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The Pope John Center: Labor, Delivery and the First Decade

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Historians who chronicle significant events within the Catholic Church during the last third of the 20th century will surely devote a few paragraphs to the Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research and Education Center of St. Louis, Missouri. The birth process of this innovative and unprecedented center for Catholic medical ethics was completed on July 1, 1974 when Rev. Albert S. Moraczewski, O.P. came to St. Louis to begin serving as the Center's full-time president. But a long gestation period had begun at least three years previously when Msgr. Edward Michelin, president of the board of trustees of the Catholic Hospital Association (CHA) proposed at an April, 1971 board meeting that the CHA seriously consider inaugurating a Chair of Studies on Catholic medical/moral theology at a university. During this three-year gestation, the baby Center took form as an autonomous entity, guaranteed three years of financial nourishment from its CHA mother after birth, but expected to stand on its own feet.

The new Center was baptized Catholic. This distinguishes it from its various cousins among other medical ethics centers in the U.S. such as the Hastings Center or the Kennedy Institute for Ethics. Its unique *raison d'être* is to "apply the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church to specific medical-moral issues emerging from the advances of medicine and science" (By-Laws, Art. II).

In its first decade, the Center has grown in age and wisdom, blessed with dedicated staff members and scholar-affiliates and supported by the CHA, many of its member hospitals, many Catholic bishops and dioceses throughout the U.S., and a broad spectrum of individuals who welcomed the Center with open arms.

This article will review the first decade of the Pope John Center. Some readers have not yet been introduced to its 14 published books and its concise monthly newsletter, *Ethics and Medics*, which reaches 27,000 subscribers. Others, like many health-care professionals, bishops and clergy who have been introduced to the Center at its various workshops, will become better acquainted with both its accomplishments and its potential.

Gestation: 1971-1974

After Monsignor Michelin proposed a Chair of Studies on medical-moral theology, the CHA board of trustees on June 6, 1971 commissioned Reverends J. J. Flanagan, S.J., and Robert Brungs, S.J. to develop a protocol for accomplishing this goal. The protocol they prepared recommended that a Chair be established for short-range issues, whereas it proposed a contractual services arrangement with some groups already existing for long-range issues beginning to emerge. A committee on the Chair of Medical/Moral Studies was appointed, with Msgr. John E. Molan as chairman and Msgr. H. A. Murray as co-chairman.

On Feb. 28, 1972, nearly 40 key persons interested in the ethical issues of Catholic health care, including Doctors John R. Cavanagh and John P. Mullooly of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds, met for an exploratory meeting in St. Louis to discuss the establishment of a Chair of Studies or alternate ways to meet the need for a Catholic approach to new ethical issues in medicine. That spring of 1972, the CHA committee refined its own thinking, and the CHA board of trustees approved its three recommendations at its June 10 meeting. One recommendation proposed a new CHA department of medical-moral affairs, but another proposed a new committee to plan for incorporating a separate legal entity for research and education on long-term medical-moral issues. This would become the Pope John Center.

That fall, the new committee, still headed by Monsignor Molan, developed articles of incorporation for the new entity and decided to name it the Pope John XXIII Center for Medical-Moral Research and Education. The articles of incorporation in the State of Missouri were approved Dec. 22, 1972, and on Jan. 3, 1973 the initial board of directors met for the first time. Sister Mary Maurita Sengelaub, R.S.M., the executive vice-president of the CHA, was elected chairman of the board and Thomas E. Callahan of the CHA staff was elected president of the new Pope John Center. On March 29, the full board of 15 persons met and selected Monsignor Molan as chairman, Sister Mary Maurita having served only on a temporary basis. At its April meeting, the CHA board of trustees approved a loan of \$168,000 to serve as seed money for the Center in its first three years of operation.

On Dec. 6, 1973, the board chose Rev. Albert Moraczewski, O.P., to replace Mr. Callahan and become the first full-time president of the Center. He served first in a part-time capacity from Feb. 1, 1974, until July 1, 1974. On May 6 of that year, Father Moraczewski hosted a meeting in St. Louis of representatives from nine bioethical centers in the U.S. to announce the impending birth of the Pope John Center and to discuss mutual concerns and resources. The labor and delivery of the infant Center was completed with its birth as a functioning entity on July 1, 1975.

The Early Years: 1974-1978

For the first four and one-half years, Father Moraczewski served as the only full-time professional staff person of the Pope John Center, assisted by the board of directors and by several part-time scholars, several fund-raising consultants, his secretary, and the volunteer members of the two task forces he organized. He developed material about the proposed role of the Center, contacted the apostolic delegate, Archbishop Jean Jadot, and the president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin, and began planning the projects of the Center.

In May, 1975, the Pope John Center board established three standing committees, including one on public relations and development. That October, a subscription program was launched to solicit institutional and individual subscriptions to the publications of the Center, for \$200 and \$50 respectively. The newsletter, *Ethics and Medics*, appeared quarterly in 1976, then bi-monthly from 1977 until January, 1979, when it began to appear monthly as it still does. Sister Mary Maurita replaced Monsignor Molan as chairman of the board of the Center in 1976 and served through 1979.

The first task force, set up to analyze the proposed new government regulations on fetal experimentation which were necessitated by the *Roe v. Wade* abortion decisions of 1973, produced the Center's first book in the spring of 1976. The nine task force members, including two neonatologists, contributed to the final 137-page manuscript of *An Ethical Evaluation of Fetal Experimentation: An Interdisciplinary Study* which Father Moraczewski and Rev. Donald McCarthy, of Mount St. Mary Seminary in Cincinnati, edited. Rev. Benedict Ashley, O.P., added an important appendix, offering scientific and philosophical support for the presence of the spiritual soul at fertilization.

The second task force, on genetic counseling, got underway in 1976 and its study appeared in the spring of 1980. The task force members, including three geneticists, wrote various sections of the report which was then unified and edited by Gary Atkinson, of William Woods College in Fulton, Missouri, and Father Moraczewski. The 260-page volume, entitled *Genetic Counseling, the Church and the Law*, includes a lengthy appendix by Patrick J. Kelley, J.D., a St. Louis attorney, on the legal implications of genetic counseling.

Father Moraczewski also arranged a third publication of the Pope John Center at this time, a 200-page study of artificial insemination in Catholic teaching by John C. Wakefield, a Catholic theologian from Houston, Texas, entitled *Artful Childmaking*, which appeared in 1978. However, further growth and development of the Center could not occur because fund-raising efforts were hardly meeting the Center's operational expenses. Happily, the board of the CHA approved a request that the original funding provided in 1973-1976 need not be repaid.

Bishop Bernard Law of the Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Missouri diocese replaced John Cardinal Carberry of St. Louis who was on the Center's original board of directors. At the May, 1978, board meeting, he proposed a major consultation to chart the future of the Center. Father Moraczewski also proposed to the board that it engage a new president of the Center and allow him to become vice-president for research. On Nov. 28-30, 1978, the consultation took place at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana with 60 invited participants from the fields of Catholic health care and medical ethics. The following month, the Pope John Center board accepted Father Moraczewski's proposal to become vice-president for research and chose Rev. William M. Gallagher, a priest of the Providence, Rhode Island diocese as the new president of the Pope John Center, beginning Jan. 1, 1979. The stage was set for new initiatives in the development of the Center.

New Initiatives: 1979-1981

The new president began to implement the recommendations of the Notre Dame consultation, particularly that the Center seek to establish linkage with Catholic bishops throughout the nation. Father Gallagher began a long series of personal visits to ordinaries of each diocese of the United States, which he substantially completed within an 18-month period. At the suggestion of Bishop Law, the Center also obtained from the Knights of Columbus in January, 1980, its first grant to sponsor a medical ethics workshop for bishops of the United States and Canada.

During the summer of 1979, Father Moraczewski and Dr. Atkinson completed a new 116-page publication called *A Moral Evaluation of Contraception, A Dialogical Study*. They presented the Church's teaching on the issue along with the principal objections raised to it in the 10 years since Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*, with an analysis of those arguments. Meanwhile, *Ethics and Medics* had begun broadening its circulation as it was offered to all the clergy and religion educators of dioceses which affiliated with the Center.

In August, 1979, Father McCarthy became a third staff member as director of education and began coordinating the program for the bishops' workshop scheduled for January, 1980, in Dallas, Texas. In December, Bishop Law replaced Sister Mary Maurita as chairman of the board of the Center.

The first bishops' workshop from Jan. 28-31, 1980, attracted 122 Catholic bishops from throughout the U.S. and Canada to study "New Technologies of Birth and Death." Speakers discussed both technological reproduction at the beginning of life and the ethical implications of prolonging life and the determination of death by brain criteria. The program opened with a videotaped greeting from Pope John Paul II and the premiere of a 15-minute videotape produced by the Center,

entitled "That They May Have Life." The bishops grateful paid tribute to the careful planning and organization by the Center staff and to the generosity of the Knights of Columbus in funding the program. Their evaluation forms expressed hopes for a follow-up workshop on human sexuality in contemporary philosophy and theology.

Videotapes from the first Dallas bishops' workshop were used in several subsequent programs sponsored by the Center, including a two-day conference for St. Louis clergy at Kenrick Seminary in March, 1980. During that summer, the Center staff, in collaboration with staff of the CHA, began planning a fall workshop on "Moral Responsibility in Prolonging Life Decisions." This program featured 12 guest speakers for the two days, and eight seminars offered on the third day. Registration reached 250 health care persons with another 60 unable to attend because of space limitations. Two more presentations of the same basic workshop were offered the following spring of 1981 in Tampa, Florida and Phoenix, Arizona, with a total of 310 persons attending.

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1980, plans moved ahead for the second bishops' workshop, again funded by the Knights of Columbus, and for publication of the proceedings of the first workshop. This volume appeared in December, 1980, and arrangements were made with Franciscan Herald Press of Chicago to act as commercial distributor of the book, *New Technologies of Birth and Death*. Rev. Mark Hegener, O.F.M., director of the Franciscan Herald Press, also agreed to begin marketing the book, *Genetic Counseling, the Church and the Law*, which the Center had already published.

In January, he also agreed to market the new book, *Human Sexuality and Personhood*, which contained lectures prepared for the second bishops' workshop and which was readied in advance of the program. This workshop was also well-received by the 190 bishops who attended in Dallas from Feb. 2-6, 1981. While the bishops expressed interest in another such workshop, it was agreed to wait until 1983, because the National Conference of Catholic Bishops had already scheduled a 10-day conference for U.S. bishops for June, 1982.

Meanwhile during the summer of 1981, Fathers McCarthy and Moraczewski completed the manuscript for the 316-page resource volume entitled *Moral Responsibility in Prolonging Life Decisions*, derived from the three workshops presented under that title. They edited it with 12 chapters from the workshop speakers and eight chapters prepared from tapes of the seminars. Franciscan Herald Press also agreed to market this volume, the seventh book published by the Pope John Center within a space of six years.

The work of the Pope John Center expanded as its existence became better known through the bishops' workshops and the expanding publications of the Center. An arrangement had been made

with the CHA in October, 1980, to handle its medical-moral inquiries from CHA staff and constituents and to assist in presenting medical-ethical issues at CHA workshops and in *Hospital Progress*, the CHA monthly journal. Increasing numbers of requests also came in for speakers at diocesan programs and in regional hospital seminars.

In the summer of 1981, the Pope John Center also received confirmation from the Pallottine Center for Apostolic Causes of favorable response to a grant proposal which had been titled "The Pilot Program." This proposal requested funding for two intensive 10-day workshops in 1982 and 1983 for representatives chosen by their diocesan bishops as persons able to use this training in clergy education and in giving Church leadership on medical-moral issues within their individual dioceses. Father McCarthy would act as director of these programs with the assistance of Rev. Edward Bayer, a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, who would join the Pope John Center after completing his studies for a doctorate in moral theology in Rome.

In the fall of 1981, the CHA invited the Center to organize three one-day conferences for health care professionals in the midwest, with the help of a grant from the American Association of the Knights of Malta. Father Moraczewski directed this program and subsequently edited the volume containing the proceedings of all three workshops. This book, *Genetic Medicine and Engineering*, was the first which the CHA and the Pope John Center jointly published and marketed. That winter was the first in three years that the Center staff was not pre-occupied with preparing a bishops' workshop. Instead, it was planning the "Pilot Program," the most significant recent development at the Center.

1982-1984: Recent Developments

Three new staff members came to the Center in 1982. Father Bayer arrived in February and was given the title of director of continuing education. In July, Rev. Larry Lossing, an Episcopal priest from Florida, who had been received into full communion with the Catholic Church and was awaiting ordination to the Catholic priesthood, arrived in St. Louis with his family. Father Lossing became director of communications, a position which a St. Louis Jesuit, Rev. Bert Akers, S.J., had held for a few months the previous fall. Also in July, Rev. Michael McDonough, an Opus Dei priest from Chicago with a degree in moral theology and a background in business and social ethics, joined the staff as director of social ethics.

The first of the two "pilot programs" on "Critical Life Issues" took place in St. Louis from Aug. 22 to Sept. 3, 1982. Fifty-five dioceses sent representatives, most of whom were priests involved in continuing education of clergy or hospital ministry, but four physicians, one

nurse, one lay expert on natural family planning and one seminarian were among the participants. The 22 speakers at the 10-day program had submitted materials in advance. Fathers McCarthy and Bayer edited their contributions into a readable and uniform volume with 17 short chapters and with illustrations by Father Lossing. This 200-page *Handbook on Critical Life Issues* is marketed commercially by St. Mary's Press of Winona, Minnesota, and has become one of the "best sellers" of the Center's publications.

In October, 1982, Father Moraczewski directed in St. Louis an invitational conference for a dozen nationally known experts in the field of research on human sexuality. This conference was suggested as a follow-up to the 1981 bishops' workshop on sexuality and personhood. The experts addressed particularly the issue of gender determination and sexual preferences. With the help of a grant from the Raskob Foundation, the proceedings of this conference, along with the seven chapters of theological reflections by additional experts, appeared as another Pope John Center volume in February 1984, under the title *Sex and Gender, A Theological and Scientific Inquiry*.

Also in October, the Pope John Center, in collaboration with the CHA, sponsored in Philadelphia, St. Louis and San Francisco a two-day conference entitled "Ethical Hard Cases in Contemporary Medicine." A mailing went to Catholic physicians throughout the U.S. and Canada — the first time a Pope John Center program was publicized to physicians by direct mail. A core group of the participants in each location was physicians whose presence contributed greatly to the depth and quality of the discussions. In fulfillment of its contract of services to the CHA, the Center also began a monthly series of columns in the CHA journal, *Hospital Progress* in January, 1983.

The Knights of Columbus provided the Center with another grant in the early summer of 1982 for a third bishops' workshop in Dallas in February, 1983. Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, Ohio, replaced Bishop Law as president of the Pope John Center board in December, 1982, and continues to serve through the present date.

Father Moraczewski coordinated the program for the 150 bishops who attended the third Dallas bishops' workshop from Jan. 31 to Feb. 4, 1983. The proceedings from this workshop appeared in February, 1984, in the largest book published so far by the Center, a 502-page study entitled *Technological Powers and the Person*. The book provides exhaustive information on three basic themes: the nature and dignity of the human person; the risks and benefits in the peaceful use of nuclear energy; and the legal, social, and canonical implications of reproductive technologies. It has already been circulated to all English-speaking bishops of North America. When the Spanish translation, now in press, appears, it will be sent to the remaining bishops of North, Central, and South America.

Later, in spring of 1983, from April 19 to 29, the Center conducted

in St. Louis its second "pilot program" on the theme of critical sexual issues. Once more the 23 invited speakers submitted material to Fathers McCarthy and Bayer who edited a popular-style, and readable volume, *A Handbook on Critical Sexual Issues*. The Center published the first edition of this book in the summer of 1983 and then Doubleday & Company, Inc. of New York, published in March, 1984, a second edition for broad circulation as one of its Image Book series.

On July 31, 1983, Father Moraczewski left St. Louis and the Pope John Center after nine years of dedicated and highly competent service to the Center and the Church. He continues to work with the Center as contributing editor of the newsletter, *Ethics and Medics*, while serving as liaison officer for research at the Texas Research Institute of Mental Sciences at the Texas Medical Center in Houston.

Sister Margaret John Kelly, D.C., the vice-president of the CHA for Mission Services, acted as CHA liaison staff person with the Pope John Center during her stay in St. Louis from 1980 to 1984. She gave the concluding lecture at the 1983 bishops' workshop and assisted in planning the 1984 workshop. In the summer of 1983, she directed research work on ethics committees by an ethics intern at CHA. Then in September, 1983, she and Father McCarthy co-directed in St. Louis a two-day workshop, jointly sponsored by the CHA and the Center on "The Role and Formation of Ethics Committees in Catholic Health Care." The overwhelming interest in the topic attracted 260 health care professionals. In June, 1984, the Pope John Center and CHA jointly published a second book, a 150-page volume entitled *Ethics Committees, A Challenge for Catholic Health Care*, containing the content of this workshop.

Meanwhile, the Knights of Columbus had once more generously provided a grant for the fourth bishops' workshop in Dallas. Both Msgr. Orville Griese, a priest of the diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Mr. Tim Cooper, a business administration graduate of Northeast Missouri State University in Kirksville, joined the Center in time to assist in staff preparations for this program. The subject was fundamental Catholic moral theology, with special emphasis on the Church's teaching of certain exceptionless moral norms, like those forbidding direct abortion, mercy killing, and direct sterilization. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, delivered the keynote address on Feb. 6, 1984, to a record number of 240 bishops gathered from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. He also attended the entire workshop which featured 13 other speakers from the U.S., Canada, England, and Germany, and then presented a concluding summary on Feb. 10, 1984. The Center published the proceedings of this workshop in August, 1984, in a 360-page volume entitled *Moral Theology Today: Certitudes and Doubts*.

Coincidentally, two staff members left the Pope John Center on the

same date — July 31, 1984. Father McCarthy returned to his home diocese of Cincinnati to become full-time pastor of St. Anthonis parish. He will continue as senior educational consultant of the Center. Rev. Michael McDonough returned to full-time work in Chicago with his sponsoring organization, Opus Dei. However, Rev. Robert Barry, O.P., a Dominican priest from the eastern province, joined the Center on July 1, 1984, after completing his doctoral work in moral theology at the Catholic University of America.

Also in the summer of 1984, the Knights of Columbus, through their Supreme Knight, Mr. Virgil Dechant, made another grant for a fifth bishops' workshop which the Center will present in Dallas, Feb. 4 to 8, 1985, on "The Bishop and the Family." Proceedings from this workshop should be published by the fall of 1985.

The most recent publication of the Pope John Center, currently coming off the press in St. Louis, is a thorough study of Christian anthropology. This contemporary theological research volume entitled *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian*, represents the climax of a lifetime of profound study by Rev. Benedict Ashley, O.P. The Center staff believes it will point the way for future research in applied moral theology.

The Future

Discussions by staff and board members of the Pope John Center point toward at least two research and publishing projects within the next several years. One will deal in some way with the allocation of health care resources and prolonging life procedures. Shrinking public funds for expanding health care costs have created the current diagnosis-related grouping (DRG) approach to reimbursement which will undoubtedly precipitate ethical concerns, particularly in behalf of the elderly and those persons suffering a diminished quality of life. Fast-moving developments in court decisions and legislative statutes, as well as public attitudes which verge on approving voluntary euthanasia, demand the Center's attention. Within the next several years, the Center will probably publish either a new edition of its resource book, *Moral Responsibility in Prolonging Life Decisions*, or an entirely new study of this important issue, to include the complex economic aspects of prolonging life decisions and health care allocation.

Another felt need which the Center wishes to meet is the provision of a straightforward commentary on the 43 *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Facilities*, which the U.S. bishops approved in 1971. Administrators, physicians, nurses and other staff persons in Catholic facilities are asking for a simple explanation of each of these pithy statements. The Pope John Center wishes to provide this in a clearly and simply written volume of 75-150 pages.

Mention of the *Directives* also raises the question of the Church's

magisterial teaching authority. A number of the *Directives*, especially numbers 18-20, those universally forbidding contraception and sterilization, have been widely rejected by many Catholic theologians in the period of theological dissent which began in 1968 with Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. The Pope John Center pledged itself in a 1978 policy statement to avoid dissent from the Magisterium of the Church when it teaches authoritatively and officially, even though not in an infallible or *ex cathedra* manner. Hence, the Center will not dissent from these *Directives*, which represent a teaching firmly presented by modern popes, including our current pontiff, John Paul II, and by the International Synod of Bishops in 1980.

On the other hand, some of the *Directives* offer room for more current theological reflection without compromising the Church's official Magisterium, such as Directive 16, forbidding removal of an ectopic pregnancy by salpingotomy to preserve the Fallopian tube and a woman's fertility. (See *Ethics and Medics*, September, 1984). Hence, the Center will seek to point out this type of reflection and present the most useful and reliable commentary possible. In an additional chapter or section, this publication may also discuss some new medical-ethical issues which have gained prominence in medical circles since 1971. Many people also feel that social justice issues in Catholic health care facilities should be discussed, since these are also an important part of Christian ethics and Church teaching.

Beyond these two areas of concern, the Pope John Center staff has many ethical subjects of emerging importance to pursue, especially those arising from genetic engineering, cryogenics (already being practiced with human embryos), and the new capacities to prolong almost indefinitely the life of the irreversibly comatose.

Furthermore, the Pope John Center has an *educational* as well as a research mission. Yet modern education cannot reach a broad public by the printed word alone. A vast challenge of producing audio cassettes, videotapes, and actual television programs on cable and commercial channels beckons the Center. These new media are indispensable, not only for the Catholic public, but also for physicians and nurses as well as clergy and religion educators within the Church. Furthermore, since the Pope John Center was "baptized" Catholic, like any good Catholic it wishes to bring the good news of Christ to the whole wide world.

Readers of this article may wish to follow the Pope John Center as it moves ahead toward the 21st century and attempts to meet the challenges just discussed. The simplest way to keep abreast of the Center is to send a \$12 check for an initial one-year subscription to *Ethics and Medics*, Pope John Center, 4455 Woodson Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63134.

Dec. 22, 1984 will mark the 12th anniversary of the Center becoming an incorporated legal entity. Besides the persons mentioned by

name in this article, hundreds of others, including dedicated board members and hard-working secretaries have assisted the center through its birth pangs and growing pains. After Dec. 22, the center will enter its 13th year, a teenager at last! By Dec. 22, 1999, it will thus be a robust adult, 27-years old. Judging by what has already been accomplished, future Church historians may need more than a few paragraphs to describe what the Pope John Center accomplished for the Church in the last third of the 20th century.

(See list of Pope John Center publications on the opposite page.)

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