

May 1967

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Recommended Citation

Dunn, H. P. (1967) "Letter from New Zealand," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 34 : No. 2 , Article 19.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol34/iss2/19>

Letter From New Zealand

The American event of the year in this country was the visit of President Johnson, a most successful venture by any standards. Even a Republican would have felt gratified and flattered by the warmth of the welcome which he received. This is one country above all in which Americans can be sure of being received with generosity and with gratitude for the unforgettable adventures of the Pacific war.

Close on the President's heels, and complaining that Mr. Johnson had stolen his thunder, came the incomparable sporting ambassador, Arnold Palmer. He endeared himself to tremendous galleries of fans by being beaten by the New Zealand champion, left-hander Bob Charles.

This country is experiencing similar medical trends to those reported by all other Western societies, namely, a falling birth rate (from a peak of 27 per 1000 mean population to about 23 per 1000 in 1966), widespread use of the contraceptive pill which is employed by about one quarter of all the married women in the childbearing age groups, and a soaring illegitimacy rate (10.8% of all live births) which is exceeded by only that of Sweden. The worldwide campaign to provide more liberal access to legalized abortion has been extended to these shores. As a forestalling move the

medical Guild of St. Luke and the legal Guild of St. Thomas More had a joint meeting in which the matter was discussed and from it motions were sent to the Minister of Health and the Minister for Justice warning them of our opposition if such legislation were to be contemplated here.

Your correspondent had an article on the reliability of the safe period (the rhythm) published in *Aust. N.Z.J. Obstet. Gynaec.* (1966), 6: 331. This was a clinical study of 359 Auckland women, its main interest being in the method of selection of the subjects. The usual birth control surveys give misleadingly favourable results because many of the subjects will be suffering from unrecognized secondary sterility and could not become pregnant if they wished to do so. The criterion of selection was therefore that the subjects must have achieved a subsequent pregnancy, whether planned or unplanned. This strict requirement limited the group to a small number of women, and also gave the worst possible impression of the rhythm but it is the only scientific way of achieving an accurate assessment of its effectiveness. The total failure rate was 11.87 per 100 woman-years, which is better than the rates reported for many forms of contraceptives except for the anovulants.

We should stress the advantages of this system, which are: it preserves physiological intercourse, which is an aspect of the virtue of purity; there is no cost, no danger, no drugs, and no equipment; and it fosters sexual discipline in marriage. This latter factor of restriction on the frequency of intercourse has usually been regarded as a disad-

vantage but we should point out to patients that such a discipline is an inescapable obligation for a stable marriage and it is a protection against the social ills which derive from undisciplined sexuality.

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