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History of the Biological Control of Human Fertility

Jan Mucharski, O.F.M.Cap.

Fall River Modern Printing Co., 1981. Available through Married Life Information, 1 Manor Drive, Oak Ridge, N.J. 07438; 146 pp., paper.

This is the most ambitious chronology of the history of natural family planning which has ever been written. A lifetime of research is summarized at the end in 25 pages of selected references. Our present knowledge of the subject is not due to any one sudden insight, discovery or invention, but rather to a myriad of myths or theories, some of which stood the test of scientific proof.

Father Mucharski is a sociologist and marriage counselor who studied for years in Warsaw and Paris before becoming an author himself. Under the pen name of Paul Thyma, he has written *The Double-Check Method of Family Planning*. The book reviewed here is really a logical and chronological explanation of how Father Mucharski developed his double-check method.

Every culture in history had its own theories until Kyusaku Ogino, a Japanese gynecologist, gave his formula for determining fertility in women. His articles in 1923 were based upon microscopic study of corpora lutea. Hermann Knaus, an Austrian gynecologist, used a manometer to study uterine contractions while a balloon was inserted into the uterus. He developed a formula based upon the responsiveness of the myometrium to injected pituitary extract. To doctors suggesting sterilization as a means of preventing contraception, Knaus proposed abstinence during the time of possible conception. Leo Latz of Chicago published *The Rhythm of Sterility and Fertility in Women* in 1932.

For the past 100 years, temperature curves have been related to menstrual cycles. Father Mucharski says, "In 1945 the progesteronic thermal theory was so developed that it could be used as a basis for what came to be called the 'temperature' or 'thermal' method of controlling human fertility."

Many of our contemporaries are given recognition in this booklet. Very little is said about studies on sperm survival. There is scant information on Dr. Eric Odeblad's monumental studies on cervical mucus. The names of very few women are included. Perhaps 99 percent of the research done on fertility of women has been done by men. This may change.

This booklet belongs in the library of every teacher and every student of natural family planning. After completing the massive task of researching this subject, Father Mucharski may write a sequel on all that has been said concerning the "morality of the biologic control of fertility." Better yet, he might review his correspondence with all those interesting personalities who have devoted their energy to NFP and write less of a chronology and more of personal insight into their motivations and accomplishments.

— John J. Brennan, M.D.