himself, from the start of his married life, to retain his seminal emission. Paul Chanson saw two advantages in this. The first fits within a problem framework of narrow casuistry [philosophical nit picking]: if the husband fails, pollution could take place "inside the body" and thus avoids sin. But Paul Chanson put forward a second advantage which opened up other horizons: it was a question of teaching the Christian husband, by prolonging the embrace, to multiply the caresses which will finally bring his wife the legitimate joys for which she so often waits in vain. Chanson condemned those hasty sexual acts which left the woman dissatisfied and frustrated:

"The one who created us Man and Woman wanted the pleasure of intercourse to be lasting, so that the wife would have time to be moved in a way equal to her husband. The inventor of the marital act therefore did not *necessarily* make the interaction a "risk of nearing orgasm" such as a casuist would have it. Quite the contrary, God ordered the coming and going that we know of for two purposes: sometimes for the release of seminal emission, and sometimes for its retention thanks to the judicious alternation of pausing and resuming, this providential game which, again, is required for the maintenance and upkeep of the male's ability to retain the procreative reflex."<sup>29</sup>

Chanson therefore was not content with just presenting a new recipe for controlling births; he widened the perspective and, by means of the reserved embrace, pleaded in favour of "sensual pleasure within marriage":

"The truth is that everything is there, little is needed, to make marital spirituality a reality which would begin at last at the beginning, and which, with the help of grace, would promote a very simple and very faithful attachment, through the acting out of love, I repeat, to the human delights of the nuptial bed."<sup>30</sup>

Being hostile to "ascetic continence", Paul Chanson proposed a sexual technique that he described as "loving continence" and that allowed the spouses to continue to love each other physically even if they had to avoid procreation. But by placing Catholic morality at the heart of a work on sexual technique, Paul Chanson [448] stirred up a scandal. These 150 little pages that connected casuistry and sexual technique, sensual marital pleasure and continence, and the whole thing with the backing of a Dominican who set off a completely original theology of marriage for his times, constituted an explosive mixture. The work arrived in books shops in December 1949 and from January 1950 on, the battle began.

## II Virulent Opposition to Catholic Sensuality

On the 23 January 1950, Monsignor Pierre Brot, vicar general of the archbishopric of Paris, sent a letter to AMC publications (Family Publications for France) to ask that mention of the *Imprimatur* no longer appear in the work of Paul Chanson, "in order to avoid bumping into a very legitimately sensitive and delicate matter as much as to avoid tendentious interpretations that would undoubtedly appear."<sup>31</sup> Mgr Brot made clear that his good faith had been shaken on receipt of the work to which the censor had ascribed *nihil obstat* (no objection), having granted the *Imprimatur* without checking "the manner in which such a delicate matter had been treated."

Ten days later on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, the archbishop sent a Note to the Catholic publishing house stating that "Monsignor, the archbishop of Paris, requests that Catholic magazines and weekly publications give no publicity or awareness to the two books by Paul Chanson, *The Art of Loving*." The Family publications of France had been invited to withdraw mention of the *Imprimatur*."<sup>32</sup> *L'Ami du Clerge* (The Clergy's Friend) rushed immediately to reproduce the Note from the archbishop. The Chanson affair had begun.

### The Opposition from Religious Advisers

It seems that very quickly good souls were intercepted by the archbishop of Paris. The written evidence of the step that had been perhaps the original source of the Note of the 2<sup>nd</sup> February had been kept.<sup>33</sup> On 25<sup>th</sup> January, Fr. Caffarel, having been alerted by several priests, took the initiative to organise a meeting among several specialists in [449] morality within marriage. Two doctors (doctors Rendu and Eck) and four priests (Caffarel, Carra, Larere and Lestapis) took part in this meeting. Carré the Dominican reported on the reactions he had received "from several magazine collaborators (...) driven by violent indignation"<sup>34</sup>. The four priests therefore decided to write to Mgr Feltin to submit to him "their concerns regarding, first, the distribution of the work, and second, about the thesis it defended: the methodical learning of the *"copula reservata."*<sup>35</sup> They were worried about the "uncontrollable launch into the general public" of the Chanson book and "especially that it might be used too unwisely or indiscreetly for pastoral care by priests who were always more in search of recipes and procedures than of truly educational advice." Our four clerics therefore wanted an investigating commission to examine "the controversial thesis" (that of Chanson) and would suggest "advising the author not to consider a second edition until the investigating commission had established safe and certain conclusions. Finally, they asked Mgr Feltin to intervene with Catholic publishers to avoid a public debate "much to the detriment of the sanctity that sexual matters should retain." Mgr Feltin, through his Note of February 2 addressed to Catholic publishers, thus satisfied the last wish set out by the four ecclesiastics, but not the other ones.

Opposition to Chanson's work came from various quarters. Father Féret, who attentively followed the debate, in July 1950 identified three types of opposition. That of the religious advisers is well represented by Fr Caffarel and Father Carré. Moreover, in 1949, the latter had published a very critical review of Chanson's first work, *The Art of Loving*, in *The Golden Ring*. He detected "oversimplifications in his approaching the problem."

The first criticism: Chanson overvalued the physiological elements to the detriment of the ones concerned with psychology and with love. The second criticism: Chanson's plea in favour of "sensuality" seems to ignore

the virtue of temperance. In opposition to Chanson who invited people to trust "Christian flesh", Father Carré proposed a different education: [450]

"an education which does not regard marital pleasure either as vile or shameful, nevertheless knows it to be all consuming, and never forgets that if the flesh has the right to be fulfilled, it must be constantly mastered. The life of physical consumption, legitimate consumption, always risks dulling the mind, and losing the taste for spiritual matters. The more we give in to the flesh, the more it demands."<sup>36</sup>

With this last criticism, Father Carré brings us back to the heart of the debate: the very powerful distrust of the Church with regard to the flesh accused here of "dulling the mind" and of diverting one from "spiritual matters." Beyond the reserved embrace, the two works of Paul Chanson, *The Art of loving* and *The Art of loving and continence within marriage*, deliberately attacked this moral theology, rooted in St. Augustine and in a steadfast ecclesiastical tradition. The violence of the reactions against the works of Chanson will therefore not come as a surprise.

### **Fundamentalists act in the shadows**

A second opposition, more difficult to pin down, came from "opponents who operate in hierarchical spheres" as Father Féret expressed it. Father Féret took a letter dated May 10, 1950 from the Archdiocese of Paris as an example. In this letter, Mgr R. Touvet, private secretary to Mgr Feltin, specified that "the *Imprimatur* was effectively withdrawn from the work of M. Paul Chanson, *The Art of loving*." Addressed to one of the directors of *Verbe*, this letter was naturally distributed by him to the clergy of his parish and to the heads of family associations. Having been informed of this, Father Féret did not fail to protest in writing to Mgr Touvet and reminded him that the measure taken by the archbishopric was limited to prohibiting any mention of the *Imprimatur* granted but was neither a withdrawal of the *Imprimatur*, still less a condemnation of the work of Chanson.<sup>37</sup> Father Féret never received an answer. Convinced that Mgr Feltin was "personally completely outside of this unfair policy," the Dominican nonetheless concluded from it that "a certain double game in the ecclesiastical world" was going on. For his part, Paul Chanson collected information, [451] statements according to which "the fatal blow had been struck in Paris by the Superior of the great Seminary of Lyon."<sup>38</sup>

We also take note of the repeated interventions and denunciations by a pressure group to the French bishops and to Rome. These are the fathers assembled by Pierre Lemaire<sup>39</sup>. The latter had sent two successive reports, on August 22, 1950 and May 13, 1951 to all the bishops in France. We were able to find the second report, that of the August 22, which is composed of six typewritten pages denouncing "literary publications, called Catholic" on matters of sex education as well as the Catholic press – from *The Cross* to *Catholic France* - which were testimony to culpable complacency in regard to these publications.<sup>40</sup> Pierre Lemaire denounced Catholic Action groups which no longer provided a "foundation in doctrine" to young people, "novels with a Catholic label" such as those by François Mauriac, Graham Greene, and Luc Estang. He asked that the *Imprimatur* be refused to works that did not offer absolutely safe doctrine and specified: "It is impossible for us not to point out the book by Paul Chanson: *The Art of loving* to which, after careful examination and in the face of protests by Christian spouses, the *Imprimatur* that was granted at first must be withdrawn." Pierre Lemaire never ceased to pursue Chanson and complain to the hierarchy about all the works which presented the reserved embrace as a lawful solution.

### **A hostile medical body**

A third opposition comes from medical circles. Paul Chanson appeared to be devoid of any support from this side in the early fifties. As we shall see, while he had numerous ecclesiastical supporters to counter his adversaries, Chanson did not find medical backing. It was only later, in 1959, that Dr Chauchard resumed his fight for the mastering [452] of sexual instinct and the reserved embrace.<sup>41</sup>

Noting this weakness, Father Féret considered that Chanson himself was partly responsible as a result of his poisonous jokes about the medical profession. The fact remains that Paul Chanson often saw doctors rise to contradict him during his tours in the provinces and at meetings.

One of the most eminent Catholic doctors, Dr René Biot, having met Paul Chanson at the Rendu household, had told him of his disagreement from the first days of January 1950. Dr Biot, who worked closely with

A.M.C. since the 1930s had immediately warned Fr. Viollet and the A.M.C. of his negative reaction and threatened to write against Chanson. He finally put his ideas into an important collective work published in 1950 by the *Éditions Familiales de France* and to which we will return later.<sup>42</sup> But René Biot contented himself with delivering a short text in which he spoke more as a believer and as a moralist than as a doctor. Faced with Chanson's theses, he confessed "an immediate feeling of uneasiness, spontaneous even." For him, "a mystery must continue to hover over these sacred minutes."<sup>43</sup> Although he had been approached, René Biot had always refused to write a manual about sexual initiation out of modesty. The doctor from Lyon stated that it was more a difference in sensitivity than a fundamental objection. And he developed his moral criticism in the form of questions: "Is it therefore only this end spasm and the emission of fertilizing liquid that gives the physical gift its moral or immoral characteristic? Do we not risk embedding it in a culture of sensuality (...) in good faith no doubt and hoping to serve love, and even render it spiritual?"<sup>44</sup>

But the most critical medical article on the reserved embrace appeared in the *Cahiers Laennec* and came from a still little-known young priest, [453] Marc Oraison. Having given a nod, in the work of Paul Chanson, "to this timely reminder of the need for rational education about sexual technique," Marc Oraison developed his objections on four levels: physiological; nervous system; psychological and spiritual.

From a physiological point of view, Father Oraison believed that the reserved embrace could only have negative consequences for the male organism. With the seminal vesicles not emptying: "where does the sperm go that has been accumulated for ejaculation? (...) It seems difficult to claim *a priori* that this is not inconvenient for the physical wellbeing of the area concerned." The reserved embrace cannot restrict the natural mechanism without causing "real damage."

From the point of view of the nervous system, blocking ejaculation is "an anti-physiological practice that cannot happen without consequences." This time, according to Marc Oraison, the consequences would be more serious for the woman whose "temperament" is "even more variable and fragile than the masculine temperament."

On the psychological level, Father Oraison discerned in this dissociation from erotic play and completed copulation, a "sort of regression in the sexuality of the spouses" to the level of the egocentric eroticism of the adolescent.

Marc Oraison then developed his critique from the point of view of Christian morality. First of all, he condemned the Chanson method as "a pure and simple revival of Buddhist Tantra and Hatha yoga transposed to the Christian context." But this transposition is illusory because the Hindu spirituality justifying this sexual technique is "the opposite of Christian spirituality; the preponderant action of Grace and of the Cross is absent."<sup>46</sup>

Then taking the problem from the point of view of casuistry, Marc Oraison asked: This sperm that is accumulated through sexual excitement, where does it go? Is it "reabsorbed" as Chanson asserts, relying on Dr. Hanisch, or does it pass to the outside?

Is it evacuated in the urine? This absence of "pollution" which is the main argument in favour of the reserved embrace and which allows casuists to deem it lawful would therefore collapse: "the reserved embrace, [454] wouldn't it then be really just a 'loss of seed' in two stages, so to speak?" Before accepting it from the point of view of traditional morality, it would therefore be necessary to conduct a systematic search for spermatozoa in the urine of those who practice the Chanson method.

Finally, Father Oraison accused the reserved embrace of separating out two natural outcomes: love and procreation. And he was careful to distinguish this technique from the Ogino method; because the practice of this method required "real asceticism" and "eroticism has its place there in the normal course of the sexual reflex." On the other hand, the reserved embrace makes erotic satisfaction "an end in itself": this was to condemn it in the light of all classical moral theology.

Note that, in this long indictment against the reserved embrace, the moralist's criticisms occupied almost as much space as the purely medical objections. Wasn't that normal for a man who was both priest and doctor? And yet, it is not a sufficient explanation to take account of this shift from the medical to the moral domain. Another doctor, secular this time, Dr. Th. Kammerer, former head of the neurological and psychiatric clinic in Strasbourg, published an article which was also very critical of Chanson's work<sup>47</sup> in the *Revue de droit canonique*. However, we also note that the purely medical criticisms occupy only half of the article and that the author developed objections of a moral nature at length. It is, moreover, striking to note that Professor Kammerer's medical objections only partially agree with those of Dr. Marc Oraison. Kammerer did not believe that the reserved embrace could have negative physiological consequences. He insisted much more on the psychological repercussions: "this unfinished business - which goes against the most natural demands of instinct, constitutes a source of psychological disorder." According to the doctor from Strasbourg, women could suffer the most unfortunate consequences. But he recognized that there were no objective case studies to support his assertions. He admitted that his medical warnings against the reserved embrace were only "a prediction based on analogies." This is really [455] why the criticisms of the doctors slipped so quickly from the medical plane to the moral one to become finally, part of a global debate that concerned above all, moral theology.

### III. A Divided Clergy

Paul Chanson was not a man to let himself be knocked back. During the first months of 1950, he struggled and received a lot of support from the clergy. He multiplied the number of conferences in the Paris region and in the north of France where the clergy often facilitated the organization of meetings. According to the reports he sent to Father Féret, Paul Chanson met with success and approval everywhere. A part of the clergy seemed, undeniably, fascinated by a method which would divert their penitents away from onanism.

In March, Paul Chanson was in Lille and Roubaix where he held two conferences for the clergy and two others for families. These conferences which brought together nearly 200 priests and 300 to 400 households, were a great success. They poured over the book of Chanson and Father de Locht<sup>48</sup> who came especially from Brussels to listen to the author, assured them that his book "makes much more gossip in Belgium than in France."<sup>49</sup> Paul Chanson benefited from significant support from the hierarchy in the North. Cardinal Liénart had not only authorized his lectures but had also given the *Imprimatur* at the beginning of February 1950, with permission to include it in a new Chanson pamphlet entitled *The Honesty of the Marital bed*<sup>50</sup>. It was obviously a sign of confidence that was all the more remarkable since a fortnight earlier the archbishopric of Paris had demanded the withdrawal of mention of the *Imprimatur* from *Art d'aimer et continence conjugal*<sup>51</sup>.

[456] In Cambrai, Mgr Guerry, the assistant bishop, was very favourable towards him. On February 27 1950 he wrote to Albert Chanson:

"I have only read your brother's first volume, but I am going to study the second one. However, it already seems to me that the method he advocates can have an extremely happy outcome for spouses and that it can lead to a real elevation of souls by an effort of self-control."<sup>52</sup>

Finally, Mgr Dutoit, the former bishop of Arras who had been dismissed at the Liberation,<sup>53</sup> did not hesitate to endorse one of Paul Chanson's conferences by being present there<sup>54</sup>.

In Lille, Chanson had solid support among the clergy. Support from Canon Tiberghien, the professor of medical ethics at the Catholic Faculties, was the most spectacular;<sup>55</sup> but Chanson was also in contact with Canon Renard, director of The Works. The latter who was going to become Bishop of Versailles a few years later, then Archbishop of Lyon and Cardinal, wrote on February 5, 1949, to Paul Chanson to assure him of his agreement on the *copula reservata* and the need for "slow and fair education of spouses in the chaste control of their [sexual] instinct."<sup>56</sup>

On the other hand, the support received from Mgr Martin, moralist and vicar general of the diocese of Rennes, did not open up Brittany to the Chanson propaganda.<sup>57</sup> In some dioceses where the bishop was, if not [457] hostile towards him, at least not very favourable, Paul Chanson sometimes managed to give talks, but



more discreetly, thanks to supporters. Thus, in Versailles, on March 20, 1950, he held a discreet talk, reserved for a dozen priests, thanks to a professor of the major seminary who was committed to his cause, and who had already advised the use of the *Reservata* to some 35 young married couples<sup>58</sup>. In Soissons, Chanson managed to speak to the doctors but his conference with spouses was forbidden by the bishop<sup>59</sup>. In Lyon, the outright hostility of the superior of the major seminary, Mgr. Girard, who became superior general two years later at Saint-Sulpice, seems to have effectively blocked his way.<sup>60</sup>

### **Geographical influence**

The geographical reach of the talks given by Paul Chanson between January and July 1950 depicts a zone of influence limited to a north-west region from Caen to Lille. However, attraction to the method and the work of Chanson was wider and more spread out. Father Féret made the reserved embrace known through his frequent travels to the Limousin<sup>61</sup>. And if it is true that the South of France hardly seemed to have been reached, Belgium was extremely interested and involved in the debate. Indeed, the reserved embrace was supported there by very influential moralists. First, Father Boigelot<sup>62</sup> did not hesitate to sell the works of Chanson during ecclesiastical gatherings; Father Carpentier<sup>63</sup> who wrote in the [458] *New Theological Review* and sought to minimize the condemnation by Rome<sup>64</sup>, and so too did Canon Dermine, a great specialist in conjugal morality,<sup>65</sup> in spite of certain criticisms of Chanson.

The debate around the works of Chanson was therefore not only happening in France; it concerned the Belgian Catholic world just as much. It is no coincidence that at the meeting on January 4, 1952 at the abbey of Maredsous, one of the six talks was devoted to the reserved embrace.<sup>66</sup> The Belgian Jesuit A. Snoeck presented a well-documented report which showed the roots of the *Reservata* in theological tradition<sup>67</sup>.

In Belgium, the debate seemed to have involved activists, priests and lay people concerned with family pastoral care too. This was the case regarding the team of organisers from the *Feuilles Familiales*, some of whom clearly sided with Chanson in the quarrel. Thus for Gaston Jooris, Chanson stood for a new idea that could enrich the love between spouses and save many households exposed to the difficulties of continence.<sup>68</sup> The two priests who were members of the editorial team of the *Feuilles Familiales*, G. Ponteville and [459] P. de Locht, followed the debate with great attention. If the directives from Rome were going to make it impossible to publish articles openly advocating the Chanson method, Father Ponteville would publish an article in October 1951 which nonetheless concluded: "It is possible that, in these circumstances and for certain households, such a method provides a real solution to the problem of spacing out births. (...) The object in dispute is not to be found in the method itself, but in the presentation of it."<sup>69</sup> However, this clarification was picked up again in 1952 without any modification in a brochure entitled *The Fertile Household*, with tens of thousands of copies distributed in Belgium by the Centre d'Études et de Consultations Familiales.<sup>70</sup>

### **At the Christian Marriage Association (AMC)**

It has already been pointed out that Paul Chanson had started his work in his capacity as an advisor to the A.M.C. The two works on the *Art of Loving* had been published, moreover, by the A.M.C. press. However, the audacity of Chanson worried Father Viollet, and his closest collaborator Father A. Leclercq, wrote to Father Féret in February 1949: "Is the method recommended by M. Chanson of general value? Does it not lend itself to too many well-founded or ill-founded criticisms? We still have serious reservations about it."<sup>71</sup> These signs of hesitation from the directors of the AMC were all the more legitimate as Chanson had embarked on the vindication of the reserved embrace based on very few testimonies. In February 1950, he wrote again to Father Féret: "I lack positive testimonies. Could you put some indirect pressure on the penitents through the priests you contact? In other words, invite the priests to convey to their penitents the great duty of love that they would be doing by providing me with some testimonies."<sup>72</sup>

As soon as the controversy broke out, the priests and lay people who ran the AMC found themselves divided. While Father Merlaud, supported by Canon Tiberghien, defended Chanson, others like [460] Father Édouard Rolland and layman Jean-Pierre Dubois-Dumée, supported by Father Tesson, professor of moral theology at the Catholic Institute of Paris, demonstrated their hostility towards the *Art of Loving*. From then on, Fathers

Viollet and Leclercq observed a cautious wait-and-see attitude. A.M.C. did not take a position on the legality of the *Reservata* in the face of the great Paul Chanson scandal. So much so that in the parish of St-Pierre de Montrouge - which was where the A.M.C. was based, a priest asserted that the reserved embrace was a mortal sin.

This division was reflected in A.M.C. publications. In the magazine for the clergy, Édouard Rolland published a harsh article in May-June 1950.<sup>72</sup> Based on the now classic manual of the moralist Noldin, Édouard Rolland recognized that the practice of the *copula reservata* was not new but had always been “something ambiguous.” Without ever quoting Chanson, the AMC priest declared himself “sceptical” in the face of the enthusiasm caused by this method and asked “that we avoid any propaganda which would tend to overestimate the practical effectiveness and the moral value of these 'methods' and would have the unmistakable result of distorting conscience.” On the other hand, the important collective work published in 1950 by the AMC, *Birth Control and Christian Conscience*, allowed supporters and opponents of the reserved embrace to express themselves at length.

Three personalities opened the debate with a critical study that targeted Chanson's work explicitly. The three authors recognized the legality of the reserved embrace which “respects norms”, but situated the moral debate elsewhere. The Chanson method was, for them, only a truncated asceticism “since it does not impose a sacrifice but, on the contrary, shows one “how to enjoy it.”<sup>74</sup> But “Christian married life is something other than this sexual success, than this nod to morality before passing on to free frolics.” By denouncing the legality of a method which makes it possible to enjoy the body without the risk of sin, the authors declared that they would prefer not to compromise on moral standards even if human weakness does not meet them.

Three authors responded one after the other to this attack followed by Dr Biot's critical note: Gilbert Deschamps; then two renowned moralists; [461] Pierre Tiberghien and the Belgian Jean Dermine. Canon Tiberghien insisted on the legitimate value of marital intimacy, in the way opened up by Pius XI in the encyclical *Casti connubii*, and he saw in the *Reservata* “a means of loving each other and of manifesting this love”. As for Jean Dermine, he asserted that the Chanson method did not in itself imply, “a danger of sliding towards a sensual idea of marriage” but, on the contrary, implied “a rather laborious effort that involved genuine asceticism.”<sup>76</sup>

However, Canon Dermine came up with two reservations. This “*art of loving*”, which was too focused on the body, should be replaced with an integrated synthesis of love that focused totally on spiritual values. But above all, the Chanson method could, for some spouses with few scruples, become an opportunity for “onanism that was more or less admitted.”<sup>77</sup> This is why Dermine was hostile to advertising it to the public and wanted to reduce the spread of the method to cases carefully chosen by priests, to the confessional box or in the guiding of conscience. This last reservation of the Belgian moralist single handedly thwarted Chanson's strategy. However, the latter could use many arguments against his adversaries from the judgment of Dermine who was recognized as one of the most eminent specialists in the theology of marriage. But Paul Chanson could no longer count on the AMC to disseminate his method and his work.

### **In the world of workers**

Paul Chanson had also forged links and won sympathy among priests operating in working class communities. Father C. Bordet, from the general secretariat of the J.O.C., could see in the Chanson method “liberation for married couples that is far superior to all the extrinsic things” and proposed, as early as 1949, to disseminate

the work among fiancés and young Jocist households<sup>78</sup>. For its part the journal *Masses Ouvrières* published [462] a short, very favourable review of the two works of Chanson in February 1950. Here, there was no hesitation. *Masses Ouvrières* asked a question, only to answer it immediately:

“Workers, broken with fatigue, will they ever have enough time and physiological means to master this? Why not? Shouldn't we aspire to liberation and promotion for the common man in that regard too?”.

In the same issue, a long article was devoted to the physical intimacy of spouses. There the "union without consummation" was declared lawful for spouses who could not contemplate a new birth in the short term<sup>79</sup>. The author, a Jesuit priest-worker, Georges Pierre-Puységur, had himself written works about sexual initiation and confided to Chanson in March 1950 that he recommended *reservata* to households that were open to it.<sup>80</sup> We should also note that in June 1950, the parish priest of Colombes, Fr. Michonneau, organized a conference with Chanson for his parishioners. More than a hundred people came to listen to the author of *L'Art d'aimer*.<sup>81</sup>

Even if Paul Chanson and his works had been subjected to violent hostility from one part of the clergy, he also had many clerics who were concerned about marital issues and aware of the tragedies experienced by a multitude of Catholic homes and were the best agents to promote and disseminate his works. It is obviously impossible to measure the extent of this dissemination: the role of these priests was in fact often discreet, because it was more or less linked to the confession box, but also because the condemnation by Rome soon forced them into the shadows.

#### IV. The Holy Office and the Church of France

For his part, Father Féret had not remained inactive. After the archbishopric had decided on January 23, 1950 to withdraw mention of the *Imprimatur* in Chanson's books, Father Féret requested an audience with Mgr Feltin. Having been received on February 24, Father Féret found confirmation that it had never been the intention of the archbishop of Paris [463] to condemn the reserved embrace. And Mgr. Feltin asked the Dominican for a report on the issue for the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops.

In addition, Bishop Martin wrote to Paul Chanson to assure him that the measure taken in Paris was intended only to prevent the Church engaging publicly in the area of sexual technique. The publication of the *Imprimatur* on such a work had been a nuisance<sup>82</sup>. Relying on these official appeasements, the *Éditions Familiales de France* obtained the authorization of the Archbishop of Paris in March to send a brief update to Catholic publishers. It specified: first that the ban on mentioning the *Imprimatur* was not a condemnation; second: that the temporary absence of a review of the work did not prevent one making a reasoned judgment about it, with all the caution and the reserve of language that such a subject matter demands."<sup>83</sup> But *L'Ami du Clergé*, who had torpedoed Chanson by publishing the Note of January 23 from the archbishopric, stubbornly refused to publish this new update.<sup>84</sup> The damage had been done and the rumour that Chanson had been condemned continued to circulate.

As early as March 1950, Father Féret had sent Mgr Feltin a long report of 47 typed pages. The Dominican argued for the reserved embrace as a theologian; but he also expressed himself as a pastor suffering from the "painful dead end" in which many Christian homes found themselves struggling as a result of faith to adhere to the teachings of the Church. And in conclusion he emphasised:

"Because of the sacrament [of marriage] in fact, it is fundamental in the Church of Christ that Christian homes make a success of the reality of marriage, as homes, and first and foremost with respect to all things physical, (.....) It would be completely abnormal that the majority of households, because of the sacrament, would be in a state of heartbreak or inhuman moral struggle."<sup>85</sup>

[464] After a 30-page presentation, Father Féret reproduced testimonies from moralists (from Father Vermeersch to Mgr Martin) and, moreover, 20 testimonies in favour of the reserved embrace from 17 lay people and 3 religious advisers.

Canon Albert Chanson was also responsible for writing a report for the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops. Did Mgr Guerry and Mgr Feltin use these two reports from Father Féret and Canon Chanson to rule out any debate and negative position taken by the A.C.A.? Whatever happened, the official records of the A.C.A. did not refer to any debate on the works of Chanson.<sup>86</sup>

On April 17, 1950, Mgr Feltin again received Father Féret. The archbishop told him that he had nothing to alter in his theological presentation, but said he was hesitant about publishing this report: "He feared that if these

pages were spread without precautionary measures, they would give the young people finding them the idea that they could indulge in experiences of [sexual] love.”<sup>87</sup> Mgr Feltin who humbly declared himself to be incompetent on the matter of sexual issues, thus exposed the concerns of a dignitary of the Church. Fr Féret was dumbfounded by it, with the ignorance of the archbishop who believed the reserved embrace was a novelty which had never been mentioned in treatises on moral theology: "He only knew of separate beds on the one hand, or the *copula perfecta* (the completed act) on the other, possibly accomplished according to the Ogino method". The Dominican noted at last that Mgr Feltin was "clearly anxious to avoid any new business with Rome."

The French hierarchy therefore hoped for silence. A revealing sign of what was going on: in Lille, at the end of June 1950, Paul Chanson learned from a priest that "the [465] Cardinal had had to give orders to the priests and to Boussebart and to Canon Renard to stop giving talks. Not that the Cardinal disapproved of the *Reservata*, but for the moment he does not want any more conferences."<sup>88</sup> As for Fr. Féret, he contented himself with distributing his report discreetly to around a hundred theologians or priests concerned with this problem. Discretion did not ward off lightning.

### **First sanction by Rome**

During the month of August 1950, Mgr Feltin received a letter dated August 12 1950 from Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani, secretary of the congregation of the Holy Office. Following denunciations of the two books of Paul Chanson, the consultors of the Holy Office "judged that they should be condemned as much for their general tenor as for the particular advice they give."<sup>89</sup>

The two books were therefore to be withdrawn from the market, any translation and new edition was to be prohibited. The letter specified that the Holy Father had approved the decision of the Holy Office. Immediately informing Father Féret, Mgr Feltin remarked: "More discretion in this delicate matter would undoubtedly have served souls better."<sup>90</sup>

In fact, on August 17, Father Féret had been informed of the decision by Rome during an audience granted by the Master General of the Dominicans, Father Suarez. As a member of the Holy Office, the latter had come to Paris to bring French theologians into line<sup>91</sup>. Father Suarez had a document emanating from the Holy Office read to Féret calling into question the two works of Paul Chanson. But he had specified that the content of Féret's postscript was not called into question but only the fact of its being attached to the offending book. Father Féret then proposed to give the consultors of the Holy Office a document on the substance of the problem, that is to say, on the [466] morality of the *Reservata*; but Father Suarez rejected this proposal by stating that the matter was closed from a juridical point of view and that the Chanson books had been neither condemned nor put on the Index [black list]. The text from the Holy Office addressed to Mgr Feltin only referred to "the general tenor" and "the particular advice" given by Chanson. We therefore cannot know precisely what had seemed worthy of condemnation in the works of Chanson. And this imprecision allowed the protagonists in the debate to exploit the most diverse interpretations.

According to Father Suarez, the decision by Rome was in response to "many denunciations that came mainly from France", but it suggested that the measure taken by Rome did not give complete satisfaction to the denouncers. A year later Mgr Feltin gathered useful information while visiting Rome. On November 5, 1951, he confided it to Father Féret.<sup>92</sup> Having been received by Pius XII, Mgr Feltin introduced the subject with a careful question:

"There are people, I told him, who claim that there is no problem, that *Casti connubii* has solved everything. Certainly, I subscribe to *Casti connubii*. But all the same, is it not necessary to add details for these Christian homes, especially in matters of sexual initiation? "

"You mean," the Holy Father interrupted me immediately, "the books of Mr. Chanson? I have read them. I asked for them at the Holy Office, that as you know I am personally the president of. I read a few pages of them and immediately threw them into the wastebasket; it is pornography!"

At the Holy Office, Mgr Ottaviani declared to the Archbishop of Paris that he was "not at all opposed to the legitimacy of sexual initiation, but that one had to be careful."

As soon as he learned of the judgment by Rome, Paul Chanson ordered his publisher to stop selling the works. Submission was the only response suitable to such a fervent Catholic. He also resigned from his post as advisor to A.M.C. Paul Chanson did not give up his fight but could only pursue it on secular grounds.

From his first troubles with the archbishopric of Paris, Paul Chanson had thought about secularising his work on the education of married couples so as to preserve his freedom. On March 20, 1950, he contacted the Ministry of Health in order to obtain support for the [467] "centres for marriage counselling" that he wanted to create. Modifying his speech, Paul Chanson now wanted to talk in terms of natural morality. As a citizen, he understood that by educating married couples, he was combating neo-Malthusianism and contraceptive methods. This is why in October 1950 he published a new book, *L'Accord charnel* [Carnal Accord], with Éditions du Levain<sup>93</sup>. Chanson had in fact found a new ally in the person of Claude Truchot. This Catholic militant, who had practiced the reserved embrace long before reading the works of Chanson, had just founded the Éditions du Levain in May 1950. Claude Truchot enthusiastically adhered to the ideas of Chanson. From then on, the two men worked together for the same cause. In May 1950, they founded the *Orphée* movement with the aim of pursuing sex education activities for young people. For Chanson, it was a way to carry on the work started at the AMC, but on a non-religious level, not involving the Church and therefore leaving him with complete freedom.

### **The success of a method**

Testimonies about the practice of the reserved embrace, which Chanson badly needed at the beginning of 1950, began to pour in and strengthened his conviction that he was fighting a just battle. Father Féret was also accumulating positive testimonies. At the end of 1950, he stopped recording them because the question seemed to him to be settled as a result of the experience of spouses.<sup>94</sup> He then wrote to a Belgian Dominican: "My thinking has not changed, but, above all, because of the now massive experience of which I am now aware, it has developed into a growing conviction that it is in this direction that we must seek the authentic moral and Christian solution."<sup>95</sup>

Even if Paul Chanson had now built a strategy of non-denominational action, the shock wave still spread throughout the French Catholic world. The ban by Rome certainly stifled public debate, but many clerics remained convinced that the reserved embrace offered a legitimate solution to the aspirations of married couples. In a letter to Mgr Guerry, Canon Albert Chanson undoubtedly expressed the state of mind of a section of the clergy: [468]

"We can hope that in some time from now by combining the Ogino period (with a very sure margin of safety) and the reserved embrace, most Christian spouses will be able to perform human continence. What a relief it will be for the religious advisers not to have to impose heroic behaviour on their congregation! What a liberation for Christian spouses to not have to be obsessed with this question and to be able to devote themselves freely to a sacramental and apostolic life."<sup>96</sup>

In fact, clerics continued to make the Chanson method known. Among those who wrote to him or went into the *Éditions du Levain* to buy *L'Accord Charnel* that replaced *L'Art d'aimer* which had been withdrawn from the market – there were all sorts: parish priests; missionaries; ACO and JOC chaplains; Jesuits; Franciscans; and Dominicans<sup>97</sup>. And we noticed that Chanson's area of influence had widened. The reserved embrace spread to the West: Chanson now received letters from Mayenne, from Maine-et-Loire, Loire Atlantique, Ille-et-Vilaine and Manche. In Alsace, a Franciscan in charge of marriage preparation courses, did not hesitate in the event of the failure of the Ogino method, to advise the reserved embrace. From 1951 on, testimonies from the south of France, which had remained out of the debate for a long time, finally came in. In Alès, during a mission in front of astonished audiences, a religious dared to address these questions of morality within marriage. In Sarlat, a wife discovered the Chanson books thanks to a Jesuit brother. In Port-de-Bouc, an enthusiastic layman tried to organize a meeting tour for Chanson. In December 1950, Pierre Lambert, one of

the main organisers of the *Mouvement Familial Rural* and director of the magazine *Foyer Rural*, wrote to Chanson: "From a personal point of view, and moreover as many chaplains and leaders would agree, I think that by advocating the reserved embrace you are opening up a new path that we will embark on little by little. In a few years, what seems so strange or so dangerous today will be considered normal. This is why I do not fail to speak about you to everyone I meet and whom I consider capable of understanding without the risk of thoughtless diversion."<sup>98</sup>

[469] Here and there discussions about the reserved embrace were taking place in groups of households and *Catholic Action* movements<sup>99</sup>. In the *Teams of Our Lady*, no one liked the hostile attitude adopted by Father Caffarel. Paul Chanson's opponents were quick to put pressure on the bishops to stifle this propaganda. Thus, in October 1950, Cardinal Liénart received two letters, one from Armentières and the other from Versailles. Both condemned the continuation of the campaign supporting Chanson in the North. One of these letters, from a gynaecologist declaring herself "a Christian mother," considered itself as the echo of "indignant young households " and stated:

"Great numbers of Catholics are stupefied and are waiting for the Church to dissociate itself publicly from the rantings of a sex addict. I hope with them that an official clarification will put an end as quickly as possible to a scandal that has already lasted too long."<sup>100</sup> As for the second letter, it condemned this "unspeakable scandal": "So the subordinate clergy could legislate on their own on such an important and delicate moral issue without taking advice and without having the authorization of the only source of truth which is Rome."<sup>101</sup> Fifteen days later, Cardinal Liénart received a new letter signed by 29 Catholic households, testifying in favour of the Chanson method. While respecting the decision of the Holy Office, they wanted to let the cardinal know that this method had enabled them to love each other much better and to live our Christian marriage with more faith, and in a more peaceful way."<sup>102</sup>

It will be noted that the most understanding bishops - Guerry, Liénart and Feltin adopted an interpretation which had been proposed to them by Father Féret and Canon Tiberghien and which minimized the scope of the sanction by Rome. It distinguished form from substance in the Chanson books.

[470] It was the form that was condemned by Rome: "overly explicit details, a lyricism that was too suggestive" had produced, explained Cardinal Liénart, "an unfavourable impression."<sup>109</sup> But "the root of the matter, that is to say the *copula reservata*, accepted by many moralists, does not seem to me to have been condemned" wrote Mgr Feltin.<sup>104</sup>

### **The *Monitum* of the Holy Office (June 30, 1952)**

However, on June 30, 1952, the congregation of the Holy Office published a *Monitum* [Warning] aimed this time, at the reserved embrace. The Holy Office affirmed that "the Apostolic See notes with grave concern that in recent times, several writers dealing with marital life, here and there, openly and meticulously descend into unseemly detail about this matter. In addition, a few describe, praise, and advise a certain action called "reserved embrace". The Holy Office, "by formal mandate from His Holiness Pius XII, seriously warns the above-mentioned authors to refrain from doing this." Bishops were urged to take appropriate action accordingly. As for priests, they should never "express themselves in such a way that one might believe that there is nothing objectionable in the reserved embrace from the point of view of Christian law."<sup>105</sup>

The *Monitum* was not a formal condemnation of the reserved embrace. It is important to stress that the Holy Office had not taken on board the conclusions of Hering the Dominican who had asserted the year before that the reserved embrace was "an illicit practice, seriously contrary to natural law."<sup>106</sup> The [471] Belgian moralist R. Carpentier did not fail to point that out in his commentary on the *Monitum*<sup>107</sup>. But the Holy Office had turned the reserved embrace into a dangerous, suspicious practice, which could only be recommended, at best, in certain difficult cases, for example to avoid onanism. The warning from Rome was therefore aimed at stifling propaganda in favour of the Chanson method and forcing bishops to be vigilant. From this point of view, the operation by Rome was successful and the *Monitum* of June 1952 closed the debate that had been spectacularly opened by Paul Chanson.

However, the spread of the reserved embrace was not stopped. Chanson retained strong supporters, especially in the clergy, who continued to advise about his method discreetly. In 1958, Cardinal Suenens, in his book *Love and Self-Mastery*, legitimized the reserved embrace.<sup>108</sup>

The reserved embrace continued to circulate in Catholic circles detached from Paul Chanson, its initiator. So much so that Cardinal Ottaviani complained about it publicly in an address given on November 16, 1959.<sup>109</sup> But the attention of moralists now turned to other issues and, above all, to the new methods of birth control that were beginning to spread in the late 1950s. Compared to the “pill,” the reserved embrace now appeared to be a legitimate solution. Father de Lestapis, one of the best specialists in marital morality and one of the most concerned with orthodoxy, did not hesitate to recommend the reserved embrace in 1960 in the second edition of his masterly work, *Birth Control*.<sup>110</sup> The storm started in 1950 by Paul Chanson was well over.

#### [472 ] V. The significance of the Chanson affair

Between 1950 and 1952 the Chanson affair appeared to reveal an ecclesiastical crisis with respect to the fundamental attitudes of the Catholic world towards sexuality. We will consider these two aspects in turn.

The ecclesiastical situation at the beginning of the 1950s was marked by a pope who showed his hostility towards sex education literature and his concern, his anguish even, when faced with descriptions of sexual life. Pius XII could rely, moreover, on the teaching of his predecessor, Pius XI, who, in 1929, in an encyclical on Christian education, had condemned any form of public sex education.<sup>111</sup> In a speech to cardinals, archbishops and bishops on November 2, 1950, Pius XII was worried about “the disorder that upsets marriage and the institution of the family everywhere and fundamentally, poisons contemporary society like a plague and causes the ruin of souls in regard to their salvation.”<sup>112</sup> He then denounced “the muddy torrent” of publications of all kinds that “corrupt the healthy judgment of people” and arouses “dark instincts.”

In April 1952, the Holy Office published a Warning [*Monitum*] that reminded the faithful of the “very serious obligation” to refrain from reading works describing or teaching “lascivious or obscene subjects”; it asked the public authorities and educators to protect young people from these readings “as from a treacherous poison.”<sup>113</sup>

Finally, in [473] October 1951, in his speech to Midwives which is, moreover, the most innovative speech by Pius XII on questions of marital morality, the pope stated:

“To glorify the generative function unreasonably, as is often done nowadays, even in the just and moral form of married life, is not only an error and an aberration; it also involves the danger of an intellectual and emotional detour that is capable of stopping and stifling good and elevated feelings, especially among young people.”<sup>114</sup> In this passage from the talk to Midwives, Pius XII wanted preserve the traditional doctrine of the superiority of consecrated virginity over the state of marriage. But this doctrine was linked to a devaluation of sexuality, always associated with inferior instincts, capable “of stifling good and elevated feelings.”<sup>115</sup> The moderation recommended in the practice of marriage corresponded to necessary discretion in the description of sexual life.

For Pius XII, as for those who had control of the Roman Catholic congregations, sexual education, as soon as it leaves the heights of spiritual commentary to become a little more concrete and precise, darkens into obscenity. Thus, according to the testimony of Mgr Felin, after reading a few pages of the Chanson book, Pius XII threw it aside and cried out: “It’s pornography!”

Pius XII had never been more explicit than in his speech to French fathers on September 18, 1951. There he condemned Catholic literature on sexual initiation with the most extreme severity that was suspected of no longer being distinguishable from erotic and obscene media which exploits the lowest instincts of fallen nature.<sup>116</sup>

The Pope spoke of "the intolerable shamelessness of such literature" which violates the secret of marital intimacy. He ended his speech with a call to action for the fathers "to break and stop these campaigns." Bear in mind that Pius XII was addressing a very particular French group. These fathers, led by Pierre Lemaire, had made a specialty of denouncing all deviations from pontifical teaching by French Catholics [474] and in particular, all the Catholic initiatives in the field of sexual education and morality within marriage.<sup>117</sup> We have already spoken of the report sent by Pierre Lemaire on August 22, 1950 to all the French bishops. The latter could not but be impressed by the stamp of approval that Pius XII had afforded Pierre Lemaire by receiving him and taking up the condemnations made by French fathers in his address. Pius XII had sided spectacularly with the most conservative tendency within French Catholicism.<sup>118</sup> It should be added that Pierre Lemaire was received at the Holy Office the day after the audience granted by Pius XII, on September 19, 1951. According to Pierre Lemaire, Mgr Ottaviani would have encouraged him to act and would have insisted on the need to "provide reports on each significant problem it raises" and "notes" on "all issues likely to provide information and clarification."<sup>119</sup>

The French bishops had to take into account the prevailing state of mind in Rome and could not avoid imposing sanctions. On April 14, 1952, the *Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops* (A.C.A.) made public a declaration which raised "a heated protest against the abuses committed by recent information pamphlets, novels or magazines in the field of the sexual initiation of children and young people." The A.C.A. warned against "deviations and the perils of certain methods of education" and called on "all Christians to boldly become defenders of morality."<sup>120</sup>

#### [475] A climate of suspicion

In the moral domain as in others,<sup>121</sup> the Catholic pioneers of the fifties had to work in a climate of suspicion and under the constant threat of denunciations and sanctions. Paul Chanson was, in the moral sphere, the most spectacular victim of these circumstances. But there were other victims. In Lille, in July 1952, Cardinal Liénart demanded that the brochure of Father Boussebart, parish priest in Roubaix, entitled *Quand l'amour Veille* [*When love grows tired*], be withdrawn from the catalogue of the *Éditions Familiales de France* and no longer be reprinted.<sup>122</sup> In January 1955, we learned that the work of Father Oraison, *Christian Life and Problems of Sexuality* had been blacklisted.<sup>123</sup> Others suffered harassment. This was the case of the Belgian Jesuit Boigelot who published works that were widely distributed under the pseudonyms of Duval-Aumont then of Dufoyer.<sup>124</sup> There were still difficulties for the austere professor at the major seminary of Quimper, Fr François Dantec, author of *Foyers Rayonnants*: it took the intervention and the authority of Mgr Martin for him to be granted the *Imprimatur* at the end of 1950 which had been initially refused.<sup>125</sup>

[476] In November 1953, Father Féret appeared before the court of the Holy Office. Among the issues about which the Dominican had to explain himself was his approval of the reserved embrace and the support he had given to Paul Chanson. He defended himself by specifying what his attitude had been since the decree of the Holy Office of June 30, 1952: "On the one hand, on the grounds of discipline, and in submission to this decree and those that have followed it, I have always refused to speak or write on these subjects, despite the requests I have received. On the other hand, theologically speaking, I asked on several occasions, either the authority in Rome through Rme P. General as an intermediary, or the theologians who had taken a position against the reserved embrace, to let me know the 'serious drawbacks', moral or otherwise, that we should recognize in this behaviour that I believed had legitimized it theologically. However, I have never been given the slightest answer. I was therefore not in a position to reply to those who questioned me."<sup>126</sup>

What then, in fact, had been condemned by Rome in regard to the reserved embrace? The *Monitum* of June 1952, while requiring priests never to express themselves "as if, as far as Christian law is concerned, there was nothing to object to about the reserved embrace", in no way specified what there was to object to. As for the letter of August 12, 1950 from the Holy Office addressed to Mgr Feltin, it condemned only the "general tenor" and the "particular advice". The vagueness of the accusations was, of course, part of Rome's strategy: it created a climate of suspicion around the accused people which extended easily to all their initiatives.<sup>127</sup> But, in the case [477] of the reserved embrace, imprecision was, perhaps even more, particularly necessary. One could not condemn a method recognized as lawful, at least in theory, by a line of eminent theologians. But at the same time, the reserved embrace could lend itself to a glorification of the physical dimension of marriage



and an enhancement of sexual pleasure which were, in the eyes of dominant Catholic tradition, truly unacceptable.

### **Marital pleasure or Christian temperance**

The reason was Paul Chanson had not presented the reserved embrace as a simple technique for birth control and a stopgap for spouses who were unable to exercise prolonged continence. He had eulogised "marital pleasure"<sup>128</sup> and stated that spouses had to continue to love each other physically even when they were forced to avoid procreation. In a Church which never ceased to value chastity and which saw birth control as an almost providential opportunity to renounce the flesh in order to grow spiritually, Chanson's pleading could only result in scandal.

From the first work by Chanson, *The Art of loving*, Father Carré had spotted the danger: by glorifying physical pleasure too much, Paul Chanson had forgotten Christian temperance.<sup>129</sup> The reproach was made by lay people as well as by priests. Thus, one of the editors of the journal *Foyers*, JP Dubois-Dumée, reproached Chanson for removing the necessary tension between two duties, the one to sustain love and the other to respect the law of continuity.<sup>130</sup> And, in *Témoignage Chrétien*, JP Dubois-Dumée published an article in July 1950 that was hostile to Paul Chanson under the title "*There are no recipes!*"<sup>131</sup> The reserved embrace seemed to him like a "trick" that was too simple to be Christian: "When one goes beyond a boundary: [478] sin begins. Then, as soon as we are locked into the system, we look for everything we can do without sinning: the maximum pleasure within the framework of the law (...) Is this authentic Christian asceticism?"

Jean-Pierre Dubois-Dumée was, however, one of those who advocated "a more flexible morality" and did not consider, like some, prolonged abstinence as the truly Christian solution to the problem of birth control.<sup>132</sup> However, all the opponents of the Chanson method ended up saying: it is not Christian because there is too much sexual pleasure in it.

The most elementary fear and the one most typically clerical, consisted of condemning the threat to the dissolution of *mores* through this freedom to enjoy sex without the fear of procreation. A Belgian priest expressed it in these terms: "I have the impression that certain ecclesiastics are seized with panic by the following thought: what would happen if, in general, we can perform the marital act whilst being almost certain that there will be no procreation. Will sexual morality not decline, are we not going to witness a general relaxation of *mores*? If we teach men to perform the act without procreation, won't they be tempted to experiment with other people?"<sup>133</sup> We will find the same fear and the same objection later to contraceptive pills, and even in the encyclical *Humanae vitae*.<sup>134</sup>

Cardinal Liénart advanced a more elaborate argument; he explained the first sanction imposed by Rome against Chanson by "the glorification of a sort of refinement of sensuality in marriage: an 'art' which would border on gluttony instead of sticking to simple use."<sup>135</sup> "Simple use" indeed corresponded to the [479] conception of marriage set out in the chapter "*De Matrimonio*" of textbooks on moral theology. The sexual act was only a duty, a "debt" (*conjugale debitum*) intended to fulfill one of the purposes of marriage. Pleasure - which accompanies the use [of sex] - is a gift from God who thus compensates for the burdens of procreation; but the marital act cannot be justified by only seeking for pleasure.<sup>136</sup> Certainly, sexual pleasure is good and is willed by God, but we are eager to glorify chastity, temperance and renunciation as necessary for redemption.

Paul Chanson's insistence on physical joy caused concern and scandal. Against the current prejudice that the marital embrace is all the more virtuous the briefer it is, Chanson pointed out, "that in principle - from the start to the finish - the experience of sexual union should last for around three quarters of an hour, that is, if one intends to benefit at least from all the resources and all the potential of its efficiency for love."<sup>137</sup> Chanson's advice panicked some<sup>138</sup> and, when Pius XII's speeches stigmatizing "anti-Christian hedonism"<sup>139</sup> became known in 1951, Chanson seemed to have been targeted and condemned by the pope.<sup>140</sup>

It is quite remarkable, however, that given such theological training, a section of the clergy, and not just lay people primarily interested in the method, had accepted, supported and spread word about the Chanson

method. Many were simply sensitive to the practical solution brought about by the reserved embrace for the dramatic problem of Christian couples forced to control births. The Ogino method could no longer delude anyone after so many failures, [480] and marital onanism continued to be "the cross borne by religious advisers."<sup>141</sup> But some priests also seemed to have accepted the legitimate value of the physical relationship in Chanson's *Art of Loving*. The practice of confession and of spiritual direction had made certain clerics deeply aware of marital difficulties, and in the most intimate detail. Those most engaged in family pastoral care came to play the role of marriage counsellor. From this experience, some had acquired a critical take on the moral teaching learned at the seminary. The Belgian moralist Jacques Leclercq did not hesitate to publish articles criticizing moral treatises: "From reading them you would say that the only purpose of marriage is to practice chastity."<sup>142</sup> As for Father Féret, he had developed a new concept of marital temperance in a report intended for Mgr Feltin. The Dominican underlined the fact that one could not simply transfer "the practical methods of temperance suited to celibate life" over to married life. The spouses "must practice, and as perfectly as possible, a specifically marital form of temperance, which is defined precisely as a moderation in the exercise of it and not by abstaining from it."<sup>143</sup> For Father Féret, the reserved embrace was, precisely such a form of this marital temperance that aimed at mastering basic instinct.

The supporters of the Chanson method, however, had to question themselves on a new and unexpected issue: the sexual pleasure of women. Father Féret explains it in these terms:

"A very large number, let's say the majority of wives whose husbands practice the reserved embrace, thereby discover marital joys which they had never known before, even when they'd had quite a few children. There is no doubt either about this inevitable consequence that having discovered these joys, they find them desirable. The problem that [481] you ask begins here: what will be the moral attitude of the female conscience grappling with this desire?"<sup>144</sup>

In this letter addressed to Canon Tiberghien, the Dominican had immediately considered as resolved an issue that seemed very difficult from a casuistic standpoint: does a woman have the right to orgasm in an embrace that excludes the man's orgasm? Current theological tradition asserted that complete pleasure (*voluptas venerea completa*) was only permitted within the completed act. In that regard, one could object that the argument was only valid for the man since the male orgasm is associated with insemination; which is not true for the woman.<sup>145</sup> This daring position was very quickly adopted by Father Féret and, despite some reluctance, by the Lille moralist Tiberghien too.<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, Paul Chanson's brother, Canon Albert Chanson, a punctilious casuist, remained attached to the principle: only complete sexual acts authorize complete pleasure. The question preoccupied Paul Chanson, who was anxious not to give the slightest edge to the criticisms of the casuists.

Be that as it may, the reserved embrace made it possible to think about the place of feminine pleasure which, in traditional theology, appeared very little since this pleasure is totally unnecessary for procreation and for the satisfaction of male lust. Paul Chanson had emphatically asserted that the husband has a duty to provide physical satisfaction for his wife, that the latter has the right to sexual fulfilment as much as the man. Father Féret in his role as a theologian added that, like the husband, the wife should not seek this ultimate pleasure for herself and with the sole intention of selfish enjoyment: that would be to contravene the demands of temperance. But he also called on theologians to trust marriage:

"If the whole of their Christian life is of sufficient quality, let us trust marriage, nature and the sacrament to rebalance moral life very quickly. I believe, [482] that the dizziness of a discovery of marital intimacy and its joys (all the more inebriating since it is discovered late on) may be somewhat unsettling at the time."<sup>147</sup>

In the years 1950-52, the Chanson affair revealed the extent of an ecclesiastic conflict. A conflict between the experience of physical realities fully lived by committed Christians and the demands of a Catholic morality that was always distrustful of sex. While the conflict had crystallized and often manifested around the issue of birth control, it was deeper and broader. On two occasions before the 1960s, the debate went beyond the issue of birth control and became more widespread. The first was in the years 1935-44, with the German Herbert Doms who introduced the question of the meaning of marriage into the theological field. Would

Catholic morality admit, beside its ends, a sense of marriage that would be about the interpersonal union of the spouses? In 1944, Rome gave a negative answer to Doms' proposition.

A few years later, Paul Chanson reopened the debate around marriage. And this is undoubtedly the first time that a lay voice had been raised with force in the Church of France, not to applaud the word of the *Magisterium*, but to claim, with specific competence, a right to interpret doctrine. Amidst the controversy that Chanson and his books had unleashed, a cohort of laymen suddenly intervened: would the theology of marriage no longer be the preserve of clerics?

The originality of Paul Chanson's attempt consists of proposing physical fulfilment within Christian marriage on the basis of a sexual technique which scrupulously respects the requirements of traditional moral theology. Without saying it and perhaps without being aware of it, Paul Chanson had advocated Catholic eroticism. Rome's response to it was that there was only "anti-Christian hedonism."

Twice Rome had blocked the reevaluation and evolution of the theology of marriage. We should therefore not be surprised at the importance assumed by the real and urgent issue of birth control: it enabled theologians to continue their research on marriage. But the essential issue raised by Paul Chanson remained unanswered: does Catholic moral theology condemn [483] the sexual pleasure of spouses to remain under surveillance, subordinated to the purpose of marriage? Can it not recognize an autonomous place for it within Christian marriage? It was not until Vatican II and the chapter of *Gaudium et Spes* devoted to marriage that the Church offered its faithful a more positive doctrine on sexual life.

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FOOTNOTES: BELOW

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> P. CHANSON, *Art d'aimer et continence conjugale*, Paris, Éditions Familiales de France, 1949, p.158
- <sup>2</sup> We have documents drawn from various archives available for this study but above all two precious files compiled and kept by R.P. Féret and which he was kind enough to allow us to consult. Mrs. E. Rendu also sent us a correspondence file from Paul Chanson, given by a daughter of Paul Chanson, Mrs. J. Gantelme. On the other hand, despite all our efforts, it was impossible for us to find the Paul Chanson archives. Mme Gantelme could only provide us with a few documents for an elementary biography. As for the archives of Canon Albert Chanson, it seems that the latter voluntarily destroyed them before his death. In any case, the diocesan archives of Arras gave us only a few disappointing documents.
- <sup>3</sup> For this bibliography, we rely on two documents: a long handwritten letter from the widow of Paul Chanson, addressed to Father Féret on November 10, 1964, and a document of 41 typed pages, entitled "Plan du livre", and also written by Mme Chanson with a view to a publication envisaged by Editions du Levain. (Papers by Mme Gantelme)
- <sup>4</sup> In 1937, Chanson established his family in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and surrounded himself with two collaborators to follow his business in Calais. He later gave up the management of his commercial enterprise for good in order to devote himself entirely to his intellectual and Christian work.
- <sup>5</sup> P. CHANSON, *The Rights of Workers and Corporatism*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1935, p.247
- <sup>6</sup> P. CHANSON, *Communisme ou Corporatisme*, Paris, Cerf, 1937, p. 265
- <sup>7</sup> Letter from Mme Madeleine Chanson, widow of Paul Chanson, to Father Féret, November 10, 1964.
- <sup>8</sup> P. CHANSON, *L'Œuvre de chair*, Paris, Éditions Familiales de France, 1942, p. 52
- <sup>9</sup> Thus, for example, in January 1948, Father André Merlaud, collaborator of Father Viollet, addressed a household in difficulty to Paul Chanson. Letter from Father Merlaud to Paul Chanson, January 27, 1948. Chanson file, E. Rendu papers.
- <sup>10</sup> Handwritten note from Paul Chanson, July 17, 1948. Papiers Gantelme.
- <sup>11</sup> Paul Chanson, Conference at the Banquet of Elders of the Catholic Church . (Catholic Faculties of Lille), June 11, 1963; handwritten notes, Gantelme papers.
- <sup>12</sup> P. CHANSON, *L'Art d'aimer*, Paris, Éditions Familiales de France, 1949, p.159
- <sup>13</sup> L'Ami du Clergé, April 21, 1949.
- <sup>14</sup> Letter from Canon Tiberghien to Paul Chanson, August 31, 1948, handwritten by Paul Chanson for Father Féret (Papiers Féret). We will refer more than once, in the remainder of this study, to these letters copied by hand by Paul Chanson for Father Féret. The original letters have obviously disappeared with the personal archives of Paul Chanson.
- <sup>15</sup> A. CHANSON, *Pour mieux confesser*, Arras, Brunet, 1948, p.320
- <sup>16</sup> On this subject, we will read the work of A. EXNER, *The Amplexus Reservatus seen in the history of Catholic doctrine on the use of Marriage*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1963, p. 271
- <sup>17</sup> L'Ami du Clergé, January 27, 1949.
- <sup>18</sup> A. MARTIN, *Le Mariage. Précis théologique et canonique*, Rennes, Imprimerie H. Riou-Reuzé, 1935; the work went through six successive editions until 1960.
- <sup>19</sup> Father Féret made regular trips to Limoges where a group of worker priests had asked for his help in advising Christian homes. Interviews with Father Féret, July 13, 1988 and January 9, 1990.
- <sup>20</sup> HM Féret, "Corrections and additions suggested for the text of Paul Chanson ", 4 typewritten pages, February 8, 1949; Féret papers.
- <sup>21</sup> HM Féret, "Art of loving and Christian spiritual life", afterword to Paul Chanson's work, "Art of loving and Conjugal/Married Continence", p. 135.
- <sup>22</sup> Idem, p.136.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.136.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.139.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 151.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 152.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 154.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 157.
- <sup>29</sup> P. CHANSON, op. cit., p. 11.
- <sup>30</sup> Idem, p. 43.
- <sup>31</sup> Letter from Bishop Pierre Brot to the Director of Editions du Mariage Chrétien, January 23, 1950; Feret papers.
- <sup>32</sup> Communiqué reproduced by L'Ami du Clergé, February 9, 1950.
- <sup>33</sup> The archives of Father de Lestapis and the correspondence of Father Féret have provided us with additional documents.
- <sup>34</sup> Letter from Father A.M. Carré to Fr Féret, 24 February 1950; Feret papers.
- <sup>35</sup> Letter sent by Frs Caffarel, Carré, Larere and Lestapis to Mgr Feltin, January 31, 1950; Lestapis papers.
- <sup>36</sup> A.M. Carré, review of *L'Art d'aimer*, by Paul Chanson, *L'Anneau d'Or*, n ° 29, 1949, p. 380-381. Another review, also very critical of the second work of Chanson, appeared in No. 32 of *L'Anneau d'Or*, under the signature R.T., p.136.
- <sup>37</sup> Letter from Father Féret to Mgr Touvet, May 10, 1950; Feret papers.
- <sup>38</sup> Letter from Paul Chanson to Father Féret, 23 February 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>39</sup> Pierre Lemaire: born in 1894, this father of a large family gathered together other fathers of Catholic families from 1947 onwards. He published a bulletin entitled *Paternity*, then *Defence of the Home*. His action was carried out through reports and denunciations to bishops and even more to Rome to Roman congregations and in particular to the Holy Office.
- <sup>40</sup> Letter from Pierre Lemaire, dated August 22, 1950, followed by a memorandum of six typed pages; papers of Bishop Couderc, diocesan archives of Viviers.
- <sup>41</sup> Paul Chauchard, director at the École des Hautes Études, published in 1959 a pamphlet entitled *Sexual Mastery: Problems of continence and reserved union*, p.60, with the Éditions du Levain. He also dedicated his introduction to Paul Chanson.
- <sup>42</sup> *Birth control and Christian conscience*, Paris, Family Publications of France, 1950, p. 340  
A whole part of the book is devoted to the reserved embrace.
- <sup>43</sup> R. Biot, *Remarks of the doctor*, in *Birth control and the Christian conscience* p. 289-292.
- <sup>44</sup> Idem, p. 292.
- <sup>45</sup> M. ORAISON, *A propos de l'étreinte réservée*, in *Cahiers Laennec*, n° 3 (1950), p. 45-54.
- <sup>46</sup> Idem, p. 292.
- <sup>47</sup> Th. KAMMERER, *Regarding the book by M. Paul Chanson: "Art d'aimer et continence conjugale"*, in *Revue de droit canon*, June 1952, p. 240-248.

- <sup>48</sup> Pierre de Locht: born in 1916, Belgian priest engaged in family pastoral care since 1946; founder and head of the National Centre of Family Pastoral Care for French-speaking Belgium from 1959 to 1973. Member of the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Birth Problems (1964-1966) Emeritus Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain.
- <sup>49</sup> Letter from Paul Chanson to Father Féret, March 20, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>50</sup> P. Chanson, *The Honesty of the marriage bed*, Roubaix, *Delplanque*, 1950, p. 126
- <sup>51</sup> With the *Imprimatur* dated 4 February 1950 granted at Lille for *The Honesty of the marriage bed*, one might wonder if Cardinal Liénart had been informed of the first defiant measures taken by the Archdiocese of Paris against Paul Chanson on January 23 and February 2, 1950.
- <sup>52</sup> Letter from Mgr Guerry to Albert Chanson, February 26, 1950, handwritten by Paul Chanson and addressed to Father Féret; Féret papers.
- <sup>53</sup> Bishop Dutoit was one of the seven French bishops removed from their diocese after the Liberation, in 1944-45. Cf. J. Duquesne, *French Catholics under the Occupation*, p. 421-425.
- <sup>54</sup> On February 17, 1950, Bishop Dutoit wrote a letter of approval to Paul Chanson which ended with: "What a path of holiness you are thus opening up to spouses for Holy Year! Congratulations! Accept my thanks!"; Féret papers.
- <sup>55</sup> Pierre Tiberghien (1880-1963): professor of moral theology at the Catholic Faculty of Lille. He participated, with Eugène Dutoit, in the organization of the Semaines Sociales de France.
- <sup>56</sup> Handwritten copy of the letter from Canon Renard to Paul Chanson, February 5, 1949, sent by Chanson to Father Féret; Féret papers.
- <sup>57</sup> Mgr Martin, in a letter to Paul Chanson of March 30, 1950, specified that he and a colleague, professor of ethics at the Seminary of Rennes, were working on making his method known but that conferences in Rennes seemed to them premature: "The mind of our priests is not yet ready for the ideas that you set out in your works (...). So I do not believe that the Cardinal, for the moment, would welcome such lectures being given here." Féret papers.
- <sup>58</sup> Letter from Paul Chanson to Father Féret, March 21, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>59</sup> Idem.
- <sup>60</sup> Pierre Girard (1892-1974): Sulpician, professor at the major seminary of Clermont from 1922 to 1930, superior of the seminaries of Lyon from 1930 to 1952, superior general of Saint-Sulpice from 1952 to 1966. He was vicar general in Lyon then in Paris, and was in charge of the service of the *Imprimatur*.
- <sup>61</sup> A fellow priest from the Dominican convent in Clermont-Ferrand wrote to Father Féret on October 2, 1950 to express his sympathy to him for the ordeal and to hope for "a comment that could reassure many households who had found in you a reason to hope". (Féret papers). We will see later that the first sanction by Rome happened in August 1950.
- <sup>62</sup> René Boigelot (1898-1959): born in Namur, this Belgian Jesuit was interested in marital issues from before the war. From 1938 onwards, he published a series of works devoted to sexual morality under the pseudonyms of Duval-Aumont and Pierre Dufoyer. From around 1935 to 1950, he was one of the most informed and committed clerics on these issues for French-speaking countries.
- <sup>63</sup> René Carpentier (1894-1968): Belgian Jesuit, professor of theology
- <sup>64</sup> In May 1950, Father Carpentier published a very favourable account of the works of Chanson in the *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* (*New Theological Review*), Vol. 72, I, p.546-548, and underlined that this "art of loving" was a "truly Christian" inspiration. In 1952, after the *Monitum* of the Holy Office against the reserved embrace, R. Carpentier commented on it aiming at limiting the scope of the warning from Rome (*Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 74, II (1952), p. 974 -980).
- <sup>65</sup> Jean Dermine (1893-1951): priest from the diocese of Tournai had studied theology at the Gregorian University. Upon his return to Belgium in 1919, he undertook a series of talks on marriage which was the origin of an important book, *The Doctrine of Christian Marriage*. Published in 1925, this work was the first major Catholic synthesis on marriage published in French for the 20th century. It was republished five times until 1938.
- <sup>66</sup> *Program of the Days at Maredsous* (January 3-4, 1952) These days brought together 25 moralists, including 16 Belgians, 8 Frenchmen and one Luxembourger; *de Locht Papers*.
- <sup>67</sup> Father Snoeck's conclusions were therefore the opposite of those of the Dominican H. Hering who, in the review *Angelicum*, had set out a whole theological tradition condemning the *Reservata* as an illicit practice. (H. HERING, *De amplexu reservato*, in *Angelicum*, 28 [1951], p. 313-345).
- <sup>68</sup> Letter from G. Jooris to J.P. Dubois-Dumée, July 27, 1950 (*de Locht Papers*). G. Jooris reacted to an article by J.P. Dubois-Dumée which appeared in *Témoignage Chrétien*, July 14, 1950 and was very hostile to Chanson.
- <sup>69</sup> G. Ponteville, *Concerning the books of Mr. Paul Chanson*, in *Feuilles Familiales*, October 1951. This article was reproduced in *Le Prêtre et la Famille* (*The Priest and the Family*), March-April 1952.
- <sup>70</sup> *Fertile Household* (*Foyer fecund*), Brussels, Éditions des Feuilles Familiales, 1952, p.94
- <sup>71</sup> Letter from Father A. Leclercq to Father Féret, February 20, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>72</sup> Letter from Paul Chanson to Father Féret, February 28, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>73</sup> ER, *Copula Reservata*, in *Le Prêtre et la Famille* (*The Priest and the Family*), May-June 1950.
- <sup>74</sup> B. BESSE ccc, H. DUMÉRY, A. LAUDRAIN, Critical study on the reserved embrace, in *Birth Control and Christian Conscience*, p. 269-287.
- <sup>75</sup> P. TIBERGHIEEN, *Précisions sur la Reservata*, op. cit., p. 304.
- <sup>76</sup> J. DERMINE, *A serious problem in marital life*, the article first published in the *Revue diocésaine de Tournai*, May 1950, and reproduced in *Birth Control and Christian conscience*, p. 307-313.
- <sup>77</sup> Idem, p. 313.
- <sup>78</sup> Letter from Father C. Bordet to Father Féret, April 24, 1949; Féret papers
- <sup>79</sup> G. PIERRE-PUYSÉGUR, *The physical intimacy of the married couple*, in *Masses Ouvrières*, February 1950, p. 52.
- <sup>80</sup> Letter from Paul Chanson to Father Féret, March 20, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>81</sup> Personal notes from Paul Chanson, June 13, 1950; E. Rendu papers.
- <sup>82</sup> Copy of Mgr Martin's letter to Paul Chanson, March 3, 1950, addressed to Father Féret; Féret papers.
- <sup>83</sup> Note from the *Éditions Familiales de France* to Catholic magazines, March 13, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>84</sup> *L'Ami du Clergé* explained this without quoting Chanson, in November 1952. The journal asserted: "Ordained priests know perfectly well that there are not two kinds of *Imprimatur*, one which appears prominently in the work, the other that a publisher or an author would be entitled to keep in his pocket. (*L'Ami du Clergé*, November 13, 1952, p. 698).
- <sup>85</sup> HM FÉRET, *Étreinte Réserve et Tempérance conjugale*. Report written for Mgr Feltin, March 1950, 47 pages Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, 391-B-1.
- <sup>86</sup> The Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops met twice a year, in spring and in autumn. At their meeting of March 14-16, 1950, Mgr Guerry presented a note on divorce and abortion which was adopted by the ACA. and published. According to official reports, there was nothing to report during the four A.C.A. meetings of 1950 and 1951. On the other hand, in March 1952, under pressure from Rome, which we will look at later, the A.C.A. adopted and made public a declaration on March 14 in which it raised "its indignant protest against the abuses committed by recent information works, novels or magazines in the field of the sexual initiation of children and young people". (*Catholic Documentation*, April 6, 1952). The work of Chanson addressing adults and married couples therefore did not seem to be covered by this declaration.

- <sup>87</sup> Father Féret gave an account of this audience the next day in a letter to Paul Chanson, dated April 18, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>88</sup> Personal notes of Paul Chanson, June 29, 1950; E. Rendu papers.
- <sup>89</sup> Letter from Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani, secretary of the Holy Office, to Mgr Feltn, August 12, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>90</sup> Handwritten letter from Mgr Feltn to Father Féret, August 26, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>91</sup> Letter from Father Féret to Mgr Feltn, September 2, 1950; Féret papers. Our case is indeed part of a more global context of condemnation of Dominicans. On this subject, one can read the work by F. LEPRIEUR, *Quand Rome condamne*, Paris, Cerf / Plon, 1989, p. 784
- <sup>92</sup> The very evening these confidences were shared, Father Féret took care to take note of them upon his return to the convent, in two typewritten pages, dated November 5, 1951; Féret papers.
- <sup>93</sup> P. CHANSON, *L'Accord charnel*, Paris, Éditions du Levain, 1950, p. 157
- <sup>94</sup> In 1952, Paul Chanson was able to publish a collection of testimonies, *The reserved embrace: Testimony from spouses*, Paris, Éditions du Levain, 1952, p. 224
- <sup>95</sup> Letter from Father Féret to Father Van Wynsberghe, December 7, 1950; Féret papers.
- <sup>96</sup> Letter from Canon A. Chanson to Mgr Guerry, March 29 1950; Guerry archives, Albert Chanson file.
- <sup>97</sup> For this study, we have a large correspondence file kept by Mme Rendu.
- <sup>98</sup> Letter from Pierre Lambert to Paul Chanson, December 18, 1950; E. Rendu.
- <sup>99</sup> Thus, a Catholic activist from Gard showed Éditions du Levain, November 7, 1952: "In our Catholic Action meetings and in Christian Foyers meetings, we now speak openly and frequently about it". (E. Rendu papers).
- <sup>100</sup> Letter from Dr Lesueur-Capelle, gynaecologist, to Cardinal Liénart, October 7, 1950; diocesan archives of Lille, "Family" file.
- <sup>101</sup> Letter to Cardinal Liénart, October 5, 1950, followed by a "Memorandum" of a typed page; diocesan archives of Lille, "Family" file.
- <sup>102</sup> Letter from 29 Catholic homes to Cardinal Liénart, October 25, 1950; E. Rendu papers.
- <sup>103</sup> Letter from Cardinal Liénart to Paul Chanson, October 10, 1950; diocesan archives of Lille, Family file.
- <sup>104</sup> Letter from Bishop Feltn to Father Féret, September 5, 1950; Féret papers. Bishop Guerry used the same reasoning in a letter to Paul Chanson dated December 20, 1950; E. Rendu papers.
- <sup>105</sup> The Latin text of the *Monitum* was published by *L'Ami du Clergé*, November 13, 1952, p. 693.
- <sup>106</sup> H. HERING, *De amplexu reservato*, in *Angelicum*, 28 (1951), p. 313-345. The Dominican emphasized that physical union is in itself an act intended for procreation and concluded that to interrupt this act was against nature. But the Jesuit F. Hürth, the great moralist of the Gregorian (college), still a very traditional theologian, opposed this thesis and recognized, at least in theory, the legality of the reserved embrace. (F. HÜRTH, *Inquisitio critica in moralitem "amplexu reservati"*, in *Periodica de re morali, canonica, liturgica*, 1952, p. 251-269).
- <sup>107</sup> R. CARPENTIER, Commentary on the Acts of the Holy See, in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, November 1952, p. 974-980.
- <sup>108</sup> L.J. SUENENS, *A crucial problem: Love and self-mastery*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1958, p. 230
- <sup>109</sup> The cardinal declared: "Did the Holy Office, for example, not publish a "*Monitum*" to warn against the dangers of indiscriminately supporting the doctrine of the reserved embrace? And yet, how many still write about this subject, without considering the just reservations and the great moral consequences that such a question has?". Address by Cardinal Ottaviani to the *Domus Mariae*, November 16, 1959, *Documentation Catholique*, December 20, 1959, col. 1572-1573.
- (110) S. de Lestapis, *Birth Control*, Paris, Spes, 2 edition, 1960, p. 177. Let us note that, in the first edition of his work published in 1959, the Jesuit stated that he did not want to present the reserved embrace as a legitimate method akin to continence (1st edition, p. 177). According to the testimony of Mrs. Weil-Hallé, during a dinner at the castle of Mr. de Saint-Seine in Villepreux, Father de Lestapis had suggested that the reserved embrace be among the methods recommended by the Family Planning centres. (Interview of January 29, 1992 with Ms. Weil-Hallé). At the beginning of the sixties, M. de Saint-Seine had paid a bankrupt Paul Chanson as part of the Dynam-Institut which he had created and financed.
- <sup>111</sup> Encyclical *Divini illius magistri*, published on December 31, 1929 by Pius XI, *Catholic Documentation*, n° 507-508, February 15-22, 1930. Pius XI specified that, if the circumstances made it necessary for individual instruction by the father, he still had to observe all the precautions that traditional Christian education knows so well".
- <sup>112</sup> Pius XII, Address to the cardinals, archbishops, bishops and priests of the localities, November 2, 1950, *Catholic Documentation*, n° 1082, November 19, 1950, col. 1500.
- <sup>113</sup> *Documentation Catholique*, n° 1125, July 13, 1952, col. 847.
- <sup>114</sup> Pius XII, *Discours aux Sages-Femmes*, October 29, 1951, *Documentation Catholique*, n° 1109, 2 December 1951, col. 1490.
- <sup>115</sup> On March 25, 1954, Pius XII published an encyclical entitled *Sacra virginilas*, entirely devoted to reaffirming that "holy virginity prevails par excellence over marriage", *Documentation Catholique*, n° 1173, 16 May 1954, col. 585.
- <sup>116</sup> *The Pontifical Audience for French Fathers*, September 18, 1951, *Documentation Catholique*, n° 1106, October 21, 1951, col. 1284.
- <sup>117</sup> From its n° 2 edition of March-April 1948 the magazine *Paternité*, which had been created by Pierre Lemaire, protested against publications aimed at sex education and restated the precautionary directives from Rome.
- <sup>118</sup> From his trip to Rome in 1951, Mgr Feltn had reported to Father Féret the remarks made by Mgr Montini. The latter confirmed that the interventions of Pierre Lemaire had had some influence on the Pope and would have added that "this Mr. Lemaire was a fundamentalist, but that one had to take into account the fact that he was favoured by the Holy Father because he made a great impression on him by his holiness". And Father Féret concluded: "In reporting all this to me, Mgr Feltn sufficiently demonstrated by his tone on which side his sympathies lay, but it is obvious that he cannot ignore the Holy Father's current state of mind". (Notes from Father Féret, November 5, 1951).
- <sup>119</sup> "*Audience of the S.O. - September 19, 1951*", report by Pierre Lemaire, 2 typed pages; Lemaire papers.
- <sup>120</sup> *Declaration of the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops*, March 14, 1952, *Documentation Catholique*, n° 1118, April 6, 1952, col. 399.
- <sup>121</sup> Let us recall that between 1950 and 1954, a series of sanctions fell on French theologians, clerics and activists, from the Jesuits of Fourvière to the worker-priests. See É. Fouilloux, *French Traditions and Experiences*, in *Histoire du Christianisme*, edited by J.M. Mayeur, t. 12, p. 518-521.
- <sup>122</sup> The brochure of Father Boussemart, a fervent supporter of Paul Chanson, had been distributed with the *Imprimatur* since 1950. Regarding these sanctions against Father Boussemart, see the diocesan archives of Lille, Family file.
- <sup>123</sup> The decree of the Holy Office, dated March 18, 1953, was not made public until January 1955. And Father Oraison submitted to it immediately. Cf. the *Catholic Documentation*, n° 1191, January 23, 1955, col. 81 and no.1194, March 1955, col. 288.
- <sup>124</sup> C. DUVAL-AUMONT, *Birth control in the Christian home*, Paris-Tournai, Casterman, 1938, p. 142; Pierre DUFOYER, *Marital Intimacy*, a series of works published and edited throughout the forties, with an edition for husbands and another for wives.
- <sup>125</sup> Interview with Father François Dantec, August 27, 1988. But the Holy Office does not seem to have been satisfied with these sanctions taken in France since, on March 29, 1954, Cardinal Pizzardo wrote to Cardinal Liénart to denounce again the "connivance" of certain Catholic circles with literature which, in dealing with sexual issues, has become "a real school of immorality". He decried a serious act: "Certain ecclesiastical censors have sanctioned by their approval some writings which then had to be condemned, even by the Holy See". And to ask that this question

be examined by the next plenary meeting of the bishops of France so that “measures may be adopted by common accord by the entire French episcopate”. (Diocesan archives of Vannes, “Miscellaneous” folder, Secretariat of the episcopate).

<sup>126</sup> The Holy Office forbade the accused to take notes during his appearance in court, so Father Féret wrote a 93-page typed report two days later on November 15, 1953.

<sup>127</sup> Taking advantage of the public criticism of his famous postscript to the Chanson book, Father Féret wrote to Mr. Girard, who had recently become Superior General of Saint-Sulpice, on September 25, 1952. The latter was indeed according to rumour, one of Chanson's whistle blowers. Father Féret asked him to specify the decisive arguments which had justified his hostility, based on Christ's teaching of correcting one's brother. At that point M. Girard, in his response of September 29, shied away from it by taking refuge behind the disciplinary decrees from Rome. Father Féret returned to the charge with two new letters: but in vain. Papiers Féret.

<sup>128</sup> P. CHANSON, *Art d'aimer et continence conjugale*, p. 43.

<sup>129</sup> AM CARRÉ, Report on *L'Art d'aimer*, in *L'Anneau d'Or*, n° 29, 1949.

<sup>130</sup> JP DUBOIS-DUMÉE, A household speaks to you, in *Le Prêtre et la Famille*, March-April 1951, p. 4.

<sup>131</sup> J.P. DUBOIS-DUMÉE, *Regarding two disputed books about marriage. There are no recipes!* in *Témoignage Chrétien*, July 14, 1950.

<sup>132</sup> Prolonged abstinence was the solution advocated, for example, by a priest collaborating with the AMC, Édouard Rolland, who had written an article entitled *La continence ascétique*, published in the collective work *Birth Control and Christian Conscience*, p. 315-332.

<sup>133</sup> Letter from Father Willimès to Paul Chanson, March 14, 1951; Chanson file, E. Rendu papers.

<sup>134</sup> We have seen above that in April 1950, Mgr Feltin expressed an identical fear to Father Féret. In 1968, in *Humanae vitae*, Paul VI, referring to the artificial methods of birth control, stated: "Let them first consider what a wide and easy route they would open to marital infidelity and to the general lowering of family morality" (n° 17).

<sup>135</sup> Letter from Cardinal Liénart to Paul Chanson, October 10, 1950; diocesan archives of Lille, *Family* file.

<sup>136</sup> On March 2, 1679, Innocent XI condemned the following proposition: "The sexual act in marriage that seeks only for pleasure is totally exempt from sin, even venial sin." recalled by J. PAQUIN, *The Reserved Embrace*, in *Ecclesiastical Sciences*, 1953, p. 96.

<sup>137</sup> P. CHANSON, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>138</sup> In December 1951, Father Bordet reported the words of a Dominican fellow priest to Father Féret: "You will not make me believe that it is moral to advise married couples to achieve an orgasm for 1/2 hour by the clock (sic)"; letter from Father Bordet to Father Féret, December 17, 1951; Féret papers.

<sup>139</sup> Speech of Pius XII to Midwives, October 29, 1951, *Documentation Catholique*, n° 1109, December 2, 1951, col. 1492.

<sup>140</sup> *Friend of the Clergy* did not fail to underline this in an article devoted to *Recent decisions by Rome relating to the chastity in marriage*, November 13, 1952, p. 695. Likewise, in January 1952, the magazine *Prêtre et Apôtre* classed the work of Chanson as "anti-Christian hedonism".

<sup>141</sup> This expression circulated in ecclesiastical circles both in French and in Latin (*crux confessorum*). The first use of it we found was in the *Bulletin de l'A.M.C.*, June 1919, which wrote: "Everyone knows that the problems posed by Malthusian practices are the cross borne by religious advisers". We find it written by Pierre de Loch, in the work he published in 1979, *Les Couples et l'Eglise*, p. 83.

<sup>142</sup> J. LECLERCQ, *Autour de la morale conjugale*, in *Le Prêtre et la Famille*, May-June 1952.

<sup>143</sup> HM FÉRET, "The reserved embrace and marital moderation", report written in March 1950, 56 typed pages, unpublished.

<sup>144</sup> Letter from the Father Féret to Canon Tiberghien, November 23, 1950; Féret papers.

<sup>145</sup> Canon Montaigne, a moralist from Lille, however questioned his brother Tiberghien: "Is it certain that the female orgasm is not involved in fertilization?". By bringing about full relaxation and opening of the uterus, a woman's orgasm is therefore an important phenomenon to facilitate conception without however being essential", Letter from Abbé Montaigne to canon Tiberghien, no date; *diocesan archives of Lille*, Tiberghien papers.

<sup>146</sup> Father Féret had exposed the problem in his report of March 1950 intended for Mgr Feltin.

<sup>147</sup> Letter from Father Féret to canon Tiberghien, 23 November 1950; Féret papers.