

A Twenty-Year History (1958-1978) of Contraception and Abortion as Experienced by the Catholic Medical Association

*Richard J. Fehring**

ABSTRACT: This paper is an historical analysis of the issues of contraception and abortion as presented through the focus and lens of articles in *The Linacre Quarterly*, the official journal of the Catholic Medical Association (CMA). The twenty-year history includes the ten years before and after the pivotal papal encyclical *Humanae vitae* (HV). The articles show the clear link between the issues of contraception and abortion and how these issues led to the decline of the Federation of the Catholic Physician Guilds (the precursor of the CMA in the United States). It was a decline that, I propose, lessened opposition to liberalized abortion laws. There is, however, a new and revised CMA that has been built on a faithful and prolife membership of physicians and other health professionals.

ALTHOUGH MANY PRO-LIFE LEADERS and pro-life organizations do not see the connection between contraception and abortion, or do not wish to deal with this issue, the link is rather apparent. Pope John Paul II called abortion and contraception the fruits of the same tree.¹ Research also has

* *Richard J. Fehring*, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, is Professor Emeritus and Director of the Marquette University College of Nursing Institute for Natural Family Planning. He received his master's degree and doctorate in nursing from The Catholic University of America and his baccalaureate degrees in biology and nursing from Marquette University. He has published over 180 articles and book chapters, co-edited three books, and has generated over \$3 million in research and foundation grants. His research interests include effectiveness of fertility awareness methods of family planning, marital responses to family planning, and religious influences on human sexuality.

¹ John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Evangelium vitae* (The Gospel of Life), March 25, 1995.

demonstrated, in population-based studies, the connection between use of contraception and abortion.² Furthermore, some methods of contraception are potential abortifacients.³ To ignore this association is essentially closing one's eyes to the issue, but it will not go away.

This paper deals with a different type of association between contraception and abortion, that is, an historical link between contraception and abortion in the evolution of a Catholic medical journal (*The Linacre Quarterly*) and its parent organization, the Catholic Medical Association (CMA). The consequences of ignoring this link contributed to the near demise of the CMA and to the weakening of this 10,000 member organization just when it was badly needed to fight the liberalization of abortion laws in the United States. This paper will present a short historical analysis of the issues of contraception and abortion as presented in articles published in *The Linacre Quarterly*. The paper is divided into five short sections: (1) the early years of *The Linacre Quarterly* (1932-1951); (2) the post- World-War-II response (1951-1958); (3) the papal birth control commission and the United States rhythm commission (1960-1968); (4) the response to *Humanae vitae* (1968-1978); and (5) re-growth, recovery, and building the future.

1. The Early Years of *The Linacre Quarterly* (1932-1951)

The Linacre Quarterly is the official journal of the Catholic Medical Association and one of the oldest ongoing journals dealing with medical-related ethical issues in the world. The journal is named after Thomas Linacre, a sixteenth-century physician from England, who was the personal physician to King Henry VII and King Henry VIII, a friend of Thomas More, and the one responsible for the development of the Royal Society of Medicine.⁴

The Linacre Quarterly began to be published in 1932. At that time one of

² R.J. Fehring, "The Influence of Contraception on Abortion among Women of Reproductive Age in the United States," *Life and Learning. Proceedings of UFL Life and Learning Conference XXI* (2011), pp. 1-21.

³ W.L. Larimore and J.B. Stanford, "Post-Fertilization Effects of Oral Contraceptives and Their Relationship to Informed Consent," *Archives of Family Medicine* 9 (2000): 126-33; R. Rivera, I. Yacobson, and D. Grimes, "The Mechanism of Action of Hormonal Contraceptives and Intrauterine Contraceptive Devices," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 181 (1999): 1263-69.

⁴ James F. Gilroy, "Who is Thomas Linacre?" *The Linacre Quarterly* 22/3 (1955), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lmq/vol22/iss3/2>.

the vexing issues in medicine and nursing was the use and promotion of birth control methods. Margaret Sanger, a nurse, was one of prominent promoters and advocates of birth control, known for opening a birth control clinic in New York City in 1916 and for being arrested for her efforts.⁵ She is also known for starting The Birth Control League in 1921, which evolved into today's Planned Parenthood Organization.

The first issue of *The Linacre Quarterly* was thus published shortly after the 1930 Lambeth Conference, a meeting at which a major Christian religion proclaimed that married couples, with serious reasons, could use contraception. In response, the Catholic Church, under the guidance of Pope Pius XI reaffirmed, in the encyclical *Casti Cannubii*, that birth control is against the natural order, frustrates the marital act, and may not be used.⁶ Pius XI did, however, indicate that recourse to the natural rhythms of fertility and infertility of the woman was valid.

It was in the early 1930s that the first scientific methods of natural birth regulation were being developed and published. The methods were based on the work of an Austrian scientist-physician Dr. Herman Knaus and a Japanese obstetrician gynecologist Kyusaku Ogino.⁷ In the United States Dr. Leo Latz, M.D. (a professor of medicine at Loyola University in Chicago) developed a calendar-based method of natural birth-control regulation based on Knaus's finding and wrote a small book titled *The Rhythms of the Sterility and Fertility of a Women's Menstrual Cycle*. The term "rhythm method" was popularized from the title of his book and erroneously used to describe all natural methods.⁸

⁵ Alexander Sanger, *Beyond Choice: Reproductive Freedom in the 21st Century* (Cambridge MA: Public Affairs and Perseus Book Group, 2004), p. 34.

⁶ Pope Pius XI, encyclical letter *Casti connubii* (On Christian Marriage), December 31, 1931. At the time of the encyclical the only methods of birth control were crude sheep-skin condoms, pessaries, and a selection of crude appliances that were inserted into the vagina. These methods and devices were obvious disrupters of the male to female act of intercourse.

⁷ Kyusaku Ogino, *Conception Period of Women* (Harrisburg PA: Medical Arts Publ. Co., 1934), pp. 79-80. Herman Knaus, *Periodic Fertility and Sterility in Woman: A Natural Method of Birth Control* (Vienna: Wilhelm Maudrich, Publisher, 1934).

⁸ Leo Latz, *The Rhythm of Sterility and Fertility in Women* (Chicago IL: Latz Foundation, 1932). It should be noted that in this book Latz viewed the use of rhythm as a preventive measure for abortion, i.e., to prevent unwanted pregnancies. See also Leo J. Latz, "The Latz Foundation: Its Aims and Achievements," *The Linacre Quarterly* 3/1 (1934), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol3/iss1/2>.

He and his foundation sold over 600,000 copies of his book in the U.S. In Europe Dr. Joseph Smulders published a book based on the work of Ogino about another natural birth-regulation method. It was published and distributed by the Dutch Catholic Medical Association.⁹

In the first issue there was a short article from Dr. Latz explaining his new method of birth regulation. The anonymous editor for ethical questions (called Ethicus) was wary of this new method and especially the distribution of this method and information into the hands of married couples.¹⁰ The thinking at that time, both within Catholic medicine and the Catholic Church, was that the decision of whether to use this new natural birth-regulation method should only be implemented in consultation with a priest and the couple's physician.¹¹ This information should not be distributed and used by couples on their own, and if used at all, should be used only for serious reasons. An illustration of how fixed this idea was is that Dr. Latz was dismissed from his position as a professor of medicine from a Catholic Jesuit University.¹² He continued to research this new natural method of birth regulation and presented it at Catholic medical guild meetings.¹³ Latz also published short articles on his natural birth-regulation method.¹⁴

Information on how to use these new natural birth regulation methods was thus out in the open public, and they rapidly became rather popular.¹⁵ So too,

⁹ Jan Nicolas Joseph Smulders, *Peeriodieke Onthouding in Het Huwelijk, Methode Ogino-Knaus* (Nijmegen-Utrecht, 1930).

¹⁰ Ethicus, "The Morality of the Use of the Safe Period," *The Linacre Quarterly* 1/2 (1933): 23-26.

¹¹ Leslie Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2004) and John D. Conway, *The Rhythm* (Notre Dame IN: Fides Publ., 1961), pp. 3-7.

¹² Dr. Latz was let go from his position at Loyola University and lost his imprimatur from Cardinal Mundelein because at that time in history it was somewhat scandalous that married couples should have the information contained in his book. Dr. Latz continued teaching about his work and NFP at three Catholic nursing programs in Chicago.

¹³ Catholic Physicians Guild, "Guild Notes," *The Linacre Quarterly* 1/2 (1933) available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol1/iss2/4>

¹⁴ Leo J. Latz, "The Latz Foundation: Its Aims and Achievements," *The Linacre Quarterly* 3/1 (1934), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol3/iss1/2>.

¹⁵ Catholic Physicians Guild, Book Review of *Nature's Way, the Fertile and Sterile Periods of Marriage* by Victor C. Pedersen, *The Linacre Quarterly* 3/1 (1934) available at <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol3/iss1/4>; Catholic Physicians

simple devices to help couples determine the fertile and infertile times of the menstrual cycle were developed. An advertisement for a rhythm wheel was published in *The Linacre Quarterly*. One of the most eminent physicians at that time declared that the rhythm method was one of the most effective and accessible methods of family planning available.¹⁶ Another eminent Catholic physician obstetrician and Harvard professor was Dr. John Rock who opened one of the first Rhythm Clinics in the U.S. and also researched the use of the rhythm method.¹⁷

In the mid-1930s, a parish priest (Fr. Wilhelm Hildebrand) was teaching the European rhythm method to married couples in his parish and noticed a number of unintended pregnancies.¹⁸ This obviously disturbed him and he turned to his physician brother who recommended a book by Van de Velde, a Dutch physician who had researched the link between basal body temperature and ovulation. Fr. Hildebrand was one of the first persons to add basal body temperature to a calendar-based “rhythm” system as a new method of natural birth regulation. He received an honorary doctorate for his efforts.

In 1937, the American Medical Association (AMA) declared that the prescription of contraception for their patients was a legitimate part of medical practice and that medical students should learn about contraception in medical school.¹⁹ That year an article in *The Linacre Quarterly* noted that the president-elect of the AMA was a distinguished and beloved Catholic physician from Louisville, Kentucky.²⁰ The Federation of Catholic Physician Guilds, however, issued a very strong opposition statement to the actions of the AMA on contraception at their annual meeting in Atlanta City.

During the late 1930s and through the 1940s, there were a number of

Guild. Book Review of *Conception Period of Women* by Dr. Kyusaku Ogino, *The Linacre Quarterly* 3/1 (1934) available at <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol3/iss1/5>.

¹⁶ C. G. Hartman, *Time of Ovulation in Women* (Baltimore MD: The Williams & Wilkins Co, 1936).

¹⁷ John Rock, *The Time Has Come* (New York NY: Avon Books, 1964).

¹⁸ As told by Rudolf Vollman, “Brief History of Natural Family Planning” in *Natural Family Planning: Introduction to the Method* (Washington DC: The Human Life Foundation, 1977), pp. 1-5.

¹⁹ Ignatius W. Cox, S.J., “What Did the AMA Do at Atlantic City?” *The Linacre Quarterly* 5/3 (1937) available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol5/iss3/1>

²⁰ James J. Walsh, “The President-Elect of the American Medical Association,” *The Linacre Quarterly*: 5/3 (1937).

physician scientists who developed what we have come to call temperature methods of natural birth regulation or basal body temperature.²¹ The AMA, however, called on scientists to develop better methods of contraception and especially physiological and hormonal methods. At this time period, the world was recovering from a deep economic depression that saw the birth rate severely decrease, a world war that saw the loss of over 100 million lives, and a slow recovery from the devastation of war.

2. The Post World War II Response (1951-1958)

By the late 1940s and early 1950s there was rising concern about rising populations world-wide, the scarcity of resources for this increase in population, and the health consequences of this rise, especially with regard to childbirth and maternal mortality.²² The United States, of course, was experiencing what is now called the post-war “baby-boom.” Some medical textbooks at this time referred to various sub-populations (usually the poor and even Catholics) in derogatory terms such as “breeders.” Margaret Sanger and her philanthropist friend Kathryn McCormick increased their efforts and funding for the development of a hormonal contraceptive pill.

In 1951, Pope Pius XII responded to concerns about population and the claimed need for birth control by promoting the use of natural birth-regulation methods. In an address to Italian nurse midwives, he indicated that it was their

²¹ P.J. Bartzén, “Effectiveness of the Temperature Rhythm System of Contraception,” *Fertility and Sterility* 18 (1967): 694-706. G.K. Doering, “Detection of Ovulation by the Basal Body Temperature Method” in *Proceedings of a Research Conference on Natural Family Planning*, ed. W.A. Uricchio and M.K. Williams (Washington DC: The Human Life Foundation, 1972), pp. 171-80. G.K. Doering, “Über die Zuverlässigkeit der Temperaturmethode zur Empfängnisverhütung” [Reliability of the Temperature Method as a Means of Contraception], *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift* 92 (1967): 1055-61; English abstract in *The Yearbook of Obstetrics and Gynecology* (Yearbook Medical Publisher), pp. 354-55. R.F. Vollman, “Assessment of the Fertile and Sterile Phases of the Menstrual Cycle,” *International Review of Natural Family Planning* 1/1 (1977): 40-47. John Marshall, “A Field Study of the Basal-Body Temperature Method of Regulating Births,” *Lancet* 2 (1968): 6-10.

²² Clement S. Mihanovich, “Myth of Overpopulation,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 19/2 (1952), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol19/iss2/5>. Clement S. Mihanovich, “The Current Birth Rate,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 19/3 (1952) Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol19/iss3/5>. Joseph Bernard Doyle, “The Bomb, The Baby and the Pope,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 20/1 (1953), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol20/iss1/4>.

responsibility to learn these methods and to explain the moral bases for their use.²³ Furthermore, he said that married couples could use these methods to avoid pregnancy for serious reasons even for the entirety of their reproductive lives. This assertion was an enormous leap, from the view that only grudgingly allowed the use of natural methods after consulting with a priest and physician to one that encouraged health professionals to provide them to couples. Later that same year, in an address to a congress on large families, he called on scientists and medical schools to work on more effective and better methods of natural birth regulation and actually asked them to “bend their backs with this effort.”²⁴ In response to the Pope’s call, a number of physicians and scientists developed what is now called natural family planning (NFP); it used body temperature and cervical mucus changes to estimate the fertile time of the women’s menstrual cycle.²⁵ In the mid-1950s about 55% of Catholic married couples were using NFP and about 33% of all married women.²⁶

By the mid-1950s, with the funding and promotion from Sanger and McCormick, a group of scientists and physicians (Gregory Pincus, Min-Chueh Chang, and John Rock) developed and tested the first formulations of a contraceptive pill.²⁷ By the end of the 1950s, the group funded by Sanger and

²³ Pius XII, Address to Italian Catholic Union of Midwives (October 29, 1951) in *Natural Family Planning: Nature’s Way/God’s Way*, ed. Rev. Anthony Zimmerman (Milwaukee WI: DeRance, Inc. 1980), pp. 229-30.

²⁴ Pius XII, Address to the National Congress of the Family Front and the Association of Large Families (November 26, 1951) in *Natural Family Planning: Nature’s Way/Gods Way*, ed. Rev. Anthony Zimmerman (Milwaukee WI: DeRance, Inc. 1980), p. 231.

²⁵ E. Keefe, “Self-Examination of the Cervix as a Guide in Fertility Control,” *International Review of Natural Family Planning* 10 (1986): 322-38. J. Roetzer, “Further Evaluation of the Sympto-Thermal Method,” *International Review of Natural Family Planning* 1 (1977): 139-50. John J. Billings and Evelyn L. Billings, “Determination of Fertile and Infertile Days by the Mucus Pattern: Development of the Ovulation Method,” Ch. 12 in *Proceedings of a Research Conference on Natural Family Planning*, ed. William A. Uricchio and Mary Kay Williams (Washington DC: The Human Life Foundation, 1972), pp. 135-48.

²⁶ C.F. Westoff and N.R. Ryder, “Conception Control among American Catholics” *Perspectives on Social Change*, ed. W.T. Liu and N.J. Pallone (New York NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1970), pp. 257-68.

²⁷ Bernard Asbell, *The Pill: A Biography of the Drug that Changed the World* (New York NY: Random House, 1995). It should be noted that the testing of the first formulations of the pill involved use of the mentally ill and poor Puerto Rican women

McCormick was able to synthesize estrogen and then combine it with synthesized progesterone to create a hormonal birth control pill. Physicians then started to use this pill to regulate the menstrual cycle and to treat some health problems related to the menstrual cycle, but they also realized that taking the pill everyday would suppress ovulation and could be used as a contraceptive pill.

Pope Pius XII, although near death at that time, seemed to be on top of these hormonal pill developments. In 1958, in an address to hematologists, he condemned the use of the progesterone pill as a method of contraception but said that the steroidal contraceptive pill could be morally used to treat medical conditions.²⁸ Catholic physicians at that time were using these hormones to help regulate the menstrual cycle so that the rhythm method and other NFP methods could be used with more confidence.²⁹ Some people, however, started to use the pill as a contraceptive method under the guise that they were treating a health problem in regulating the menstrual cycle and in particular painful menses.³⁰ By 1960, it was estimated that around 500,000 women were using the hormonal pill to “regulate” the menstrual cycle and to treat menstrual pain.

3. The Pill and the Commissions (1960-1968)

In the late 1950s and early 60s, Dr. John Rock, a Catholic Harvard physician, obstetrician, and gynecologist, was studying the effectiveness of this new birth control pill with Dr. Celso Garcia, a physician from Puerto Rico. Instead of studying financially well off women in Rock’s private practice, they used poor Puerto Rican women.³¹ Rock then applied for and received Federal

and lack of full consent, a major violation of human rights.

²⁸ Paul VI, Address to Participants at the Twenty-Fifth General Assembly of Pharmacology (September 7, 1974) in *Natural Family Planning: Nature’s Way/God’s Way*, ed. Rev. Anthony Zimmerman (Milwaukee WI: DeRance, Inc. 1980), p. 257.

²⁹ G.C. Nabors, “Do Progestins Regulate Menstrual Cycles?” *The Linacre Quarterly* 33/1 (1966), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol33/iss1/21>; Eugene F. Diamond, “Oral Progestins and the Catholic Physician,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 33/2 (1966), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol33/iss2/19>.

³⁰ It should be noted that both the developers of natural birth regulation methods (i.e., NFP) and the developers of hormonal contraception also saw these methods of family planning as a means to end the need for unwanted pregnancies and thereby abortion.

³¹ Dr. John Rock and others realized that the new birth control pill would be more

Drug Association approval for the first birth control pill, labeled Enovid. The pill separated sexuality from fertility, thereby leading to the sexual revolution and all of its consequences.³² By the end of the 1960s, the pill was the most popular form of family planning and use of the natural methods dropped to around 2% of users of family planning methods in the U.S..³³

At that time the Catholic Church was undergoing tremendous change, with Pope John XXIII “opening the windows of the Church” and initiating the Second Vatican Council, to address the modern world. Influential figures of that day were deeply concerned about world population and saw a need for birth control. Archbishop Suenens from Belgium convinced the Pope to take the issue of birth control out of the jurisdiction of the Council and to appoint a special commission to study the question of birth control and population.³⁴ When Pope John XXIII died, Pope Paul VI kept the birth control commission but directed the findings to be presented to him alone.³⁵

The birth control commission met six times from 1963 through 1966 and went from having just six members to eventually having over seventy. The commission members struggled with its purpose but eventually realized that they might be able to change Church teaching on the matter of birth control.

readily accepted if they mimicked the woman’s monthly period (i.e., menses) by having seven days of the pill be just inert (i.e., sugar pills), thus creating a hormonal withdrawal bleed. Women instinctively view having regular menses as a sign of health. Health professionals have recently realized that the menstrual cycle is a true vital sign of women’s health. In essence, the withdrawal bleed with the pill was a ruse. It also should be noted that the original pill had high levels of synthetic steroidal estrogen, which resulted with a number of deaths in the original group of Puerto Rican women. It is also well know that the estrogen in the pill can lead to stroke, thrombosis, and other cardiovascular problems. The newer steroidal hormonal pills have much lower levels of synthetic estrogens, and this helps to lessen the cardiovascular problems but those problems still exist.

³² Dr. Rock wrote a very popular paperback book at that time in which he called for the Catholic Church to change its teaching on contraception. Rock also started to study early forms of in-vitro fertilization, i.e., working with early human embryos.

³³ C. Bachrach, “Contraceptive Practice among American Women, 1973-1982,” *Family Planning Perspectives* 16 (1984): 253-60.

³⁴ Archbishop Joseph Suenens (later Cardinal) was already meeting with a small group of theologians and scientists to study the question of birth control.

³⁵ One of the members of the commission, Dr. Bernardo Colombo, a demographer from the University of Padua, mentioned to me in an e-mail that he was very disturbed that members of the commission leaked the findings of the commission to the press.

With the advent of the hormonal contraceptive pill, women now had a birth control method (i.e., the Pill) that, unlike other older methods, did not interfere with the sexual act in the way that the use of condoms, pessaries, diaphragms, spermicides, and so on did. According to Robert McClory, the commission was greatly influenced by a large (but very flawed study) of how the use of “rhythm” was actually harmful to married life.³⁶ The commission eventually wrote a majority report calling for change of Church teaching and arguing that the use of contraception was morally licit for married couples as long as they were generally open to new life.³⁷ There was also a minority report that hotly disagreed with the majority. Although the reports were to be kept confidential and only to be presented to the Pope, they were leaked to the press. Thus the world knew that the commission recommended a change to Church teaching and were waiting with great expectation for the announcement from the Pope.³⁸

About the same time that the birth control commission was meeting in Europe, another commission formed in the United States, called The Commission on Rhythm.³⁹ This commission was initiated after an International Symposium on Rhythm was held in Washington, D.C. in 1964. The Symposium was co-sponsored by the Family Life Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference at the urging of Rt. Rev. Msgr. John C. Knott and the president of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians’ Guilds, Dr. Clement P. Cunningham, M.D.⁴⁰ After this Symposium a number of physicians and theologians met in Chicago to continue discussions on the topic of rhythm and Church teaching on birth control, and to plan future symposiums on rhythm. President Clement Cunningham (of the CMA) also had a personal meeting with Pope Paul VI in Rome, who encouraged each medical guild to

³⁶ Robert McClory, *Turning Point* (New York NY: Crossroads, 1995), pp. 39-41, 188-90.

³⁷ Majority Report of the Birth Control Commission, “Responsible Parenthood” in *Turning Point* by Robert McClory (New York NY: Crossroad, 1995), pp. 171-87.

³⁸ Personal communication with Professor Bernardo, a sociologist in Padua, Italy and a member of the Birth Control Commission who was appointed for the second meeting in 1964.

³⁹ Herbert Ratner, “Commission on Rhythm: Origin of the Commission,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 32/4 (1965).

⁴⁰ Herbert Ratner, “Commission on Rhythm: Origin of the Commission,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 32/4 (1965), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol32/iss4/20>.

have continuing education on natural regulation methods.

The second International Symposium on Rhythm met in Kansas City in 1965 and included a scientific program for physicians with Ronald Prem, M.D. (University of Minnesota) presenting on "The Basal Temperature Method of the Practice of Rhythm." Max Levin, M.D. (New York Medical School) spoke on "Sexual Fulfillment in the Couple Practicing Rhythm." Daniel McSweeney, M.D. (Tufts University School of Medicine) addressed "The Cervical Mucus Test for the Determination of Ovulation."⁴¹ There were over 300 participants. In 1965 *The Linacre Quarterly* published several articles from members of the Vatican birth control commission who had the intent of maintaining Church teaching on contraception. Oddly, it took fourteen years before the journal published the very important addresses by Pius XII, i.e., the address to Italian nurses at the 1951 congress on large families and the 1951 address to the hematologists that dealt with natural birth regulation and the new hormonal birth control.⁴²

Dr. Herbert Ratner, M.D. of Chicago reported on the International Symposia in *The Linacre Quarterly*, the journal of the National Federation of Catholic Physician Guilds. The continued meetings of the planning commission included a mixture of priests and physicians, including department heads of various medical schools. The Fourth International Symposium on "Abortion, Rhythm and Life" was held in 1969 in Chicago.⁴³ As indicated by the title, the commission had taken on a broader purview by including the rising issues of abortion, sterilization, and other threats to family life and marriage. Of significance is that this commission initiated a new journal *Child*

⁴¹ Herbert Ratner, "Commission on Rhythm: The 2nd International Symposium on Rhythm," *The Linacre Quarterly* 33/1 (1966).

⁴² John C. Ford, "Morality and the Pill," *The Linacre Quarterly* 31/3 (1964), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol31/iss3/9>. John C. Ford, S.J., was a member of the Papal Birth Control Commission. From the Allocution of Pope Pius XI to the Convention of the Italian Union of Obstetrical Nurses (October 29, 1951), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 43 (1951): 835-54. From the Allocution of Pope Pius XI to the "Fronte della Famiglia," the Italian Union of Large Families. November 26, 1951. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 43 (1951): 855-60. From the Allocution of Pope Pius XI to the VIIth International Congress of Hematology. September 12, 1958. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 53 (1958): 732-40.

⁴³ Herbert Ratner. "National Commission on Human Life Reproduction and Rhythm," *The Linacre Quarterly*: 36/1 (1969) : Article 13

and *Health* with Dr. Ratner as Chief Editor.⁴⁴ The journal included articles on rhythm, pro-life issues, marriage, and family topics.

4. The Response to *Humanae vitae* (1968-1978)

Pope Paul VI surprised the world on July 25, 1968 when his encyclical *Humanae vitae* condemned the use of hormonal contraception, other forms of birth control, sterilization, and abortion.⁴⁵ This document led to immediate dissent by theologians, bishops, priests, and the press. At first, the CMA did not respond, and the president at that time seemed to be conflicted on the issue.⁴⁶ In early 1969, however, the CMA board and membership voted to support the Pope and his encyclical.⁴⁷ In the minutes of the 1969 meeting it was noted that many of the younger physicians disagreed with this motion on support of the Pope and his teaching on birth control.

In 1969, the official office and address of the CMA moved to a suburb of Milwaukee. This move included the editor and staff of its official journal *The Linacre Quarterly*. Surprisingly the editor appointed a very prominent dissenting moral theologian (Fr. Charles Curran) to the editorial board.⁴⁸ The editor also published dissenting articles to *Humanae vitae* by prominent theologians like Rev. Richard McCormick, S.J., Fr. Charles Curran, and others.⁴⁹ One of the main issues was whether *Humanae vitae* was a binding

⁴⁴ It seems that this new journal was more orthodox on Catholic Church teaching on human sexuality and contraception than *The Linacre Quarterly* was at that time.

⁴⁵ Paul VI, *Humanae vitae* (Boston MA: Pauline Books, 1968).

⁴⁶ B.J. O'Loughlin, "President's Page: Reality, Reverent Relevance and Reform," *The Linacre Quarterly* 35/4 (1968), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol35/iss4/2>. This article seems to be questioning the authority of *Humanae vitae* and the Pope, as does the article by Heenan below. John Heenan, "The Authority of the Church," *The Linacre Quarterly* 35/4 (1968), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol35/iss4/5>.

⁴⁷ Catholic Physicians Guild, "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians Guilds," *The Linacre Quarterly* 36/1 (1969), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol36/iss1/12>. The members passed a resolution at this meeting to support the Pope and his encyclical on Human Life, *Humanae vitae*.

⁴⁸ Catholic Physicians Guild, "Editorial Board of Advisors," *The Linacre Quarterly* 40/3 (1973), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol40/iss3/12>.

⁴⁹ Richard A. McCormick, "Not What Catholic Hospitals Ordered," *The Linacre Quarterly* 39/1 (1972), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol39/>

document and whether a physician could faithfully dissent from its teaching. The question of conscience also was addressed by articles that asked whether personal conscience could override the teaching of the Pope, even though encyclicals are at the highest level of papal teaching.

Besides theologians, there were prominent physicians who published in *The Linacre Quarterly* and promoted dissent from the encyclical *Humanae vitae*. One notable physician was Dr. André Hellegers, a member of the Vatican birth control commission and a renowned physician at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. He was also responsible for the development of the Kennedy Center for Bioethics at Georgetown University. He was one of the physician dissenters on *Humanae vitae* and argued for a couple's right to follow their conscience on the matter of birth control. He also asserted that the Catholic Church denied the findings of modern science on hormonal birth control.⁵⁰ *The Linacre Quarterly* also published a positive review of Dr. John Rock's book titled *The Time for Change* (that is, change of the Catholic Church's teaching on contraception).⁵¹

In the late 1960s the CMA was one of the largest medical associations in the U.S. with over 10,000 members. At that time it was estimated that there were approximately 35,000 Catholic physicians in the U.S. After the vote on supporting *Humanae vitae*, the membership gradually declined to around 300 faithful members, and the many guilds also declined, became inactive, or just

iss1/7; Charles E. Curran, "Sterilization: Roman Catholic Theory and Practice," *The Linacre Quarterly* 40/2 (1973), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol40/iss2/6>; Richard F. McCormick, "The Silence Since *Humanae Vitae*," *The Linacre Quarterly* 41/1 (1974), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol41/iss1/6>; Charles E. Curran, "Sexual Ethics: Reaction and Critique," *The Linacre Quarterly* 43/3 (1976), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol43/iss3/5>; Charles E. Curran, "The Catholic Hospital and the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Facilities," *The Linacre Quarterly* 44/1 (1977), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol44/iss1/6>.

⁵⁰ André E. Hellegers, "Population, Rhythm, Contraception and Abortion Policy Questions," *The Linacre Quarterly* 40/2 (1973), available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol40/iss2/5>.

⁵¹ James A. O'Donohoe, "Has the Time Come?," *The Linacre Quarterly* 31/2 (1964): Article 10. Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol31/iss2/10>. This is a rather apologetic review of Dr. John Rock's book "The Time Has Come" that called for the changing the Church's teaching on Birth Control.

disappeared.⁵² Thankfully, some of the larger and stronger guilds from Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston held the organization together. Certainly the dissent by bishops, theologians, and the faithful contributed to this decline. There was no support from Catholic medical schools in the United States, and in fact some of the Catholic medical schools became secular institutions while most Catholic Universities lost their religious and faith-based focus.⁵³ The Catholic Medical and Nursing programs in the U.S. offered very little to no information on NFP methods and if they did, it was often negative.⁵⁴

In 1973, after the Supreme Court decision on abortion in *Roe v. Wade*, there was surprisingly little response from the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds. There was a mention by the president at that time about the court's decision, but also a reiteration that *The Linacre Quarterly* and the organization should be reflective of all voices.⁵⁵ There was no mention of a vote or resolution condemning the Supreme Court decision. The next president, Dr. John Brennan (an obstetrician and gynecologist from Milwaukee) called for all members to have information packets on the right to life movement, to be involved in right to life groups, and for Catholic obstetricians and gynecologists to join the pro-life Association of Pro-life Obstetricians and Gynecologists.⁵⁶

Just before Pope Paul VI died in 1978, he again pleaded with scientists to increase their efforts in researching NFP methods. He stated the importance of the knowledge of the biological laws of human fertility and a healthy regulation of births by natural methods. He also stressed the need for more scientific research in this area by stating that "scientific research be intensified in this

⁵² This number is based on discussion with current president of the CMA – Dr. Peter Morrow.

⁵³ Several studies have shown that physicians, professional nurses, and nurse midwives receive little education in methods of NFP, and if they do, it is often presented in a negative light. See:

⁵⁴ Richard Fehring, "Physicians' and Nurses' Knowledge and Use of Natural Family Planning." *The Linacre Quarterly* 62/4 (1965): 22-28.

⁵⁵ Charles A. Bauda, "President's Message," *The Linacre Quarterly* 40/3 (1973): Article 11. Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol40/iss3/11>. The president of the Federation of Catholic Physician Guilds reiterates the need for divergence of opinion on moral issues.

⁵⁶ John J. Brennan, "President's Page," *The Linacre Quarterly* 41/1 (1974): Article 1. Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol41/iss1/1>.

area.”⁵⁷ He reiterated that the scientific work should be coordinated and supported with funds proportionate to the issue in question and to the services rendered. By the time of Paul VI’s death it was clear that most Catholics in the United States rejected the Church’s teaching on birth control.

After *Humanae vitae* was proclaimed, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provided money for the development of a Natural Family Planning Human Life Foundation to study and promote methods of NFP. Besides holding national conferences, the money helped to develop diocesan NFP programs.⁵⁸ Later on, this organization morphed into the NFP and Human Life Foundation, a title change designed to recognize the important link of contraception to abortion. At the tenth anniversary of *Humanae vitae*, *The Linacre Quarterly* published a tenth-year anniversary issue dedicated to *Humanae vitae* and NFP. The issue had articles from the major methods and NFP organizations at that time, but also articles somewhat critical of the Church teaching on birth control.

V. Regrowth, Recovery, and Building the Future

Pope John Paul II, with his larger-than-life personality, his teachings on the theology of the body, his apostolic letter *Familiaris consortio* on marriage and the family, and his major encyclicals *Evangelium vitae* and *Veritatis spendor*, became a stimulus for efforts to promote NFP and the pro-life movement in the U.S. and around the world. *Evangelium vitae* called contraception and abortion the fruits of the same tree and said that contraception necessitates the availability of abortion.⁵⁹ In the same encyclical John Paul II mentioned that building a culture of life requires having centers for the teaching of natural birth regulation methods. Like Paul VI and Pius XII, he called on scientists to study and promote the culture of life but focused his call especially on Catholic universities.

It was most likely the strong example of Pope John Paul II that stimulated

⁵⁷ Paul VI. Letter of Cardinal Villot in the name of Pope Paul VI to the Congress of the International Federation for Family Life Promotion (June 1977) in *Natural Family Planning: Nature’s Way, God’s Way*, ed. Rev. Anthony Zimmerman (Milwaukee WI: DeRance, Inc. 1980), pp. 257-58.

⁵⁸ Larry Kane, “NFP Pioneers: Human Life and NFP Foundation,” NFP-Diocesan-Activity-Report-1994, pages 6-7.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Boston MA: The Daughters of St. Paul, 1981); see John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 1995).

Catholic organizations, and in particular the Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds, to re-focus efforts to support Church teaching on human life and sexuality. In the late 1990s and 2000s the Federation changed its name to the Catholic Medical Association and re-dedicated its mission to be faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church. The CMA began building up the organization guild by guild. It now has close to 4,000 members, over 200 guilds, and an increase of attendance at each of the recent annual CMA national education conferences. Most of its members are faithful to Church teaching on contraception and other life issues, including abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, a preference to care for the poor, and moral end of life care.

As the official journal of the CMA, *The Linacre Quarterly* has been reorganized and bolstered its credibility under the leadership of the Editor-in-Chief Dr. William Williams, M.D.⁶⁰ The journal had a special issue on NFP in 2013 and for the November 2018, a special topic issue on the 50th anniversary of *Humanae vitae*. The CMA also includes a threaded topic of NFP in its national educational conferences, and frequently offers NFP pre-conferences. Finally, the CMA sponsors a week-long "boot camp" for medical students to help mentor them on Church teaching, medical moral issues, NFP, end of life care, and other topics.

In conclusion, I think that the issues of birth control and the use of contraception are among the most important issues of our time. The separation of sexuality and fertility through contraception has fueled the need for abortion. Back in the 1960s, a *U.S. News and World Report* article wondered whether the birth control pill would lead to "sexual anarchy."⁶¹ I maintain that the development of the contraceptive hormonal pill has done more to destroy society and human life than the atom bomb. President Theodore Roosevelt said the broad use of contraception by a society would lead to the destruction of that

⁶⁰ This included having a committed and active editorial advisory board, revised system of peer reviewed articles, and listings in various indexes and articles appearing in pub-med.

⁶¹ Nancy Gibbs, "The Pill at 50: Sex, Freedom and Paradox": "In May 1960, the FDA approved a new oral contraceptive. Somehow we are still fighting about it half a century later – whom it helped, whom it hurt, what it meant and why it mattered." *Time Magazine* (Apr. 22, 2010), <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1983884-3,00.html>. Page obtained 5/26/2018.

society.⁶² The author Pearl S. Buck also warned in a 1968 *Reader's Digest* article that "Everyone knows what The Pill is": "It is a small object – yet its potential effect upon our society may be even more devastating than the nuclear bomb."⁶³

We now know that the separation of sex and procreation has set up a challenge to the meaning of human marital relationships, marriage, gender, and the family itself. The separation of the procreative (life giving) and unitive nature of the sexual act also has led to the greater likelihood of cohabitation, single-parent families, divorce, high levels of adolescent pregnancies, abortion, sexually transmitted infections, fertility rates falling well below replacement, and a medical system that treats fertility like a disease rather than a gift to be cherished and kept healthy,⁶⁴ as well as to a medical system that is willing to treat new human life when unwanted as tissue to be destroyed and discarded rather than protected and nurtured.

In the mid-1960s, the CMA was a 10,000 plus organization of Catholic

⁶² Theodore Roosevelt, "Address Before the National Congress of Mothers," Washington, D.C. (March 13, 1905).

⁶³ Gail Sheehy, "Remembering Carl Djerassi 1923-2015," *Politico Magazine* (December 29, 2015).

⁶⁴ Richard Fehring, "The Influence of Contraception, Abortion, and Natural Family Planning on Divorce Rates as Found in the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth," *The Linacre Quarterly* 82 (2015): 273-82; K. A. Haglund and R. J. Fehring, "The Association of Religiosity, Sexual Education, and Parental Factors with Risky Sexual Behaviors among Adolescents and Young Adults," *Journal of Religion and Health* 49 (2010): 460-72; K. Haglund, L. Edwards, R. Fehring, and J. Pruzynski, "Religiosity and Sexual Risk Behaviors among Latina Adolescents: Trends from 1995 to 2008," *Journal of Women's Health* 20 (2011): 871-77; C.W. Mørch, P.C. Skovlund, I. Hannaford, L. Iversen, S. Fielding, and O. Lidegaard, "Contemporary Hormonal Contraception and the Risk of Breast Cancer," *New England Journal of Medicine* 377 (2017): 2228-39; C.W. Skovlund, L.S. Mørch, L.V. Kessing, O. Lidegaard, "Association of Hormonal Contraception with Depression," *JAMA Psychiatry*, published online September 28; C.W. Skovlund, L.S. Mørch, L.V. Kessing, T. Lange, and O. Lidegaard, "Association of Hormonal Contraception with Suicide Attempts and Suicides," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 1(2018): 336-42; C.H. Kinsley and E. A. Meyer, "Women's Brains on Steroids; Birth control Pills Appear to Remodel Brain Structure," *Scientific American* (Sep 28, 2010), retrieved online March 10, 2015; <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/womens-brains-on-steroids/>; J. Weaver, "Birth Control Pills Have Lasting Effects on Relationships; Using Oral Contraceptives May Affect Relationship Satisfaction," *Scientific American Mind* 1 (2012): 23, retrieved online March, 12, 2015. <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-problem-with-the-pill>.

physicians. If, at that time, a majority of them would have held to Church teaching, on contraception, sterilization, and abortion, it might have made a difference in the U.S., in particular, in Catholic healthcare settings where they were the majority provider. The delay in proclaiming the teachings of *Humanae vitae*, the immediate dissent by theologians, priests, and bishops, and the lack of a strong response by the younger physicians lessened that possibility. Then when abortion was legalized in the United States, the CMA was weakened even more and proved helpless in launching an effective response. Today the CMA is quick to gather its members and its guilds to respond to important moral issues. Without strong organizations like the CMA we have little hope that a culture of life will prevail in modern society.