

Germany, *Humanae Vitae*, and Dissent: A Tragic Irony

By John F. Kippley

An article on Cardinal Walter Brannmuller's truly informative Statement on the Catholic Church in Germany was especially interesting to me because of my German heritage. Who could have imagined that some Germans still resent Rome's victory over a German army in 9 A.D?

The situation in Germany carries a unique irony. It was a German Catholic priest in 1935 who invented the Calendar-Temperature form of Fertility Awareness, generally referred to as Natural Family Planning. It was in 1967 that a German doctor published a study in which that system showed a 97% level of effectiveness in avoiding pregnancy and in which a more conservative Temperature-only system showed a 99% level of effectiveness. That was several months after the papal birth control commission had given its two conflicting reports to Pope Paul VI and 13 months before the publication of *Humanae Vitae*.

Three huge questions arise: Did the German bishops and/or scholars know about this research? If so, did they make sure that this information was given to the Pope? Or did they knowingly suppress this information? I'm not sure if anyone who has first-hand information is still alive.

Background. Ovulation—the release of an egg from the ovary—was discovered in 1923, and researchers began working to determine its timing in each cycle. Hermann Knaus of Germany and Kyusaku Ogino of Japan are the best known researchers, and by 1930 Knaus recognized that Ogino's calculations were better than his own. Their calendar-rhythm system became known as the Ogino-Knaus method, and many couples used it quite effectively. (Our first landlord told us that they used the OK method in the 1930s with 100% effectiveness for their family of three children.) On the other hand, some were disappointed. A German Catholic pastor, Father Wilhelm Hillebrand, found that some of his parishioners were having surprise pregnancies at a rate they found discouraging. Then Father Hillebrand learned that a woman's waking body temperature rises after ovulation, so he collected 76 temperature charts from 21 women. On that basis, he counseled couples to wait for a few days of elevated temperatures before considering themselves to be in the time of post-ovulation infertility. Eventually, the system was settled at 3 days of well-elevated temps.

In the June 9 1967 issue of the German Medical Weekly (*Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift*), Dr. Gerhard K. Doering published the results of his years of research. His data came from 59,566 cycles of 996 women over a period of years. Most of the data came from 689 women with 48,214 cycles in which there was an unplanned pregnancy rate of 3.1 per 100 woman-years. Stated another way, that's a pregnancy-avoidance effectiveness rate of 96.9 percent. Another 307 women with 11,352 cycles used the Temperature-only rules to determine the time of post-ovulation infertility. Having marriage acts only in that time they experienced a surprise pregnancy rate of 0.845 per 100 woman years. That's a pregnancy-avoidance rate of

99.2 %. You can read an English translation of the entire study at <http://www.nfpandmore.org/Doering-1967-100315.pdf> .

In summary: In Germany, couples were learning the Doering system of Fertility Awareness and practicing it with very high effectiveness when they thought they needed to avoid or postpone pregnancy. This is a system more effective than the typical use of barrier methods and with none of the health hazards of hormonal birth control. Yet in 1968, the majority of the German bishops refused to affirm *Humanae Vitae*. Germany was probably the leading country regarding NFP education and availability; perhaps it was also the most dissident country in the world. What a tragic irony!

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Sex and the Marriage Covenant: A Basis for Morality (Ignatius)

Natural Family Planning International, www.nfpandmore.org

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