

The Pill: Controversy a Medical One Now

(Religious News Service)

The twin spectres of controversy and confusion over "the pill" loom once more as special hearings by the Senate monopoly sub-committee get underway.

Outside of the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox bodies, the theological sanctions against oral contraceptives have been rather thoroughly dissipated, but a new "moral" or "ethical" question is beginning to arise and may find exposure in the Senate hearings and in studies by other federal and private research groups.

That question is whether the birth control pill's good effects outweigh the bad, and, perhaps more importantly, have scientists and birth control advocates moved too fast in promoting dissemination and use of the pill without proper safeguards.

According to latest figures, at least 4 million women in the U.S. alone are using certain pills that British medical authorities claim increase the risk of serious, disabling and possibly fatal blood diseases.

Theoretically, the greatest recent theological impediment to birth control devices of all types was Pope Paul's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, issued July 25, 1968, but at the same

time, because of softening relations from many influential Catholics—including some bishops and bishops' conferences—the pill became the one method that many Catholics found acceptable "in conscience."

And the effectiveness of the pill, even among Catholics, cannot be minimized. In New Mexico, for instance, it reportedly reduced the birth rate by one-third, and the state is 40 per cent Catholic.

According to Dr. Bruce Storrs, medical services director for New Mexico's Department of Health and Social Services, the pill has had "more effect" than any other single factor in cutting the birth rate, not just in New Mexico. "This decline is a national trend," he said.

Gail Montgomery, head of Albuquerque's Planned Parenthood Association, commented that widespread community acceptance of birth control, especially through use of the pill, has given the state "healthier, happier families."

However, last October, the World Council of Churches' Population Commission pointed out that the reduction of population on the international scale is not as promising. Looking at immediate figures, it noted that the world's total population is likely to grow annually at 2.1

per cent between 1965 and 1985.

Translated into numbers, the world population will grow by 50 per cent in 20 years.

It seems apparent that while the pill has been effective where information about its use and potential is available, and of course, in the more affluent sections of the world, it has yet to make an impact on the overdeveloped and poorer areas. But the potential is there.

In the U.S., where birth control advocates want the use of the pill to accompany anti-poverty and welfare efforts, politics and morality are prone to clash in a storm of controversy.

A Gallup Poll of a few years ago on the use and effectiveness of the pill, taken from a sampling of blacks and whites, Catholics and Protestants, rich and poor, and from every region of the country, showed some interesting results:

—A majority of persons felt birth control pills should be supplied to welfare recipients free of charge, though, significantly, those in the lower income groups were most opposed to the proposal. Low income families, ironically, are larger and have less capability for proper financial support.

—A majority believe the pill works, but fewer would vouch for its safety over the long haul. Medical authorities are agreed on the pill's effectiveness, and while certain side effects had been noted doctors saw no evidence any were unsafe.

—A majority said that despite some doubt of the pill's effectiveness and safety, they would recommend its use for women who do not want more children.

—It was found that while the Catholic Church condemns use of artificial contraceptives, the average Catholic was moving toward views not far from those of most Protestants on questions of supplying pills to welfare recipients.

In the past few years, not only have Roman Catholics become more liberal in their use and advocacy of the birth control pill, but governments, local and national, have also ventured beyond former forbidden limits, especially in providing unsolicited birth control data to participants in welfare and anti-poverty programs.

Government involvement in birth control education and services now goes beyond national interests and is included in foreign aid programs.

The rise in the popularity of

the pill as the most effective contraceptive means yet discovered has not been without its hazards and detractors.

Aside from arguments of "psychological" and "emotional" risks to women using the pill, there have periodically cropped up certain medical warnings, mainly regarding side effects and long-range effects of the oral contraceptive.

Almost prophetic of the present alarm over certain pills containing an excess of synthetic estrogen, a female sex hormone, was in an April, 1967 report by British health authorities that recent studies suggested the increased risk of blood clots.

Now, three years later, British medical authorities are issuing more pointed warnings, which in England resulted in the abandonment of all pills which contain more than 50 micrograms of estrogen.

American health officials foresee the possibility of new standards for oral contraceptives if the British studies are conclusive in proving the dangers of the high-estrogen content.

Dr. Jesse L. Steinfeld, deputy assistant secretary for health and scientific affairs of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, said that

American medical experts must take a good look at the British data before they recommend any action.

But, he noted, some U.S. officials believe the potency rather than the amount of estrogen used in the pills may be the key to blood clotting problems. He predicted the results of U.S. studies would be published within 2 months, and then "the government will take appropriate steps."

While the high-estrogen pill may be the question at hand presently, the deeper question of overall health hazards hangs menacing in the background and may prove a "moral" dilemma of grand proportions for birth control advocates both in and out of the religious spectrum.

Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.), chairman of the Senate sub-committee on monopolies, asks precisely: Have women been adequately informed on hazards of the pill?

Former Food Drug Administration head, Herbert L. Ley, Jr., said publicly that women need "much greater information" on the pill's risk potential.

If Dr. Ley's admonition has some basis and validity, then it might be asked: What of the other pills? Do their "positive"

effects really outweigh the real or potential bad effects? Are health officials and researchers continuing to test and improve their safety? Have the women who use the various pills been "correctly" informed of "all the effects" of the pill?

Dr. Roger O. Egeberg, top federal health official, said, however, that the "great good" that has come from the birth control pill outweighs its potential dangers, adding that ordinary aspirin poses a greater threat to health. Calling the pill the "best" method now available for birth control, he noted that risks associated with the pill had to be balanced against the risks of giving birth or getting rid of an unwanted infant after conception.

More recently, Sen. Nelson, in preparing for the Senate hearings, said it appears that "a substantial number of (pill) users are not advised of any health hazards or side effects" even though drug manufacturers are required to place these warnings on the packages.

A subcommittee staff member also noted that the hearings will look into "unknown risks," including the possibility that the pill causes cancer in women and damage to unborn babies. He said that while extensive statistics do not exist to support these fears, studies have raised "serious questions."



Returning to Their Homes

Nigerian women and children carry their belongings as they return to their homes in the once secessionist region of Biafra. Since the rebel province was occupied by federal troops, the roads have been crowded with refugees who fled the region during the civil war. (Religious News Service)

Nigeria:

Mission Status in Doubt

By Courier-Journal Special Correspondent

Rome — Despite reassuring reports that Ibo tribesmen are being treated well by victorious federal forces, the future of Catholic missionary programs in Nigeria this week still hung in the balance.

Several ranking Vatican officials said it was anybody's guess as to what the federal government will do about Catholic and other missions that have been operative in Nigeria for 100 years.

Meanwhile, NC News Service reported that all missionaries inside what was Biafra will have to leave the famine-stricken region as soon as other relief workers acceptable to the Nigerian government are available.

According to NC, an official of the Nigerian External Affairs Office stated that missionaries in the distressed area who are found to have no "useful work" will be brought to Lagos.

The government made it known that those agencies that took part in certain Biafran relief projects during the 30-month war would not be permitted to continue their work.

Nor can the Vatican hide the fact that all of the Catholic missionaries in Biafra during the war played vital roles in the relief work there.

"Right at this moment we still don't really know what will be the fate of the missionary movement in Biafra — or in all of Nigeria, for that matter," said an official of the Holy Ghost Fathers, an Irish order that still has 66 men in Biafra.

"If the Nigerian government decides that our men are persona non grata because of the work they did in the relief programs during the war, then it will be the end of our 100 years of work here," he said.

An official of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith said the government appeared to be "particularly annoyed" about fund-raising activities of Catholic missionaries in the United States during the war.

However, the Catholic and other missionaries have some hopes based mainly on cold facts of life.

About 50 per cent of the Ibo tribesmen are Christians and are educated in mission schools and treated in mission medical clinics.

"The government can either let us continue these projects or take them over themselves, something I don't think they are prepared or able to



Your Fortune, Bishop?

Korene Ton, 10, offers some fortune cookies to Auxiliary Bishop Mark J. Hurley at a farewell reception for the prelate at St. Francis church in San Francisco. Bishop Hurley was leaving the city to assume duties as Bishop of Santa Rosa. (Religious News Service)

Will There Ever Be Women Catholic Priests?

No, Says Vatican Paper

Vatican City — (NC) — The Catholic Church could not ordain women priests even if it wanted to, according to the Vatican City daily newspaper.

Although women are equal to men in rights and at least equal to them in worth, they were not called to the priesthood by Christ, a front-page article in L'Osservatore Romano asserted.

The timing of the article (Jan. 23) indicated it was a reply to a recommendation of the Dutch National Pastoral Council earlier in January that women be admitted "to all ecclesiastical functions, not excluding the celebration of Mass."

The reply said:

"No, the Gospel is not hostile to women. Yet Jesus does not call women to the ministry, does not communicate to women the message he received from the Father. It is a fact—and we are bound to recognize it.

"Why could not woman fulfill a public mission of teaching, guidance and worship in this world? The reason is probably that God, just as he

chose a human language when he wanted to speak to men, had to choose a time and a place, and a cultural and social environment, when he chose to make himself a man. His Incarnation would not have been true and real if He had not submitted to the conditioning of our nature. Can the mission of Christ continue in the Church if the conditions of this community are neglected?"

There would be no objection to ordaining women priests if the ministerial priesthood were not something other than the priesthood of the entire Christian people, the article maintained.

"If in fact the powers of the ministry were delegated to the community, nothing today could prevent the community from calling women to the priesthood. But if the ministerial priesthood, as the Catholic Church would have it, is by its essence an 'other' priesthood, the priesthood which forms the men raised to it to the likeness of Christ, then the continuity of transmission of these powers could not put aside the

positive will of Him who alone chooses them and empowers them for the ministry."

The will of Christ is manifested in the Gospels, the article continued.

"He has chosen men, and to them

alone He has entrusted the power of continuing His mission in the world.

"Not even the Church could alter or ignore this will. It is precisely this will that founds the Church and is the law of its nature and of its existence."

Yes, Says Woman Lawyer

Zurich, Switzerland — (NC) — The arguments advanced in L'Osservatore Romano against women priests are "totally outdated and irrelevant," said Dr. Gertrud Heinzelmann, a prominent Swiss Catholic lawyer and champion of women's suffrage.

She has authored two books on this subject and presented a petition to the Second Vatican Council asking for the revision of pertinent sections of canon law.

"Christ appointed Jews only to be apostles; nevertheless no one would claim that Jews only can be priests," Heinzelmann explained.

Christ "fold only men they should baptize; still women can do it today," she said. "Men only were present at the Last Supper; still women partake

of Holy Communion just like men. There are many other good reasons why L'Osservatore's position is untenable, especially since women were prophetesses in the Old Testament and ordained deaconesses in the New. Arguments against a female priesthood taken from scripture ignore the fundamental fact that social conditions have since changed substantially, and are no longer applicable to women's position today.

"I am convinced the day will come when women will be ordained priests, and many Catholic theologians support this view. With so many Protestant churches now ordaining women, the ecumenical trend certainly would not be furthered were we to maintain views no longer acceptable in modern society."

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Bishop Brunin

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Jackson, Miss. — (RN) bishop of Mississippi has that the state's Catholic s not offer "a refuge from ir "Hasty schemes" to create vate school system "will but defraud" the youth o Bishop Joseph B. Brunin a pastoral letter to all C the state.

He said the Church is "cerned" with the contin strong public education s added:

"There should be no m

Louisiana To Thw

Lafayette, La. — (NC) fayette diocesan school b ed a two-point program prevent supporters of pr gated schools from mov Catholic schools.

The board approved ar policy which will restric new students into grade 2 and 10 through 12, and ed guidelines for estab local committees which evaluate and recommend to assure greater racial Catholic schools of each (county) in the diocese."

The board acted as tens ed over Louisiana public tegration. A week earlier for p r i v a t e s e g r e g throughout the state wer the Catholic bishops of issued a statement calli continued support of the pu system.

In the guidelines, the s emphasized concern fo racial balance in Catholi the diocese, thus uph



ARCHBISHOP MA New L. A Irish-Bor

Los Angeles — (RN) bishop Timothy Manning leader of the more th Roman Catholics in the of Los Angeles, regards sgment as "an expres will of our heavenly Fa

The 60-year-old prelat automatically to the post when James Francis Ga tyre, 83, announced his

Archbishop Manning, named coadjutor archbis right of succession last former auxiliary bish Angeles for 11 years.

In a message to Cardin notifying him that he h resignation, Pope Pa

"Amidst pastoral care you have been burdened shown forth the integrit which you have always preserve and steadfastly well as your loyalty to authority of the Church cessor of Blessed Peter.

"You have adhered, hating, to these with a even now observing the garding episcopal tenure