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Open Letter to Participants in the 1980 Synod of Bishops

Anthony Zimmerman, S.V.D., S.T.D.

Father Zimmerman is executive director of the Family Life Association in Tokyo, Japan.

May I kindly present for your consideration a proposal concerning a statement on family life. The statement quoted here was made at the Third Assembly of the East Asian Region of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences held in Tokyo, Japan, March 26-29, 1979. It is my hope that a similar statement be made at the 1980 Synod of Bishops to be held in the Vatican. Here is the way it was formulated at the Tokyo meeting:

The natural family planning movement looks to the development of personal values and attitudes and provides medically-sound instruction for responsible parenthood. We recommend that natural family planning programs be instituted at the local level with the sponsorship and support of the episcopal conference.

This statement follows immediately after the recommendation that "Catholics oppose with renewed vigor . . . particularly the unspeakable horror of abortion."

May I suggest to Your Eminences and Excellencies that the Church can help the faithful to overcome the temptation to commit this "unspeakable horror" not only by opposing abortion directly, but also by offering to help them follow a legitimate and wholesome method of freely planning their families. If we only oppose abortion and contraception, but do nothing to help our people to plan families in

accord with God's law, we may merit to be reproached by Christ for our negligence:

Their words are bold but their deeds are few. They bind up heavy loads, hard to carry, to lay on other men's shoulders, while they themselves will not lift a finger to budge them (Matt. 23:4).

We teach correctly that abortion is a crime, and contraception is an infraction of the law of God and of nature. But have we also done enough to help the people to carry the load, to adjust the burden so that it is a "yoke that is sweet and a burden that is light" (cf. Matt. 11:30)? Have we supported our people sufficiently in efforts to learn and follow legitimate methods of natural family planning?

Recently a woman came to a priest after he had arranged for a teaching session on natural family planning for people of the parish. She thanked him profusely, saying:

You know, Father, we women live day and night with this problem of family planning. We are anxious, we agonize, we live with this problem all the time; it is our world of daily living.

But this is the first time that I ever saw priests come into this world where we live. I had always thought that we must live here alone, that priests will not enter. If we can speak with priests about this, if we can gain peace of conscience — all this is so overwhelming, so unbelievable to me after all these years. It brings tears to my eyes. I am so very grateful to you.

Priests in Japan are not well informed about NFP. This lack of knowledge can be attributed in part to the life-style of a celibate. But there may be other reasons, such as a lack of concern about pastoral duties in the area of family life and the use of sex in marriage. Perhaps they despair too quickly about challenging their people to keep the law of God and of repenting when they have fallen. Perhaps they think people will be scandalized if a priest speaks about sexual morality. Perhaps some priests are not certain themselves about what is right and what is not.

Perhaps the bishops will wish to reflect whether they have sufficiently encouraged the priests to come face to face with this pastoral problem. Perhaps lack of general knowledge about natural family planning is as great among the bishops as among the priests; and there is a certain hesitation about coming to grips with this problem in pastoral letters and administrative measures. A kind of bamboo curtain is drawn between pastoral activities and the conjugal life of our married believers.

When a bishop is deeply convinced about the pastoral benefits of making knowledge about natural family planning available to the people, when he is inwardly moved to do this because *caritas Christi urget me*, then those of his priests who promote this work are blessed indeed, and the people take the message in a spirit of trust and sincer-

ity. But if a bishop tends to stand aloof, the spirit of *invidia clericalis* may tend to suffocate this apostolate. These are not idle words.

On the whole, when bishops and priests have a good chance to learn the truth about this subject from competent persons, many of them experience a new light of hope. Time and again they say: "Finally I see order in what seemed like a dilemma. Now we know what to tell our people. We must provide competent teachers of natural family planning to whom we can send them." This, at least, is now happening in Japan, although to a limited degree.

Twenty-eight years ago, Pope Pius XII expressed the hope that medical science will provide a secure method of natural family planning. The bishops of Vatican II, with Pope Paul VI, expressed the same hope; and Pope Paul VI summed up this desire in a passage of *Humanae Vitae*:

We now wish to express our encouragement to men of science, who "can accomplish much for the benefit of marriage and the family and for the peace of consciences, if by uniting their efforts they seek to shed more light on the various conditions that make possible a proper regulation of human procreation" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 52). It is particularly desirable that, according to the wish expressed by Pius XII, that medical science succeed in providing a sufficiently secure basis for a regulation of births based on the observance of natural rhythms (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 43 [1951]). In this way, scientists and especially Catholic scientists will contribute evidence to demonstrate that, as the Church teaches, "a true contradiction cannot exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to the fostering of authentic conjugal love" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 51).

I am happy to say this desire of the Church hierarchy and the popes for the development of a secure method of natural family planning is now fulfilled as far as the scientists are concerned. Very reliable methods of NFP have been developed and are already being used in many places with remarkable success. What remains to be done is to diffuse such knowledge; and what is even more important, solid pastoral practice on the part of bishops and priests to support and encourage the couples who wish to learn and to follow the way of life of NFP. The scientists have supplied knowledge; now it is up to us to supply leadership to the people, so that they will accept this yoke of the Lord which He promised will be "easy and light" if they take it upon themselves.

It is not my purpose here to presume to educate our esteemed bishops about the art of NFP, but may I recommend warmly that you look through the book *A Reader in Natural Family Planning* in preparation for the Synod. This book was prepared in Tokyo, and then sent to all English speaking priests in the entire world through the very generous help and kind interest of the trustees of the De Rance Foundation. The work of sending them out was done at the Human Life Center in Collegeville, Minnesota.

The book was not intended to be a handbook for the practice of NFP. Rather, it supplies testimony from about 45 scientists and teachers who are well acquainted with the subject of NFP both as to science and as to daily living.

In the book, Dr. Josef Roetzer of Austria advises young couples to learn NFP well during the first six months of married life; and then to have their first baby. He has been teaching for 26 years; and a recent check of the clients indicates that they succeed better than 99% in efforts to practice NFP. In fact, NFP has now become more reliable than the Pill and the IUD.

Dr. Edward F. Keefe of New York has gained much experience during over 25 years of teaching, and proposes observation of the cervix as an additional method, and a means of gaining more days for intercourse.

Dr. Konald Prem, University of Minnesota, also a veteran of over 25 years, gives advice about NFP during the post-partum. Dr. Rudolf Vollman, Switzerland, demythologizes the ancient myth about spontaneous ovulation, and about repeat ovulations during the cycle. There is only one ovulation event during a cycle, he says, a fact which is completely accepted by the medical profession. The egg or eggs live not more than 24 hours, so the time when fertilization can take place during each cycle is very limited, he says.

Drs. John and Lyn Billings tell how a priest, Father Catarinich, helped them to get started 25 years ago. Today the Billings Method is known in every continent.

Dr. H. P. Dunn of Auckland, New Zealand, also a veteran teacher of over 25 years, tells how much better NFP is for clients than artificial methods. He finds that many women can use the *Mittelschmerz* sign in addition to other signs, or even rely mainly on that sign.

Teachers and couples tell about managing the abstinence days; about how to organize courses; about teaching in schools; about finance. A reading of the book will provide a broad background for discussion of NFP at the coming synod.

**Family Planning:
Our Number One Pastoral Problem
Concerning Families**

If a mother is minded to abort what she has conceived in the womb, then that is a basic pastoral issue for her parish priest. Her attitude raises a wall between herself and her God. She instinctively shuns close association with God:

Everyone who practices evil hates the light; he does not come near it for fear his evil deeds will be exposed (John 3:20).

In our mission country of Japan this problem is of immense importance. Ever since the Eugenic Protection Law made abortion legal in 1948, thousands and millions of our people resort to abortion every year. Precise figures are not obtainable, since only a minority of the operations is reported, but it is thought to be likely that 2,000,000 abortions are performed annually in Japan, which is more than the number of babies born and permitted to live, estimated at 1,705,000 in 1978.

A public opinion survey conducted by the Office of the Prime Minister in 1969, covering 3,000 women from all parts of Japan who were selected by random sampling, who belonged to the age brackets of 20-49, indicated to what extent abortion has become prevalent. There were 2,597 respondents. Among them, 42% responded that they had experienced at least one abortion. In the age bracket of 35-39, 49% admitted abortion experience, and more than half had two or more abortions. We know that women try not to admit abortion, so we think this may even indicate less than the actuality.

A survey among clients conducted by gynecologists in 1963 in Aichi indicated that 67% of the 1,727 respondents had experienced at least one abortion. Among those with three or more children, 81% had had an abortion (370 of the 459 women).

Women are usually not happy about their abortion experience, of course. They accept it as something which "can't be helped" due to circumstances. They live in a society in which they feel that they must inevitably accept abortion if they failed in contraception or if they become pregnant before the plans for their marriage are ready. The Office of the Prime Minister inquired into attitudes about abortion in the survey of 1969 mentioned above:

QUESTION: What is your opinion about abortion? Check the answer which corresponds to your opinion:

1. Abortion should be forbidden entirely	11%
2. I think abortion is an evil thing	29%
3. I don't think abortion is good, but it is something that can't be helped	48%
	<hr/>
	88%
4. I don't think abortion is bad	2%
5. One cannot say in general	7%
6. I don't know	3%
	<hr/>
	12%
	<hr/>
	100%

Most women, therefore, do not internally approve of abortion, even though they practice it. Abortion strikes at the heart of their instincts of motherhood. In a survey conducted among 1,500 women in Nagoya during 1968, with 1,431 respondents, the question was asked what they think about the fetus, whether it is a human being or not. The answers:

1. I think it is a human life from the moment
of conception in the womb 67%
2. It is not a human being until
the 6th or 7th month of pregnancy 4%
3. It is part of the mother until it is born 22%
4. I cannot say 7%

From the above we can see that many Japanese women are aware that they kill a human being when they abort; but they also believe that society imposes this unwanted act upon them as something which can't be helped.

What Dr. Theodore Lidz, M.D. said 20 years ago about American women who experience abortion is probably also true about Japanese women today, and will remain so. Dr. Lidz, professor of psychiatry at Yale University said that abortion is "by and large, an extremely deleterious experience in the continuity of the life of a woman." He explained that when a woman loses the baby, she is apt to feel that she has also lost a part of herself. With it there is a loss of some degree of self-esteem: she feels that she has traded off something of self for something outside of self, e.g., holding a job, getting the approval of her husband, or something else. She may have fear about what she has done to herself, and how this will affect her future. If her man urged the abortion, her feelings toward him may be deeply changed. (See Calderone, *Abortion in the United States* [New York: Hoeber-Harper, 1958], pp. 125-126.)

A Japanese woman who has experienced an abortion will probably give up the idea of ever becoming a Christian. She will fear to approach the Holy One since she feels disfigured, unbeautiful, inside.

A Japanese woman who has *not* experienced an abortion will probably also, nine out of ten times, give up the idea of ever becoming a Christian *in present day circumstances*. If she is unmarried, she fears that being a Christian will depreciate her value on the marriage market: prospective parties will hesitate to marry a woman who is not permitted to abort surplus babies. If she is married, she will feel a duty to keep open the option of an abortion and so she renounces Christianity until at least after menopause.

How prevalent is the practice of abortion among our Catholic Japanese? We hope that it is minimal. But is our hope well founded? The rate of infant baptisms among our Catholic population is even

lower than the rate of births for the entire national population. In 1977 there were 5,060 infant baptisms among the Catholic population of 391,804. A comparison of the rate of infant baptisms per 1000 Catholics, with the national birth rate shows that the national rate is higher by about 2.5 points:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Infant baptisms per 1,000 Catholics</u>	<u>National birth rate per 1,000 population</u>
1975	14.4	17.1
1976	13.8	16.3
1977	12.9	15.5
1978	12.8	14.9

From this we cannot draw hard conclusions, but we have reason to think that the terrible practice of abortion has made inroads also among our small Catholic population (391,804 Catholics among 114,340,000 people at the end of 1977). Infants receive abortion instead of baptism.

Whether the woman be Catholic or non-Catholic, if she has experienced an abortion, and knows that she may be destined to experience it again and again, she is apt to become deeply traumatized and somewhat cynical about the whole world which imposes this unwomanly fate upon her. Will she not lose some of the esteem which she should have for a deeply trusted husband? Will she not lose some of her faith and trust in society and all of her fellow humans? Will she not find that a cloud of doubts exists between herself and a faith in a God Who should be a God of Order? If there is a God of Order Who cares about her, then why does He allow this grave disorder to become so systematized and accepted in the world? It must be very difficult for women caught in a world of imposed abortion to think kindly about God and man who do nothing when such indignities are heaped upon her womanhood; when she is or feels impelled to destroy the human who has been conceived in her womb.

Our first priority in pastoral and missionary work for families must be to free women from the de-humanizing trap of abortion into which society has so treacherously and callously tricked them.

The "Contraception Alternative" Is a Mirage

The thirsty traveler in the desert lifts his eyes to the horizon, and sees to his great joy a river of cool running water. He hastens his steps; when he arrives the river has disappeared, the sand and sun are hotter

than ever, and he stumbles on in deeper despair than before. Without being aware of it, however, he may be closer to his real salvation as a result of this bitter experience than when he first saw the mirage.

Is not this the experience of Japan which raised its eyes to see the practice of contraception as an alternative to the harmful abortions? The more Japan promoted contraception, the more did the abortions increase, until the saturation point was reached. (Some think that more skillful use of contraceptives is decreasing the number of abortions finally in recent years, but others deny it.)

The Eugenic Protection Law which liberalized both abortion and contraception was passed by the National Diet in 1948. Abortions reported under provisions of the Law numbered 246,104 in 1949; and 1,068,066 by 1953. The actual number was certainly higher, and it is thought that two-thirds of the effective reduction in births was due to abortion, and only one-third to contraception and natural methods.

A resolution of the Ministry of Welfare's Advisory Council on Population Problems recommended on Aug. 24, 1954, that contraception should be promoted to a greater extent in order to stem the harmful tide of abortions, which was having a bad effect upon the health of mothers.

There were 763 health centers in Japan at the time, with health personnel to give advice on contraception.

These employees promoted methods of contraception through mass media, lecture meetings, films, slides, and personal visitations. In 1953, for example, 1,248,716 persons were educated in 14,745 meetings. Midwives, public health nurses and clinical nurses could receive authorization to give instructions in contraception after having completed accreditation courses. Midwives were authorized to sell contraceptives, adding a small profit motive to their work of teaching. The sale of condoms increased from 84,000,000 in 1949 to 154,000,000 in 1954. And by 1970, there were 970,000,000 condoms produced in Japan, of which 630,000,000 were for domestic use, and the rest for export. But abortions have been a national plague during all the years since 1948, when contraception was liberalized and promoted in Japan.

The Ogino natural method of family planning was also taught to some extent, and has been widely used during all these years. At one point up to 46.5% of those using some method of family planning reported that they were using the safe period method, but it is not possible to say how many were using a condom or pessary during the fertile time of the cycle. According to the results of public opinion surveys conducted by *Mainichi Newspapers* every second year, the methods most in use were always the condom and the safe period, and probably many combined the methods. The statistics of some of these surveys are as follows:

Method (%)	1950	1955	1959	1965	1971	1975	1977	1979
Condom	38.5	56.8	58.3	65.4	72.7	75.0	78.9	81.5
Safe Period	27.4*	45.1	46.5	38.8	32.9	29.7	27.0	23.2
Sterilization		3.6	6.3	5.7	3.9	3.6	5.3	3.9
IUD				4.3	8.1	9.0	9.1	8.0
Pills					1.5	2.4	3.3	3.3
Other**	57.0	45.4	44.1	30.5	19.8	19.3	18.4	14.5

*Including only the Ogino Type Methods.

**Including withdrawal, douche, tablets, jelly, pessary, sponge.

We see here the smorgasbord of contraceptives, and we know that abortions have co-existed with contraceptive practice for these 30 years in Japan. Is it not time to dispose of the myth that more promotion of contraception will do away with the abortion problem? The truth is that "back-up" abortion is a standard fixture of contraceptive programs. It is said, e.g., that among 100 couples using condoms for one year, 14 pregnancies will occur.

It is noteworthy that the "safe period method" is used to such a wide extent in Japan. This gives the hope that the more modern and reliable methods of NFP will be adopted by a large proportion of the Japanese population in the future if we do our share to encourage the people.

Research on modern methods of NFP was carried on in Japan during the 1950's and early 1960's, greatly improving the reliability of NFP over the Ogino calendar method. But when the doctors had finished their research, they found no organization to popularize use of modern NFP. The research gathered dust on library shelves.

When Arnold Family Center began to function in Nagoya five years ago, to introduce modern NFP in Japan, an immediate response was given by interested medical personnel. Headquarters of the Center were transferred to Tokyo three years ago, and the work was taken over by a new national organization called the Family Life Association. The Trustees are Catholics, but the cooperating doctors and nurses are almost all non-Christians. The Association is affiliated with the International Federation for Family Life Promotion (Washington, D.C.) and with the Human Life Center (Collegeville, Minnesota). In the meantime, outstanding gynecologists in Japan have formed an NFP Research Association, and have affiliated themselves with the Family Life Association. The education of doctors and nurses in NFP is still in the beginning stages, but the amount of cooperation is very encouraging. We do not yet have much experience with the practice of NFP by couples, however. We know that it will not be easy, and that families will need much encouragement and support to practice NFP.

The time is now ripe for the bishops to lend support to the promotion of NFP publicly, and to promote it in the Catholic hospitals and

institutions. It would not be prudent, however, for the hierarchy to try to dominate the NFP movement among the non-Christian medical personnel, since this might create distrust and dampen the initiative taken by them for medical and humanitarian reasons. Is it not their task to encourage the movement, to help in obtaining finances, to support and advise the outstanding Catholics who are in it, and to lend their moral support, rather than to try to dominate and control the movement?

**The Practice of NFP Has an Inner Dynamism
Which Heals the Wounds of Modern Family Life
And Rejuvenates Love within Family Circles**

Again and again we hear that the practice of NFP challenges husbands and wives to communicate with each other on a deeper level, to show their mutual love by more consideration and sacrifice for the other, to respect the deeper sensibilities of the other, to wonder at the marvelous physical functions of woman and man, to allow themselves to be taken up by the psychological currents and tides of true love. NFP people do not practice abortion, even when their plans against conception fail, since they become more attached to this beautiful way of NFP life than to their additional family plans. NFP people do not divorce easily, they say, since love binds couples inseparably. NFP parents are more loving towards the children, and give them an example of faithfulness and morality which is the best form of sex education.

“We have seen a return to the Sacraments by quite a number of young couples, who had not been much in evidence for some time,” writes Bishop Thomas Stewart of Chun Cheon, Korea. “We have received into the Church several couples who would not previously (before NFP teaching) commit themselves. Married people have told us that their marriage and family life have improved greatly since they began to make sacrifices for each other. We have noticed that parents are giving more attention to the Christian education of their children, and to family prayers.

“Our catechists tell us that they are now far more welcome into the people’s homes. We find that our people have become more friendly and place more confidence in their priest, realizing that he is concerned with their problems, and can talk about things that were once taboo. . . .” (From Address at WOOMB Conference, Melbourne, Australia, February, 1978.)

A number of clergymen attending the First General Assembly of the International Federation for Family Life Promotion at Cali, Colombia, June, 1977, wrote as follows to the President of the Vatican Committee of the Family:

We know from our experience with families who are practicing the way of life of NFP that family life has improved greatly. . . . Parents are giving more attention to the Christian education of their children and to family prayer. Some pastors find that the people have become more friendly and place more confidence in their priest. . . . Couples have returned to the use of the Sacraments. . . . Some couples, after beginning the use of NFP, have come to have their marriages legitimized. Non-Christians, who had wanted to receive baptism, but feared to take the step because of conjugal problems, have gained confidence when using NFP, and have now come into the Church. We therefore sign this request that special priority be given to the education of the clergy on this question of NFP.

(Signed)

+ Thomas Stewart, Chun Cheon, Korea
Rev. A. Zimmerman, Japan
Rev. J. Menezes, India
Rev. D. L. St. Marie, El Salvador
Rev. G. Gibbons, El Salvador
Rev. M. Welters, Haiti
Rev. P. Richards, Uruguay

Rev. P. Primeau, Colombia
Rev. R. Opina, Colombia
Rev. T. Heuken, Indonesia
Rev. A. Deignan, Hong Kong
Rev. Paul Marx, U.S.A.
Msgr. J. Seli, U.S.A.
Rev. P. Rudman, England

NFP Is Not Anti-Population, Is Not Against Large Families

Our concern is with family life and family welfare; our teaching of NFP must always remain family-centered. If we would propose NFP as a population control measure, we would only destroy its soul, and present a degenerated form of NFP to our families. The Church was and is in favor of outstanding large families, and we know that a number of expert teachers of NFP are themselves blessed with a large number of children. It would be tragic if the bishops would propose NFP to the world in a manner which could be interpreted as something hostile to large families. Therefore it may be prudent to stress the blessedness of outstanding large families in connection with the teaching of NFP.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to recommend NFP to the Synod of Bishops. I hope and pray that the Synod will produce suitable recommendations about this practice.