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Credidimus caritati
we have put our faith in love

**WOOMB International Ltd
continuing the work of
Drs John and Evelyn Billings
of bringing the
Billings Ovulation Method®
to the world.**



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John J Billings Memorial Lecture : Bioethical Considerations of Natural Family Planning

WOOMB International Conference, Costa Rica, 27th May, 2018

Dr Martin Tantaleán



Dr Tantaleán is a surgeon and specialist in Integrated Medicine and Health Management with a special interest in Natural Fertility Regulation and natural conception assistance for couples with unexplained subfertility.

Dear Monsignors Salazar and Ramírez, esteemed directors of WOOMB International, it is a great and undeserved honor to be able to deliver these words. However, when Marian Corkill, on behalf of the WOOMB Directors, asked me to deliver the John J Billings Memorial Lecture at this conference, I felt that it was a gift of providence and at the end of these reflections you will be able to understand why I could not refuse this invitation.

As most of us know, our beloved John Billings, who excelled in all areas as a doctor, sportsman and musician, left for the Father's house in 2007, after a wonderful life's work. Those of us who were able to attend in 2009 at the WOOMB International Conference in Australia, had the honor of listening to Bishop Peter J. Elliott's wonderful paper, "Nature and Grace and the Billings Ovulation Method®"; at that first lecture dedicated to the memory of John Billings. It made sense, because in those days our beloved Evelyn was still with us. The Bible says: Jesus answered, "Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: 'This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh? They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.'" (Mt. 19:4-6)

This wonderful work, of which we have the privilege of being part, would not have been possible without Evelyn Billings, who was with John throughout his life and like him, had many awards at universities, and included the decoration of St. Gregory by St. John Paul II, which Dr. John Billings had previously received. Therefore, with the permission of the Directors of WOOMB International and the organizers of the meeting, let me make a change in the name of this conference, which I am sure Dr. John Billings would have approved, to **Bioethical Considerations of Natural Family Planning - Conference in memory of the Doctors John and Evelyn Billings**, because it was a work done and even more, lived as husband and wife.

For the purpose of these short reflections, it is opportune first to remember our mission, the mission of man on earth. At a time when it is fashionable to talk about the vision and mission in companies, we will start by reviewing the mission of man on earth as instructors of the Billings Ovulation Method® and we will finish by reflecting on what our vision should be.

We'll refer to the Bible for this. In the book of Exodus we find the ten Commandments, because God wants man to be happy, knows what is good for us and gives us guidelines to achieve happiness and so return to the Father's house. It is at the moment of creation, when God creates man in his image and likeness, that he gives man his mission "God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it'" (Gen. 1, 28a). Therefore, our mission and reason for being is to continue this work of God in the transmission of life. Remember that although St. John XXIII convened the Vatican Council, it would fall to his successor, Blessed Paul VI, to continue the Council in the midst of a strong discussion about family planning, to the point that some councilors suggested closing the Council. It is through these difficult circumstances that he brought out this beautiful encyclical *Humanae Vitae* that centres us and summarizes the doctrine of

the church when he tells us *"If therefore there are well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances, the Church teaches that married people may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth in a way which does not in the least offend the moral principles which We have just explained"*. [HV n.16]

This is sometimes not well understood, and we have both extremes. I remember when I was explaining this in a conference in a small room and suddenly one of the participants shouted at me *"Dr Tantaleán, tell me one reason why you cannot have more children!"* On the other hand, I received multiple emails from Catholic people telling me that *"you have to modernize, times change and you have to accept contraceptives"*. It should therefore be remembered that marriage is between three persons: the spouses and Christ and it is the only sacrament administered by the spouses, not the priest. Therefore, we are the spouses who in prayer must discover what God is asking us and we must make those decisions with an attitude of openness to life, seeing in the children a "gift" from God.

It is necessary that this attitude is also reflected in our way of speaking. I believe that it is partly influenced by the medical language that is very negative (when a laboratory result says that we are healthy, this is reported as "negative" and it is because doctors are thinking in illness and not in health). Often when we speak we do not use the appropriate words. Sometimes we have heard the saying "natural contraceptives", which is an aberration, conception is "beginning of life" and nobody who is in favor of life can be against it (contraception = against conception). The correct thing is to talk about natural fertility recognition methods (NFR).

In the light of *Humanae Vitae* it is clear that we can teach and even practice natural fertility recognition methods and be in an attitude of sin. To illustrate this, I'll share with you a real life case: *A teacher married the daughter of the owner of the school where he worked. She was also a teacher. Everything seemed fine. But then his wife questioned whether he had married her for love or for her money and decided that she will not have children with her husband.* Even though they would have used natural methods of fertility recognition, this attitude is not correct.

The Church is not against contraceptive methods because they are artificial: it is not enough that the means are lawful (that is, they do not threaten life or disturb the conjugal act) but the motivation must also be lawful, remembering that our mission is to be open to life.

Drs. John and Evelyn Billings not only knew and taught this, but they lived it. Several years before *Humanae Vitae* was published, when Fr Maurice Catarinich in Melbourne asked Dr. John Billings to collaborate on research that would help many couples who had difficulties planning their family, John promised his help for 12 weeks! John himself always stated that they *"had always wanted to have a large family, they were not worried about that."* At the time of his departure to the Father's house, the Billings living family numbered 8 of their 9 children, 39 grandchildren and 31 great-grandchildren. It is a beautiful testament and gives us the courage to continue this work because they lived it.

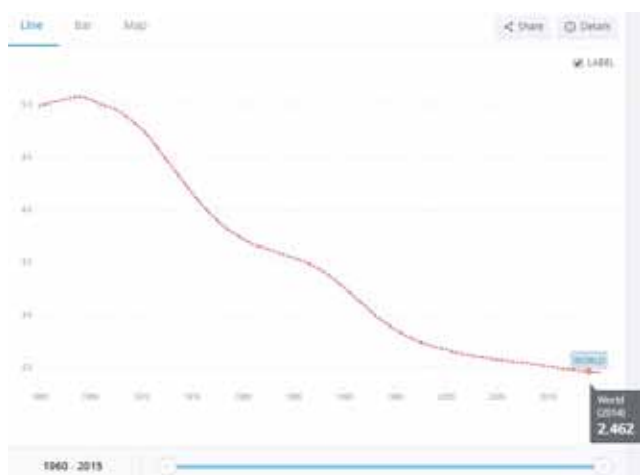
Men and women have been created in the likeness of God, equal in dignity, but different, so as to complement each other. The sexual act, this intimate way of expressing the love of the spouses, has a double function: procreative as well as unitive or affective. If we change this, the conjugal act is de-natured and we run the risk of treating people as objects and not as persons.

We have the Christian family model in the Holy Family, with the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. He has no "important role", he simply takes care of his wife and son, but it is Mary who "steals" Jesus to ask him to perform his first miracle at the wedding of Cana, in the context of marriage. She realizes that something is amiss and she tells Jesus "...they have no wine" to which Jesus replies "Woman what is it to me. My time has not yet come." But Mary, with the love of a mother and the certainty that her son will not deny her anything, naturally says to the servants "Go with Him and do what He tells you." Today our heavenly mother keeps telling us to follow Jesus and do what He tells us.

We must change our language to be positive. We now face the culture of death denounced by St. John Paul II. We must talk about methods of natural fertility regulation, or we could fall prey to the contraceptive mentality that has serious consequences.

About 15 years before *Humanae Vitae* was published and as part of the studies he carried out, Dr John Billings interviewed women who had experienced difficulties regulating their families for various reasons, and he found that several women had started the use of contraceptives. He realized then that this practice could have serious consequences in the future and we are witnessing it nowadays.

To promote contraceptives, it is argued that “we should not have several children because there are not enough resources”, but that contraceptive mentality has led to a global decrease in the birth rate in the world and the ageing of the population worldwide. To maintain the population, there must be 2.1 children for each woman (Global Fertility Rate), that is, for every 100 women 210 children are needed to replace parents and those who will die due to accidents and illness. In some countries and cities, this global fertility rate has fallen below 1.8, thus running the risk of the disappearance of ethnic and cultural groups. In Europe and other parts of the world we see another effect in the raising of the retirement age to maintain an adequate workforce.



In developing countries, covert birth control is being promoted, seeking to associate development with fewer children, but the reality is that the developed countries achieved their development when they had higher birth rates than the present. It is said that we must have fewer children because there isn't enough food. However, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations “one third of all food is spoiled or wasted before being consumed by people”. It is a problem not of resources, but of selfishness of man who does not distribute resources and imposes contraception and it has been accentuated since the Cairo Conference in 1994.

<https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN>

For this reason, those of us who are spreading NFR methods that open our eyes, allowing us to see the wonder of God's creative work, and recognize the gift of life and family, we are a barrier, an obstacle for the development of the culture of death and therefore it will try to exclude us.

In Peru, until 1994 the population law and the code of ethics of the Medical College of Peru (CMP) prohibited sterilization as a method of Family Planning (FP) because it was not accepted that, with so many FP methods available, the body had to be mutilated. It was perceived as not rational. Imagine one of the best football players: the doctor detects a coronary problem and explains that he cannot play again, but since he knows that soccer is his passion, he says “we have to amputate your legs to make sure you won't play.” This is what we mean when we say that “surgically sterilizing” a person is a disproportionate measure. After the Cairo conference, the Population Law of Peru and the CMP code of ethics were changed and a policy was developed that was later denounced as “The Green Plan”:

... the most important problem in Peru is that its demographic trends after the Second World War have reached epidemic proportions ... we must stop demographic growth as soon as possible. A treatment for existing surpluses is urgently needed. The generalized use of processes of sterilization of the culturally backward and economically pauperized groups is convenient. Without these unnecessary burdens, access to certain levels of well-being by weak family groups would be facilitated. Tubal ligation should be standard in any health center that attends childbirths, unless there is reliable proof of economic solvency.

F. Rospigliosi “Control Natal: las Fuentes de Fujimori” Revista “Caretas” 21/09/95

Between 1995 and 2000 more than 331,000 tubal ligations were conducted, many of them coercive and financed by international entities that promote the culture of death, gender Ideology and legalization of abortion.

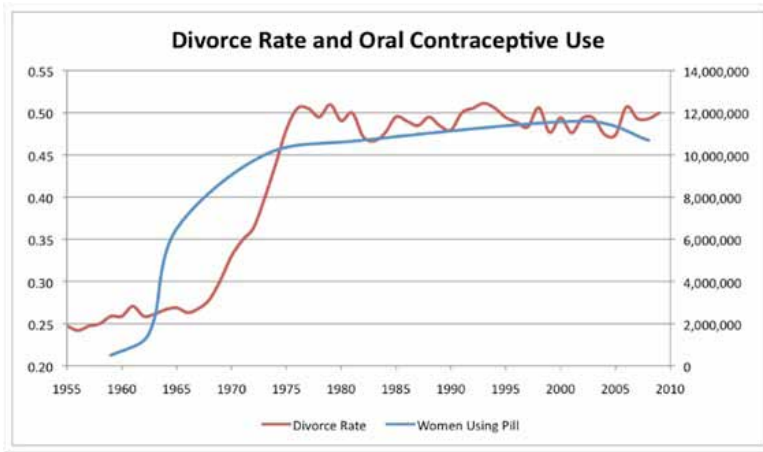
In an internet course of the World Bank, where the objectives of the millennium are stated, the 5th goal was abortion legalization worldwide, as a right. As there was resistance from several countries the goal was included as a strategy to fight against maternal deaths – but the decriminalization of abortion has no great

impact on maternal deaths: In Poland, a developed country, one of the few in Europe where abortion is prohibited, maternal mortality ratios are around 8 per 100,000 while in India, a country in development and where abortion is decriminalized, the maternal mortality ratio is above 400 per 100,000 live births.

In the year 2002 I was in a meeting with ministers of several countries and the Minister of Bolivia was talking about “sterilization fairs” that we had already experienced in Peru which not only provided sterilizations, but also disguised abortions. I asked the speaker, thinking that he would be annoyed by my question: “What do we want, do we want to control poverty or control the poor?” To my surprise, he replied with the utmost naturalness “Dear young man, Bolivia is a poor country, I cannot control poverty, I have to control the poor.” Blessed Paul VI, seeing what was happening, denounced it saying: “It is necessary, in effect, not to suppress the diners, but to multiply the bread.” [Paul VI, speech to the UN 4/10/1965]

Unfortunately, when the culture of death is imposed, NFR methods are a barrier and therefore there is no interest in their dissemination. It opens the doors to the “morning after” pill as a means of abortion. We must be vigilant.

As Dr. John Billings intuited, contraception would have serious consequences. According to official US statistics from 1955 to 2010 as seen in the graph, blue is the use of contraceptives and red divorce rates. They seem two curves mounted one on another, denoting a clear association and that brings dire consequences that affect family, spouses and society.



As instructors of the Billings Ovulation Method® we must keep in mind what the instruction *Dignitas Personae* tells us, which was promulgated on the 20th anniversary, of *Donum Vitae*. It has 3 chapters, but we will look only at the first one: Chapter 1 Anthropological, theological and ethical aspects of life and human procreation: number 6: “*The human being must be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception and, therefore, from that moment the rights of the person must be recognized, especially the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life.*”

<https://heartiste.wordpress.com/2013/05/29/the-pill-and-divorce-the-real-connection>

The human being must be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception. It must be recognized that the first right of the person is the right to life. Given this, the NFR methods are the best and perhaps the only valid option. Professor Jérôme Lejeune, geneticist, currently in the process of beatification, told a United Nations meeting: “*From the moment of fertilization, from the moment when all the information contained in the sperm comes to the female cell, there is a human being.*”

These words were spoken at a time when the United Nations was beginning to promote the decriminalization of abortion. After this conference he called his wife and said “I just lost the Nobel Prize” and that’s how it was - the geneticist who discovered Trisomy 21 as a cause of Down syndrome, is considered the father of modern genetics and deserved the Nobel Prize for Medicine.

Many contraceptive methods attack life and therefore euphemisms are used to confuse, because there is a lucrative business that began in the last century towards the 60s with the introduction of hormonal contraceptives. The paradigm of the last century was “having sex without children”, now in this new century it is “having children without sex”, and all issues of assisted conception and invitro fertilization come into play.

Hormonal methods are postulated to have several mechanisms of action: they seek to prevent ovulation, they change the cervical mucus so that sperm do not pass and alter the motility of the tubes (which can be an abortive mechanism, because if the embryo arrives as a morula - 3-4 days after conception - it cannot be implanted) and can also affect implantation factors in the endometrium. If you read the inserts of the

contraceptives you will see that "...taken before 8 days of the beginning of the menstrual cycle, there will be no pregnancy." As we know, after 8 days a woman could have ovulated, how then can they guarantee that they will work in that cycle? It is because they know that it will also not allow implantation and that mechanism is also abortive.

Intrauterine Devices (IUDs), particularly Copper T, also have an abortive effect. In fact, until a few years ago, PAHO recognized that "The IUD does not favor the implantation of a fertilized egg" (that is abortion), but WHO says that pregnancy starts after implantation (perhaps to favour the business of fertilization in vitro), giving two arguments: the first is that a high percentage of pregnancies is lost in the first trimester (which is true) and second, that "individuality has not been established." In this regard, sometimes, at the time of implantation, the embryo can be divided, generating twins, or triplets and therefore it is argued that before implantation there is no "embryo" but a "pre-embryo". To this we must respond that although what has not been established is the "singularity", that is, whether they will be one or more, what is established is that there are already one or more people. It is one thing that there are spontaneous abortions and another that we provoke them.

Of the origin of human life, *Dignitas Personae* tells us: "The origin of human life, on the other hand, has its authentic context in marriage and the family, where it is generated through an act that expresses the reciprocal love between man and woman." A truly responsible procreation for those who are to be born "is the fruit of marriage".

John and Evelyn knew this. In a meeting with St. John Paul II they were told that "you always have to talk about these things in the context of marriage" adding "I know, you talk about marriage."

John Billings has written "*Marriage is a building that must be built continuously every day*".

Marriage must be a reflection of God's love for his Church and Dr. John Billings had this very clear, when he said: "*Man can advance in age and know that every time he looks at his wife he is seeing the most beautiful woman in the world.*"

Dignitas Personae also alerts us about new problems related to procreation and new therapeutic proposals that involve the manipulation of the embryo or the human genetic heritage. On this, there are a couple of things that I would like to highlight: we must be alert, with regard to assisted conception and surrogate maternity, this includes what is known as a rental belly, which, some people believe could be "a new and more terrible form of slavery". An NGO denounced not only human trafficking but also found women abducted, raped, enslaved and even involved in the business of harvesting the organs of their fetuses, which is why some countries have banned surrogate maternity. At the other extreme we have in-vitro fertilization (IVF), cloning and experimentation with embryos, where embryos are manipulated and eliminated. There have been several successful results in therapies with adult stem cells, particularly in post-myocardial infarction treatment, Parkinson's, etc. but the investigations are oriented to obtaining and patenting new species for the production and sale of organs for transplant and for that purpose they are trying to mix human genetic material with animal genetic material.

We must be alert to these issues, for on many occasions a couple will resort to these procedures in order to have children but we must keep in mind that the end does not justify the means. In IVF some embryos are left frozen. They are not conceived as a result of the love of the spouses in a conjugal act, but through the laboratory, through a biopsy. If it is with a donor and this donor is the brother or father of the husband, then will a child be his son, his brother or his cousin?

There is no solid or scientific evidence to say that pregnancy begins after implantation: these are arguments to allow this trade and the decriminalization of abortion promoted by the United Nations. The WHO says that before implantation it is a pre-embryo, however, we speak of "embryo bank", when biologically it is the same human being. Why if biologically it is the same, in the laboratory is it an embryo and in the womb of his mother a pre-embryo? That is the worst discrimination for the place of residence. On the other hand, there is a substance that researchers have called the Early Pregnancy Factor that begins to occur between 12 to 16 hours after conception and which serves to prevent the mother's defenses attacking the baby who could be immunologically incompatible to her. The interest in research is whether this substance could help

prevent rejection in organ transplantation. If the pregnancy started after implantation, as the WHO argues, why is this substance that occurs within 24 hours of conception, long before implantation, called the Early Pregnancy Factor? On the other hand, all embryology books show and describe human life from conception day by day.

To conclude these reflections, I would like to propose a Vision for instructors of the Billings Ovulation Method® and for that we have our models in John and Evelyn Billings.

I do not know about you, but for us they are the only people we have met who had friendships with 3 popes (Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI), they have shared with saints, St Mother Teresa of Calcutta (whom they met late in the 70s in Australia), St John Paul II, and with Blessed Paul VI.



The Billings, husband and wife, have taught us with their lives that our vision is to “live holiness in the ordinary.” The Billings Ovulation Method® should not be seen as an end, but as a means to carry out our apostolate. Benedict XVI said that although we Catholics should interact with non-believers and we must in many cases give in on some things, there are 3 non-negotiable principles that we should take care to defend which John and Lyn Billings had very clear:

1. Respect for life, from conception to natural death. John Billings once said *“Abortion and euthanasia are crimes that no human law can legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; on the contrary, there is a serious and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection. You have to love your neighbour as yourself (Lk 10:27): Promote life. Thus, when we teach the Billings Ovulation Method®, we teach truth and love, two of the foundations of marriage and the expression of the natural law for all people.”*
2. That marriage is between man and woman. In this regard, Dr. Evelyn Billings in an interview I found in COMPASS said *“This is what marriage is about. Living together in peace and cooperating harmoniously.”*
3. The right of parents to educate their children on issues of values and faith. It is timely to remember what Dr. John Billings said while spreading the Ovulation Method in Europe *“The spouses, cooperating with what the Creator has designed in nature, are at peace with their consciences and live in an atmosphere of love, joy, security and peace that is best for the development of the children, each of whom has experienced the beauty of having a father and a mother who love them and who love each other.”* Something that is now no longer possible in some countries, such as Spain or Germany, a “secular education” is being imposed, complete with gender ideology that, under the pretext of “equity and equality”, seeks the “deconstruction” (destruction) of sexuality and family.

In view of this, we must bear in mind that the State has a duty to perform three functions to ensure common welfare:

- Promote what benefits society as a whole. For example, in Peru, the government promotes education and health and, in doing so, is not discriminating against anyone, since it benefits everyone.
- Allow those things that do not affect others.
- Prohibit things that affect the common welfare. For example, paedophilia.

When the natural order is left aside, you enter a field where everything can be valid and there are no points of reference. In the Netherlands, to cite a case in 2006, a political party with a very nice name that speaks of "love of neighbour" was legalized but what they propose is the decriminalization of paedophilia.

The commitment that we must have, as instructors of the Billings Ovulation Method® which is a means to evangelize and approach the model that the Drs Billings have left us, is summarized in the Prayer for Life in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* of St. John Paul II:

Oh Mary, bright dawn of the new world, Mother of the living, to you we entrust the cause of life. Look down O Mother upon the vast numbers of babies who are prevented from being born (referring to the scourge of abortion), of poor people whose lives are made difficult, (while elsewhere food is thrown away), of men and women who are victims of brutal violence (in many countries Christians and others are persecuted), of the elderly and sick killed by indifference or out of misguided and presumed mercy (euthanasia).

Although John and Lyn Billings have departed from us, they left us their witness and many teachings that we should cultivate and that should distinguish us in our apostolate in order to approach our Vision:

1. Unity with the church and its pastors. Although the religious have vows of obedience, the laity do not, but we must remain in unity with our Church and our pastors. Remember as the Bible says: "If the branch is not attached to the trunk it cannot bear fruit." In a 1953 interview, Dr. John Billings confirmed that he and his wife were convinced that contraceptives were going to be very bad. It was 15 years before *Humanae Vitae*, when John said: "We do not know what our pastors will say, and we will keep aligned with them, but we will not stop teaching the Billings Ovulation Method®".
2. Much prayer. Prayer was the source that fuelled the work of the Drs Billings and must also be ours.
3. Openness to life. The Drs Billings, as we have already mentioned, not only preached but lived it intensely.
4. Be persistent. When they started their work they did not have much support and rather they often found distrust. But they were persevering in their research and teachings and currently the Billings Ovulation Method® is the most widespread method of Natural Recognition of Fertility in the world.
5. Not be intimidated by adversity. They commented, on a visit to Guatemala, that they had faced a lot of opposition from their medical colleagues who received with skepticism the new knowledge that they tried to share. But John and Lyn patiently answering their questions and today we see right in the front row, this beautiful delegation of instructors from Guatemala, the fruit of that work.
6. Know how to listen. Dr. John Billings always stressed that he learned a lot by listening to the women he sought to help.
7. Act with joy. To paraphrase St. Teresa of Calcutta we can say that "a sad instructor is a bad instructor ...". Joy is something that stood out and is testified by all those who knew the Billings. Dr. John Billings commented how seeing Lyn for the first time in the anatomy dissection room at the university he fell in love with her – love at first sight. When he later told Lyn, she answered "well, there ... I did not have much competition."
8. Humility and knowing how to recognize our limitations. When Dr. John Billings began his research with the women in Melbourne and they asked him if he could guarantee that it would work, he humbly and honestly acknowledged "I cannot guarantee the results, but I will do my best." Despite all their merits, academic degrees and distinctions, John and Lyn Billings were always very simple and humble.
9. Always ready for cooperative work. The Drs Billings throughout the years have known how to open their doors to work in a cooperative way. We all know of the collaborations and friendships with the professors James Brown and Erik Odeblad whose independent investigations gave the scientific explanation and validation to the rules of the Billings Ovulation Method®.
10. Have a missionary spirit. Successful professionals, with multiple recognitions and a large family, they had the detachment to go around the world spreading their knowledge. We must also be willing to respond to God's call to continue this wonderful work.

Finally, I would like to share with you a little testimony of our family. Our children had often accompanied us as small children when we went through the cities of Peru teaching the Method and one day we discovered that they learned more than we imagined. Our oldest son, who is now 23 years old, was then 10 years old and in school. In his science and environment course he had been taught about the beginning of life and pregnancy. In an exam he was asked: "what is required so that a pregnancy occurs?" All children answered "a sperm and an egg" as that was what they had been taught, while our son answered "*a sperm, an ovule and the helpful mucus*" (in Spanish we say cervical mucus and he thought it was helpful mucus as helpful in Spanish is "servicial" and sounds like cervical).

I want to thank the WOOMB Directors for the providential invitation to share with you these reflections. There is one detail that you probably did not know: my wife Yanina and I met the Billings in March 1993 at a Congress we had in Peru. When I heard John's lectures I realized that I did not know anything about the Billings Method and was captivated. One night we were able to share with John and Evelyn in the house of the founders of CEPROFARENA, the Giusti couple, just a few months before we got married (we got married on 20 August 1993) and in the middle of all the stress that comes with the preparations for the wedding and the natural fears for such an important decision that is going to be undertaken, the sight of that marriage gave us the confidence to move forward. Seeing them, he playing the piano, she singing, marked our lives, reaffirmed us in our decision and today we feel that this is a beautiful gift from God and thus why, as I mentioned at the beginning, I could not refuse this invitation to speak, because since then our apostolate began and with it the commitment to the spread the teaching of the Billings Ovulation Method® and with God's help, it is going to be our apostolate for the rest of our lives.

"It's not so important how much we do, but the love with which we do it."

Credidimus Caritati : We have put our Faith in Love

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Report of WOOMB International Conference and Training Programs

San José, Costa Rica

27th April - 2nd May 2018

The International Conference, celebrating 50 years of Humanae Vitae, was, for the first time, held in America. The success of an event of this magnitude depends on a great deal of hard work and goodwill. The people at WOOMB Latinoamerica and WOOMB Costa Rica were able to show how this can be done and we know that our beloved John and Lyn Billings would have been smiling down on us over this time. The WOOMB Costa Rica team, under the direction of their presidents, Cristian Calvo Masis and Grettel Mendoza Rivera not only took on the challenge of arranging venues, meals, accommodation, transport to venues, registrations and learning materials for all participants, but also a city tour and a gala dinner which highlighted the joy of being part of the wonderful international Billings Ovulation Method® family.

The conference was attended by delegates from 27 countries – the largest number to date at a WOOMB International conference. They included 22 Affiliates and delegates from five other countries who are working to bring the authentic Billings Ovulation Method® to the people of the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rica, Panama, Honduras, and Bolivia. Their enthusiasm was impressive, and we trust that with the guidance and support of WOOMB Latinoamerica, they will soon apply to become Affiliates of WOOMB International Ltd. WOOMB Latinoamerica consists of those countries in Latin America affiliated with WOOMB International and is an example of how much can be achieved when people work together for the common good. They have been facilitated for many years by Maria Garcia from Chicago and her dedication was recognised at this Conference when she was awarded the John and Evelyn Billings Award (see page 11).

Dr Martin Tantalean, the Keynote speaker, presented the John Billings Memorial Lecture entitled: Bioethical Considerations of Natural Family Planning (see page 2).

The program also featured papers from experts in the fields of philosophy, ethics, science and medicine, and practical papers giving insights into the use of the Billings Ovulation Method® for all women. For example, Silvia Etchegoyen from Argentina presented a most inspiring paper on her work with blind teacher, Samanta Osterloh. Silvia and Samanta have vast experience teaching blind couples and Silvia demonstrated some of the resources they use - beads for charting, Braille literature and a slide rule which has different textures for the phases of the cycle. The PowerPoint presentation that Silvia used has examples of these resources and can be viewed on the download section of the Conference website. <http://www.woombconference2018.com/Home/Downloads>. (Conference photos and speakers' presentations in English and Spanish are also available on the website.)

Other papers on Scientific Facts of the Billings Ovulation Method®, Nutritional Factors and Fertility, Working with Sub-Fertile Couples, the Influence of Teacher Skills in the Effectiveness of the Billings Ovulation Method® and the Billings Ovulation Method® in the Costa Rica Health System were also presented. Professor Pilar Vigil was unable to be with us due to ill-health, however her paper on Treatment of PCOS was ably presented by Susana Godoy with Pilar available via Skype to answer questions.

Unfortunately the WOOMB Spiritual Advisor, Fr Hattie OMI was also unable to be with us but he was present via a video played at the beginning of the Conference. This video can be viewed at <https://www.woombinternational.org/index.php/news-events>

We were joined by a number of priests including the Bishop in charge of Family Pastoral in Costa Rica, Mons Manuel Eugenio Salazar, Colombian Bishop, Mons Libardo, who is the Spiritual Advisor to WOOMB Latinoamerica and Fr Rony Solano, Spiritual Advisor to the Costa Rica team. Mons Libardo was present throughout the Conference and for the Teacher Training Programs. Three priests attended the Training Sessions, Fr Dismas Kline from Nicaragua, Padre José Silvio Ojedo from Argentina and Fr Arturo René Pozo Sampaz from Ecuador. We thank them for their witness and support of the teachers. In addition the Archbishop of San José, Mons. Jose Rafael Quiros, attended a session for priests at which Mons Libardo was the guest presenter.



Following the Conference presentations, and joyful celebrations of cultural dancing, the city tour and gala dinner, it was back to work on Sunday afternoon when 190 people gathered for the three Teacher Training Programs offered to participants by the Directors of WOOMB International and experienced Spanish

speaking trainers. The Basic/Upskilling Teacher Training Program for 55 participants included delegates from countries wanting to gain authentic information about the Billings Ovulation Method®. The Extension Training Program catered to the largest group with 92 participants from 14 countries. The Curricula Overview program, attended by 37 experienced trainers from 15 countries, discussed adult learning and explained the rationale behind the Basic/Upskilling and Extension Training Programs. At the end of each day our sessions were concluded by a beautiful Mass.

The Directors wish to congratulate and offer our deepest gratitude to WOOMB Costa Rica and WOOMB Latinoamerica for hosting the WOOMB International Conference and Teacher Training Programs. WOOMB International and its Affiliates are unique in continuing to grow and offer a service to couples, despite no external funding, due to the generosity and commitment of the dedicated volunteers who recognise the importance of sharing with others the good news of love they have received.

Over recent years the WOOMB International Conferences have been held in Kuching, Malaysia which was geographically central for many of our Asian teachers; Zagreb, Croatia, which attracted European delegates and this year, San José, Costa Rica, which gave Latin American teachers an opportunity to attend. Where to next? We leave that to the Holy Spirit to inspire the hearts of those who could make it possible.

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Inaugural John and Evelyn Billings Award

The Directors of WOOMB International are delighted to announce the inaugural John and Evelyn Billings Award at this International Conference in Costa Rica.

This award was first suggested to the Directors by our Spiritual Advisor Fr Joseph Hattie, OMI. In agreeing to establish this Award the Directors gave serious consideration as to who would be a suitable recipient.

In choosing someone for this award the Directors wanted to acknowledge a person who has shown by their actions they have the passion to be an active participant in the spread of the authentic Billings Ovulation Method® to every woman on earth. In pursuing this passion there will always be setbacks and a worthy recipient is someone who does not let setbacks stop them from continuing to spread the “good news” of the Billings Ovulation Method®

As you would be aware there are many worthy recipients for this Award but there was a unanimous decision made by the Directors, particularly considering the role this person has had in bringing together so many people – which can be seen by the response to this particular conference. The person who has been chosen for the Inaugural John and Evelyn Billings Award is **Maria Garcia**.

Maria started her career with the Billings Ovulation Method® when she was certified as a Billings Ovulation Method® teacher with BOMA-USA and she became the Coordinator of NFP for the Archdiocese of Chicago. In this capacity Maria was involved with teaching Hispanic couples the Billings Ovulation Method® and was concerned by the discrepancies in the information both in the English and Spanish material available at that time.

We first met Maria when she attended a WOOMB approved Upskilling Teacher Training Program in St Louis in 2000. She impressed us at that time as someone who was determined to ensure authenticity, particularly for Spanish materials and teaching. In 2003 she joined Gustavo Machado and Sr Beatriz Santos, both present this evening, in the Spanish Language Translation Team which was established to ensure that all Spanish material on the Billings Ovulation Method® reflects the Method as taught by Drs John and Evelyn Billings.

In her role on the translation team she proved to be a person who was dedicated and committed and with her outgoing personality was able to gently bring together people who shared her passion for the Billings Ovulation Method®. Very quickly it was clear that although people in Latin America spoke the Spanish language, there were a number of different words used for the same term in different countries. Maria was able to negotiate a compromise so that the word chosen would be the most appropriate word for all to

understand. In addition, different countries had their own literature and some were hesitant to change over, however with Maria's guidance all Billings Ovulation Method® Affiliates in Latin America are now using the same approved literature.

One of Maria's greatest achievements is as Coordinator of WOOMB Latinoamerica. This coming together of Affiliates was first begun in Melbourne Australia in 2009 when Maria, who was representing the USA, and representatives from five Latin American countries, present at the OMR&RCA Conference, decided to work together under the umbrella of a new regional group - WOOMB Latinoamerica. As a result of this initiative, WOOMB Latinoamerica has ensured that all teachers have been updated, and only authentic material is used in the teaching and training. This initial group has outreached to surrounding countries, so there are now twelve countries in Latin America affiliated with WOOMB International. As the WOOMB Spanish Language Liaison Person, Maria has been the main contact with the Directors and has been the catalyst for the success of WOOMB Latinoamerica.

Maria has also been very involved in her own national organization BOMA-USA, as past Chair of the Education Committee and by ensuring that the Hispanic community in the USA has access to Spanish speaking teachers and authentic materials in the Billings Ovulation Method®.

The Directors have also had the pleasure of working with Maria on a number of occasions where she has acted as the bridge between the Directors and the participants through her skills in translating Teacher Training Programs from English into Spanish.

This is a brief overview of Maria's achievements with the Billings Ovulation Method® and WOOMB. However, we know she would claim her greatest achievement is her role as wife, mother and grandmother.

We are so grateful that God directed Maria to this work and give thanks for all she has achieved.



Maria Garcia was presented with Rosary Beads made from Australian stones. She is pictured here (third from left) with the Directors of WOOMB International and Mons. Libardo, Spiritual Advisor to WOOMB Latinoamerica, who blessed the Rosary Beads for her, in front of an icon of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Vale Louise Specken

15.2.1936 - 28.4.2018

Continuing our series paying tribute to the pioneers of our organisation from around the world, we bring you this tribute to Lou Specken, past President of WOOMB BC in Canada. With thanks to "BC Catholic" and Dr Margaret Keresztesi for permission to use extracts from their tributes and to Doreen Beagan for photos.

Lou Specken, a former president for the World Organization of the Ovulation Method-Billings (WOOMB) in B.C., is being remembered as a warrior who wouldn't let misinformation about family planning and the death of her husband stop her from promoting the Billings Ovulation Method®.

"I like to refer to her as a warrior for natural family planning," said longtime friend Father Joseph Hattie, OMI. Father Hattie, former director of the Office of Marriage and Family Formation for the Archdiocese of Vancouver, met Specken in 1978. That was the same year she and her late husband, Art, founded WOOMB B.C. to teach the Billings Ovulation Method® (developed by doctors John and Evelyn Billings of Australia).



Art and Lou Specken (left) with John and Lyn Billings. (Photo courtesy Mike Specken)

"Lou was a trained nurse and an intelligent lady who liked to get things done and was very kind, helpful, and well organized," he told *The B.C. Catholic*. As well as founding WOOMB B.C., she and her husband sat on the board of the organization on a national level. "She was involved in helping maintain higher standards of teacher training and the ability of the teachers to keep up to date."

One of her biggest challenges, said Father Hattie, would have been demystifying natural family planning for doctors and nurses who had never heard of it or had it confused with the ineffective rhythm method. "In those days, it was difficult for a number of couples who were using natural family planning and didn't have physicians that supported it," said Father Hattie. Now, thanks in part to her work, more medical professionals understand the method and support it.

"I am very grateful for the work she did for these couples and for the Church at the time. I hope others will come forward to fill her shoes. It will take a few people to do that because she was so good."



Lou Specken cuts a cake with Father Joseph Hattie, marking the 60th anniversary of the Billings Ovulation Method®. (Photo courtesy Doreen Beagan)

Lou spent four decades promoting NFP throughout B.C. and in the Archdiocese of Vancouver's marriage preparation program.

In 2015, she received the Archdiocese of Vancouver's Stewardship Award for helping hundreds of couples to naturally achieve pregnancy, postpone pregnancy, and monitor their reproductive health without the use of harmful drugs or devices and within the moral precepts of the Church.

Dr Margaret Keresztesi remembers: "I first met Lou Specken about October 1996. I was a family practice doctor in Comox, BC. I was attending RCIA because my anaesthesiologist husband had chosen to return to his Catholic roots. I considered that to be a strange mid-life crisis. I had every intention of remaining a lifelong Anglican but chose to attend a Billings Method refresher course as his parish had no Billings instructors. We had learned the Method as part of a Diploma in Reproductive Medicine in Auckland New Zealand in 1975 so it was my ecumenical gesture to make BOM available to the Comox Valley.

"The meeting was held in Coquitlam in the home of Art & Lou Specken. We were welcomed so warmly and made to feel very much at home, along with four other couples. Art & Lou took the teaching in turns using a slide presentation and their own experience. They not only taught the science and the technique, but also conveyed the effect that natural family planning had on a couple's relationship. In a very clear and simple way this older couple displayed the beauty of their couple relationship, disciplined by cycles of romance and restraint leading to passion and full expression as a couple.

"Their generosity and individual concern for each of us was very touching. Along with other challenges presented by the RCIA programme it spurred me to greater honesty in grappling with the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality. Their witness to the beauty of a sacramental marriage was powerful in overcoming for me a large obstacle to full communion with the Catholic Church. As a result, Julius was welcomed home and I was confirmed and received first Eucharist on 8 Dec. 1996, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

"After that Lou kept in touch and supported us with supplies and by arranging teacher training weekends to keep us up to date. She was extremely supportive of Dr. Agnes Tanguay and me when we presented a Billings Ovulation Method® workshop at Family Medicine Forum 2005, a national meeting of family practitioners.

At any Billings Ovulation Method® activity we planned or attended Lou would be there or would support us by phone calls and prayer. She was a small clear light who accepted this work for Christ and did it with great love. Our Lord and our Lady and Art will be welcoming her home with smiles. "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."

Lou died April 28 in Coquitlam. The funeral Mass was held May 15 at All Saints Church. She leaves behind four children, 12 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Her pride in their children always shone forth.

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WOOMB International Re-Affiliation Report 2017

September 2017 was the time for all affiliates of WOOMB International Ltd to apply for re-affiliation. To be eligible for affiliation these organisations must show that they are teaching the Billings Ovulation Method® without variation and that they use authentic materials for teaching the Method and for the training of teachers.

We are delighted to report that all 40 organisations were offered re-affiliation following their applications being accepted by WOOMB International Directors. In addition an application for affiliation was received from Benin, Africa, putting the total number of Affiliated Organisations with WOOMB International as at May, 2018 at 41. Organisations affiliated with WOOMB are listed below.

In applying for re-affiliation, Affiliates were asked to provide a brief report of their activities over the last three years and to provide some data as well as a summary of the highlights and challenges they have experienced.

It was heartening for the Directors to read these applications and to see the extent of the spread of the Billings Ovulation Method® in all countries in which there is a WOOMB Affiliate. Teacher training programs are being offered and in some countries the number of training programs presented and the numbers of participants attending is a testament to the dedication of the training teams and the obvious need for the Method for all couples in every country.

At the WOOMB International Conference in Costa Rica in April this year the Directors were delighted to meet participants from 6 countries who are not yet affiliated, but who have indicated they are keen to continue working with WOOMB Latinoamerica to gain affiliation with WOOMB. Bolivia and Honduras have already asked for further training and Panama, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, and Dominican Republic are all in touch with our WOOMB Latinoamerica team. The model WOOMB Latinoamerica has used to reach out to surrounding countries has proved to be highly effective and the Directors are grateful for their enthusiasm, selflessness and their initiatives.

Highlights

The highlights that Affiliates listed were varied and showed the dedication and outreach of our teachers in all countries. The following diagram shows the similarities that appeared in most of the reports. Much energy is being expended in training teachers of excellence with Affiliates offering regular opportunities for training and upskilling and some offering programs specifically for health professionals.



Challenges

The challenges experienced were also similar with very little outside support from either Government or Church authorities so that the spread of the Billings Ovulation Method® is being offered by skilled volunteers who devote time to be trained and continue to be upskilled so that they can offer couples the very best service to achieve their aim of achieving or postponing pregnancy. Very few organisations are able to have the type of administrative support which allows them to devote their time to teaching and training, so that many of our teachers are becoming a “jack of all trades” as they embark on steep learning curves and approach Governments and others seeking support, as well as developing promotional activities to increase knowledge of the Method. Common threads from all reports was the lack of finance and the difficulty of attracting new teachers as young couples take on responsibilities outside the home, limiting their time to devote to teaching the Method.

What was clear in reading these applications and reports was the influence of the Holy Spirit with so much dedicated and unrecognised service to couples by all our teachers, worldwide. We are indeed blessed to belong to this wonderful global Billings Ovulation Method® family and all who keep the dream of the Drs Billings alive – that every woman on earth has access to this Method.

Countries Affiliated with WOOMB International Ltd as at June 2018: Argentina Australia Brazil Benin Canada Chile Colombia Costa Rica Croatia Cuba Ecuador Egypt England Ethiopia France Hong Kong/China Hungary Indonesia Ireland Italy Malaysia Mexico New Zealand Nicaragua Pakistan Peru Philippines Poland Romania Scotland Singapore Slovakia Spain Sweden Tanzania Trinidad & Tobago Timor Leste Uruguay United States of America Venezuela Vietnam

Benin : Planning Familial Naturel par la Glaire Cervicale

Affiliated with WOOMB International



The Directors of WOOMB International are delighted to announce the affiliation of Planning Familial Naturel par la Glaire Cervicale from Benin, with Mrs Laure Salmon and Dr Olivier Salmon as accredited teachers of the Billings Ovulation Method®. The Salmons were trained and supervised by Gerard and Marie Renard of France. They have been given approval from the Ministry of Health to teach the Method to the people of Benin, and hold authorization by the Ministry of Secondary Education to teach it in colleges for the 2017-2018 school year.

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Question to Senior Teachers

How do we help women to keep an accurate record?

a) Is the observation of what the woman sees on her underwear relevant for her record?

The literature states that there are two observations: sensation and visual. In our teaching we stress the importance of the sensation experienced at the vulva but also discuss the importance of recording what is seen by the woman as she goes about her daily activities. In also stressing that touching the discharge is not the way to identify its qualities or to take mucus from the toilet tissue to examine it, some have believed we have said that anything that is seen on the toilet paper or underwear is not a relevant observation. This is not what we, or the literature is saying.

If a woman is dry and she observes she has a discharge - wherever that discharge is seen - perhaps on the tissue or the underwear, it is telling her that she has had a discharge from her body. If she is to record dry (green stamp) she must be able to state that she felt dry and there was no discharge. However, this same woman may then notice that while she still feels dry she now notices a discharge and the only place she sees it is on her underwear. This is relevant. The second part of the requirement for a dry BIP is not there - although she feels dry, she sees something. There has been a change. Perhaps it may be later identified as infertility, but when she first sees it, it is different - a change.

In the changing, developing pattern of fertility the woman will often describe the changes she sees, as well as feels. It is not just the relevance of what she notices on the toilet tissue that is important. She may notice that what she sees on her underwear also changes as the days progress. While it is possible that the mucus on the underwear may look different from what it looks like on the tissue, due to it not being fresh and having dried, the woman will recognise that the pattern she is observing is either unchanging or changing.

So yes, visual observations are relevant wherever they are seen, however common sense would indicate that what she sees on the tissue on a particular day, may in fact look different when she observes it on her underwear when it is dried. She learns to recognise these differences - if it is part of her unchanging pattern she will recognise it as infertility. If it is changing, it is indicating potential fertility.

b) How do we help women to identify the slippery sensation when they say they do not sense any feeling of lubrication when they are walking around?

For some women the sensation of slippery is very easy to identify. These women know what we are talking about, as even before they had heard of the Billings Ovulation Method®, they were aware of a feeling of lubrication on some days of their cycle – some had even equated this with high fertility. Others have more difficulty. Some of them may have a diminished symptom, others are not sure what to expect.

Many women will state that the only time they are aware of a lubricative or slippery sensation is when the tissue slips easily as they wipe over the vulva when toileting. This is relevant. It is indicating a sensation which is slippery. It may be that these woman have a diminished sensation and this is all they will experience as slippery, but for others, it may also help them to now identify the differences in the vulval sensations between slippery and wet as she goes about her other activities.

It is important that the teacher helps the woman to identify the difference between words that describe a sensation and words that describe a visual observation. The woman who says she notices the tissue slips as she wipes, is not looking at the tissue and describing what she is seeing as slippery - she is sensing a feeling of slippery or lubrication when the tissue passes over the vulva. That is a sensation and is therefore relevant. On another occasion she might describe this sensation as sticky or perhaps dry.

Using the toilet is part of “what she does every day”. It is not just when she is walking around - that is when anything coming from the cervix will be moving down the vagina to the vulva, but it is also relevant to observe the sensation during her other daily activities e.g. toileting and showering. It is often this awareness of the slippery sensation as the tissue passes that alerts the woman to the sensation of slippery which she may then recognise during her other activities.

These questions affirm for us why the teacher must “ask the right questions”. If the teacher asks the woman to describe what she has written on her chart (and what she may not have written) on a day by day basis, it will soon become clear to the woman and her teacher whether the pattern she is describing is fertile or infertile.

As Dr Lyn Billings often used to say to us: “Let the chart reveal the pattern”!

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From the Archives

Rev J Hattie OMI, Spiritual Advisor to WOOMB International

Many people are surprised to hear that when Dr John Billings took up the call from Fr Catarinich he began by teaching couples to follow the Rhythm Method complemented by basal body temperature. His search of the literature revealed that laboratory studies had been done of cervical mucus which appeared in the “middle of the cycle”, however there was no evidence that anyone had asked women if they were aware of its presence. Dr Billings then asked women if they were aware of the discharge and was amazed that they answered positively.

Dr Lyn Billings wrote in *The Billings Method* in 1980 that “the refinement of the Billings Method led to the progressive elimination of temperature-taking, which many women themselves initiated, during the late 1960s.” She wrote that, unlike the Temperature Method, the sensation and mucus observations told women all they needed to know of fertility both before and after ovulation and solved the problems of delayed ovulation. She further wrote “All attention was given to the signs of the mucus. Following this, the rapid increase in knowledge of the mucus as an indicator of fertility or gynaecological abnormalities occurred. For the first time, the ‘problem cases’ were solved and it remained only to verify and disseminate this information by providing a competent teaching service.”

Recently we were alerted to a statement in which the writer reported on a conversation he had with Dr John Billings in which temperature taking was discussed.

As teachers of the Billings Ovulation Method®, we know that the Method provides accurate information on the fertility and infertility of all phases of the cycle, both before and after ovulation. Temperature gives no information about pre-ovulatory infertility and is a less precise marker of ovulation. In discussing the statement and whether or not we needed to make a response, we sought the wisdom and insights of our spiritual advisor, Fr J Hattie, O.M.I. who knew both Drs John and Lyn Billings very well. We would like to share his response:

The devil doesn't stop getting fake news out there, using half or partial truths and by ourselves, we cannot keep up with him. We do the little we can, like with the history of the Method in the Bulletin, and correcting serious errors. Then we trust in Divine Providence.

However this writer is misrepresenting Dr John Billings with regard to temperature taking.

As you know, when Dr John began to tackle the question of fertility awareness, he explored all the scientific knowledge available and the NFP Methods that had been developed to that point. He then added to the scientific knowledge by his discovery of Nature's biological marker of fertility and its development, "the cervical mucus". With that scientific discovery he was able to develop a very simple natural fertility management method that taught women what their own bodies were telling them and which encouraged them to know themselves better, to have confidence in their own bodies and in their decision making with respect to their fertility. When the teaching of the Ovulation Method began, Dr John provided couples with the best of what science had discovered to that point - the Ovulation Method and Sympto-thermal Method

As the science underpinning the Billings Ovulation Method® was refined with the help of others, especially Professor James Brown and Professor Erik Odeblad, these findings correlated exactly with the clinical observations of women using the Method and it became scientifically and clinically obvious that the Billings Ovulation Method® could stand on its own and thus there was no need to teach both methods. The Ovulation Method became officially entitled the Billings Ovulation Method®.

This wisdom of the decision to cease using temperature records was verified by their travel experiences and by their efforts to teach NFP to the poor, e.g. the Philippines: It became evident that a thermometer was inappropriate for women who lived in homes with one room and dirt floors. It was obvious not only that they could not afford to buy a thermometer, but only a few had a place to keep it clean and safe from breakage. Further, the temperature readings were affected at times by rapid changes in weather conditions.

Since the women demonstrated that they could use the Billings Ovulation Method® successfully and without cost, it didn't make sense to ask them to take on the expense and effort of a second method for a cross-check.

John and Lyn also discovered, especially among educated women, how "easy it was" for some to have more confidence in technology than in their own bodies and in their own judgement. This tendency has become much more evident and prevalent in our time, with the development of technology and its application to some methods of NFP. In turn, this orientation encourages many women to rely on technologies which are far less effective for postponing or achieving a pregnancy than the Billings Ovulation Method®. The use of this kind of technology tends to put the pressure of conjugal love decisions on the woman. Also, the unexpected pregnancies which occur using these forms of technology undermine confidence in NFP in general.

This is the context in which Dr. John's alleged reason for giving up using the temperature as a cross-check must be understood because: "the temperature sign was too easy to do". In his experience, women found it so easy to take, record, and evaluate their temperature readings that they forgot or ignored their mucus signs". Compared to the effort needed for a woman to learn to trust her own body and her decision making, taking her own basal-body temperature is so easy it encourages her to forget her body and its cervical mucus pattern, even though it is the most accurate biological marker of her fertility. It tends not only to deprive her of the knowledge of herself which every woman has a right to, but it also undermines her ability to pass this important knowledge on to her children.

From *Humanae Vitae* to *Amoris Laetitia* : love's revolution in Francis' time

Dr. Cristian Vargas Manriquez¹

Physician - bioethicist – Billings Ovulation Method® instructor - WOOMB Int. ethics advisor



The joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church. As the Synod Fathers noted, for all the many signs of crisis in the institution of marriage, “the desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant, especially among young people, and this is an inspiration to the Church.” As a response to that desire, “the Christian proclamation on the family is good news indeed”.

Francis *Amoris Laetitia* n.1

Introduction

In this year of the 50th anniversary of the encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, given to us by Paul VI in 1968, I would like to reflect on that prophetic document while recognizing that the acceptance of the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church and the practice of those teachings differs in different regions of the world. Perhaps one of the toughest challenges for a Christian is to discern God's will - in the image and likeness of the Trinity - in life itself, in its multiplicity of dimensions: relationship - love - procreation - mercy. As Francis reminded us during his pastoral visit to Chile², the next Synod of bishops will be on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: “We must discern God's will on a daily basis, in concrete circumstances and situations as diverse as each one of us”³. It is well worth stopping for a few minutes to think about the implications of that discernment, particularly in relation to human love.

In our time, different types of constraints have increased which prevent us from accepting in a natural way, brave and courageous decisions, a kind of general numbness of conscience, a subjective and collective wellness which removes our willingness to search for love with hope. On the one hand the consumer individualism makes us lose sight of our own dignity and that of others. Family disintegration - so prevalent in our times - brings the pain and suffering of a broken promise and the crisis experienced by the children facing the loss of the source that feeds their life - the love of their parents. The ecological crisis - not only environmental but human that decimates many human communities and their environments. Abusive forms of economic relationships that prevent the integral development of whole groups of society. The establishment of unjust laws that perpetuate injustice, perverting the law regarding the pain and suffering of human life, in many cases ending by clouding the vision of a good life against the culture of discard - limiting the dialogue between reason and faith. Removing traditional “shelter” in the family, turning communities into “ghettos”, and the lack of credible witnesses to facilitate the encounter of Love.

Nevertheless, love is stronger – it encounters us, embraces us and comforts us, over and over again, in every moment of our lives, with all our virtues and defects. As in the parable of the “good Samaritan”, love finds us half dead and badly wounded, but firm in the faith that He will heal our wounds, lead us to safety and reaffirm our hope, because the life of the Church is the life of every man and woman, and the way of the Church is the way of the family. For this reason:

Let married couples, then, face up to the efforts needed, supported by the faith and hope which “do not disappoint ... because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us”; let them implore divine assistance by persevering prayers; above all, let them

draw from the source of grace and charity in the Eucharist. And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is poured forth in the Sacrament of Penance.

Paul VI *Humanae Vitae* n.25

Part I: Love in Times of War

How many wars take place within the people of God and in our different communities! In our neighbourhoods and in the workplace, how many wars are caused by envy and jealousy, even among Christians! Spiritual worldliness leads some Christians to war with other Christians who stand in the way of their quest for power, prestige, pleasure and economic security. Some are even no longer content to live as part of the greater Church community but stoke a spirit of exclusivity, creating an “inner circle”. Instead of belonging to the whole Church in all its rich variety, they belong to this or that group which thinks itself different or special.

Francis *Evangelii Gaudium* n.98

Both, *Humanae Vitae* by Paul VI and the more recent document *Amoris Laetitia* by Francis have been written at times of conflict within and outside the Church. The magisterial teaching on human love was strongly resisted in academic, political and ecclesial fields when it was enacted in 1968, which resulted in almost zero acceptance, dissemination, or inculturation in the biomedical field, and meant it was also excluded from incorporation in the formation of boyfriends and husbands even to the present day. Nevertheless, this bellicose atmosphere at the beginning did not prevent the development of natural methods for the regulation of fertility in obedience to the doctrine of responsible parenthood by groups of scientists, physicians, religious and people of good will. However there was, in reality, a degree of “passive resistance” in discernment, pastoral practice, the formation of priests, the training of health professionals and the married life of spouses which resulted in many being guided by the prevailing culture of pragmatism of economic and international organizations, and by a theologically pastoral *laissez faire* attitude which did not generate any discomfort of conscience but rather a kind of river of “freedom” without restriction or direction.

Francis faces a different scenario almost 50 years later. The contraceptive mentality and the ready availability of the morning-after-pill is prevalent all over the world. Transnational pharmaceutical companies and international agencies have established a “modern” vision that considers the use of contraceptive technologies as a synonym for development and progress and abortion as a right – almost a duty! The implementation of the ideology of gender in many places has distorted the meaning of the body and seeks to establish legal restrictions under the pretext of non-discrimination. The unitive and procreative nature of the marital act is a taboo subject, considered conservative, where the truth and meaning of sexuality⁴ are unfathomable for the common man. The education of young people on sexuality lacks reliable witnesses at home and is addressed in schools in such a manner that only the health aspects – such as to avoid the spread of disease and prevent pregnancy, are addressed. The number of couples marrying is declining as is the number of births and populations are rapidly aging.

The first challenge therefore is that of discernment, the formation of conscience and action. Francis has emphasized that spouses should enjoy a mature autonomy in the discernment of their actions - this is not limited to “workers or employees”⁵ - implying a new form of dialogue, giving reasons for faith and adherence to the Magisterium, comprehending the meaning and sense of human love, generosity towards life, mercy as a sign of grace, truly integral human flourishing, education for life and a culture of healing. The stand against the culture of death means to rediscover in its most profound sense the meaning of human love: live it, enjoy it and communicate it to others.

And now, beloved sons, you who are priests, you who in virtue of your sacred office act as counsellors and spiritual leaders both of individual men and women and of families—We turn to you filled with great confidence. For it is your principal duty—We are speaking especially to you who teach moral theology—to spell out clearly and completely the Church’s teaching on marriage. In the performance of your ministry you must be the first to give an example of that sincere obedience, inward as well as outward, which is due to the magisterium of the Church. For, as you know, the pastors of the Church

enjoy a special light of the Holy Spirit in teaching the truth [*Lumen Gentium* N. 25]. And this, rather than the arguments they put forward, is why you are bound to such obedience. Nor will it escape you that if men's peace of soul and the unity of the Christian people are to be preserved, then it is of the utmost importance that in moral as well as in dogmatic theology all should obey the Magisterium of the Church and should speak as with one voice. Therefore, We make Our own the anxious words of the great Apostle Paul and with all Our heart We renew Our appeal to you: "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

Paul VI *Humanae Vitae* N.28

Part II: The preferential option for the family and conjugal love

A child deserves to be born of that love, and not by any other means, for "he or she is not something owed to one, but is a gift", which is "the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents." This is the case because, "according to the order of creation, conjugal love between a man and a woman, and the transmission of life are ordered to each other. Thus the Creator made man and woman share in the work of his creation and, at the same time, made them instruments of his love, entrusting to them the responsibility for the future of mankind, through the transmission of human life."

Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* n.81

A mobilization of consciences is necessary, one that tackles in a decided manner, the educative urgency of families, dating couples, married couples, and children. The family and school educational spaces are true oases that we must promote, strengthen and defend against a culture seeking more and more, to disconnect young children from the love of parents. To work in promoting true human love to future generations - is a task of the present - starting with the true love of the spouses - including the reciprocal gift of each, which is open to life, and its limitation is for serious objective reasons. This is part of the challenge of a more just society, more humane and more environmentally friendly. Therefore, a revolution of conscience is required, a refocus of our personal, social, economic and political relationships, to address the wellbeing of individuals families and communities. A civil society from families and for families, where each family is recognized as a social good and the increase of relational good is the measure of human development.

Only by clearing out the modern environment, which has become a stifling atmosphere for children, young people and spouses, can we live a culture of life and love. Isn't this a priority today? Why is the generosity towards life of so many families considered crazy today? It is necessary to help and accompany so many families, who require help with material and spiritual needs, to ensure healthy marriages and family life. Perhaps it is time to widen the marginalized peripheries of engaged couples, spouses and families, to help them discern with their hearts what is the meaning of love. Human love is above all a way of life for spouses and a model of life for future generations. Both Paul VI and Francis tell us that future society depends on it. We see it in Paul's teaching from the past, and the prophetic teaching of Francis - the future of the human family must be nurtured, by discernment in these times of war, to participate in the creative work of God, who is life - life in abundance.

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News Around the World

A new Documentary entitled *Sexual Revolution: 50 years since Humanae Vitae* is soon to be released which tells the story of how the discovery, by Dr John Billings, of the significance of the mucus symptom in monitoring fertility correlated with the development of the oral contraceptive pill.

In late 2017 a film crew travelled to Melbourne and interviewed the four WOOMB Directors and members of the Billings' family as well as Dr Joseph Santamaria, who was involved in the early days of the Method, and Archbishop Anthony Fisher of Sydney. Professor Pilar Vigil was in Melbourne at the time so the crew were delighted to also interview her and a stopover in New Zealand on the way home meant they were able to interview Sr Hannah, a Missionary of Charity nun and Billings Ovulation Method® teacher.

The trailer for the film has now been released and can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zj0L3IIS8mA&feature=youtu.be>. Take a look at it and if you think appropriate you might consider how this message can be spread. Screenings of the full length documentary are being arranged in many countries and there are plans to have it translated into languages other than English. Perhaps you could suggest to your Diocese that they use this documentary to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*.

China

In the period from 5 June to 10 June 2018, a training course was held on marriage and family, with the Billings Ovulation Method® being the focus of the course. A total number of 54 participants—with 50 nuns and 4 parishioners, all female, joined the course. Among the 4 parishioners, 2 were doctors who were very dedicated to work for the welfare of the women's reproductive health. All participants were facilitated to understand the scientific and practical and were very involved and responsive in the training.



Promotion - The team also visited another province where they met with key people and were involved in a workshop to promote the Method which was attended by 60 people, including many young couples. The program was arranged and coordinated by an accredited teacher in the centre. At this stage, the Method is mainly offered in this area through pre-marriage counselling programs which have created increased interest in the Method.



Pakistan

The team from WOOMB Pakistan continues the excellent work of taking the Billings Ovulation Method® to their community. We have had several reports from them in recent months - perhaps the most moving has been this one:

We are pleased to inform you that we had a one-day BOM training program with 68 Muslim domestic helpers/workers of nearby slums and ghettos of Rawalpindi region. Most of them are illiterate and a few are semi-literate.

The program was organized in our home garage. Catherine regularly visits these slums and has found that women of the area have many reproductive health issues. Some have difficulty in achieving but most have too many children. Due to their poverty they are not in a position to afford any unwanted child.

As we cannot invite husbands, due to Muslim religious and cultural reasons, only wives were present and Nazli and Catherine conducted the training. They used simple language and sometimes even the local dialect. We did not use multi-media aids but only coloured charts for the basics and a whiteboard for charting. In addition they used colored buttons and ribbons for charting. The women were very cooperative - some brought chairs and pedestal fans from their homes to accommodate the participants.

After the program Nazli and Catherine gave one-on-one consultations to many of the women who were very happy and shared that now they won't have to use contraceptives for family planning because they now know the system of their bodies and can plan their families naturally. Some shared that in the past they have had abortions as they can't afford any more children. They were grateful that now they will no longer have to endure that agony. They will keep in regular contact with Catherine for any guidance in charting

This is one of the unique experiences we have had working with the most vulnerable and deserving class of our society.



Pervez Roderick
WOOMB Pakistan

Congratulations and prayers to Pervez, Catherine and Nazli for this wonderful example of love in action.



Ireland

NAOMI Billings Ireland recently held their Annual Meeting. Following is an extract from the address by their President and Associate Director of WOOMB International, Dr Mark Whitty:

2018 will have seen the 50th anniversary of Humanae Vitae, the centenary of the births of Dr. Evelyn Billings and of Dr John Billings; the WOOMB conference and courses in Costa Rica, and the International Family Congress in Dublin – with a Billings Europe meeting being worked on to coincide with this. Meanwhile [in Ireland], we are invited to stop protecting the weakest among us, and as ever, emulate the UK, where one in five pregnancies ends in abortion, and the newborn death rate of those allowed to live is worse than Cuba, Montenegro, Belarus, Iceland, Singapore, Germany or France.

It is also five years since Pope Benedict XVI ended his reign, and his wise reading of contemporary culture is even more in evidence since then, not least his identification of the dictatorship of relativism. While we work to see and use individual variations of patterns in nature, we are echoing the classical tradition from ancient Greece through St Thomas Aquinas to the present day, in starting with the evidence of our senses of the real world. This then is further proven in clinical trials. This is in accord with the signature characteristic of the approach of the greatest minds we have met, read or seen; they address people as intelligent, and offer them opinion, facts, and if need be, challenges – as equals.

This prime example of our witness to reality is that there are two genders – everyone has either XX or XY chromosomes in every cell of the body. The 50+ gender identities promoted by the giant mercenary social media engines are not supported by basic science, but elude any consideration of social, parental and other influences. This also threatens the common gradual evolution of self-image during human development and maturation, and excludes any development of counselling or psychotherapy that would support and promote such realistic development.

Pope Francis recently referred to male and female binary complementarity in his meeting with the Polish bishops, and they echoed this in their collective letter read out to the people soon after, on the feast day of the Holy Family.

In our service to women and to couples we are obliged both by love and by integrity to go against some of these trends by giving good true information, offering our positive help, as well as the witness of joy in our lives. We don't follow solely an objective impersonal conviction of a mathematical theorem, a law of nature, or even a philosophical demonstration but, while demanding the role of the intelligence, we also respond to the Spirit's testimony inviting belief and an intimate action of a greater kind.

We are too busy offering fact, encouragement, truth and hope; we have no need to turn aside to engage with such negative swamps, and we have a duty not to become controlled by the passing noise.

In any case, our work is one of the greatest answers to all this. What we offer is simply and positively unanswerable.

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Then Peter addressed them: "The truth I have now come to realise" he said "is that God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him."

Acts 10:34-35

This is why we teach EVERYONE for if we don't give them the truth, so that they can do "what is right", how can they live their lives in a way that is acceptable to God?

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