
RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

*A Draught of
Human Experience*

"Insufficient Guilt in the Room"
by Eugene C. Kennedy, in *America*
(Mar. 27, 1976), 106 W. 56th St.,
New York, N.Y. 10019.

Kennedy, a Catholic priest and psychologist, argues that the old authoritarian Catholic culture is dying and that today's priest must find the meaning of his ministry from within human experience. "A well-developed personal identity is indispensable to effective pastoral ministry," Kennedy writes, yet many priests continue to think of themselves "in the third person," unable to discover who they are apart from their clerical role.

The typical priest chases after the "abstraction" of what a good priest should be, constantly pitting himself against his own sense of guilt or unworthiness. When most priests have no close personal relationships in their lives, how can they hope to understand the people to whom they minister? Kennedy asks. "The clerical life lends itself to the spiritual equivalent of one-night stands."

Kennedy suggests that most decisions to join the priesthood have been rooted in a highly obsessive-compulsive Catholic culture which stresses a "pervasive need to do good and to do well, to avoid guilt and be approved."

Those values were sustained by the authoritarianism of the Church, and today that authoritarianism (as distinct from the *authority* of the Church) is breaking down. Kennedy dates the collapse of authoritarianism to the issuance of the 1968 Papal Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*—"a document that failed to match human experience."

Catholics today have "developed a new trust in their own experience"; they are no longer oriented to enormous guilt, he writes. Thus, the future strength of the Church's ministry depends on the priest's willingness to "put aside the authoritarian clerical mode . . . and build a new declericalized style of ministry in service that matches the theological rhetoric about the Church as a servant."

*Reassessing the
Rhythm Method*

"New Dimensions of Parenthood"
by Bernard Häring, in *Theological
Studies* (Mar. 1976), P.O. Box 1703,
Baltimore, Md. 21203.

Recent medical research may compel the Roman Catholic Church to reexamine its endorsement of the "rhythm method" as an appropriate means of contraception.

Catholic approval of the rhythm method relies on the assumptions that the average life of the human spermatazoa is only 72 hours, that

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the female ovum lives only 24 hours, and that it is only during this time that fertilization can take place.

These assumptions may be faulty. While it has been recognized that viable sperm can exist in the uterus and fallopian tube for up to five days, it now appears that both sperm and ova may survive even longer. Moreover, writes Häring, a moral theologian at Rome's Academia Alfonsiana, studies now indicate that the marriage of "overripe" sperm and ova sharply increase the likelihood of spontaneous abortions or defective children.

When fertilization occurs through intercourse taking place three or more days after ovulation, he notes, the frequency of abortion is 24 percent compared with an average occurrence of 7.8 percent. The incidence of fetal abnormality is also greater. When sperm are deposited in the vagina more than four days before ovulation, and fertilization occurs, the frequency of spontaneous abortion increases in proportion to the time interval and increases enormously if the interval is more than eight days.

Häring stops just short of indicting the rhythm method as "birth control" in the most pejorative sense, namely, prevention of birth by means of spontaneous abortion. To Häring, it seems "shocking" that rhythm, recently endorsed again by the Church, should in application produce a vast number of zygotes (fertilized eggs not yet implanted in the wall of the womb) lacking the vitality for survival.

Interruption of the life process between fertilization and implantation, he says, lacks the "gravity or malice" that attends abortion of an individualized embryo. But Häring concludes that the new medical evidence (already forwarded to the Vatican) disqualifies the rhythm method—at least in its traditional, publicized form—"as a safe and morally indifferent method of birth control, for its openness to procreation is not openness to safe and healthy human life."

Identifying with The Oppressed

"The U.S. Christian and the World Struggle" by Paul Abrecht, in *Christianity and Crisis* (Aug. 16, 1976), 537 West 121st St., New York, N.Y. 10027.

U.S. Christians are having trouble identifying themselves with the "cause of world justice," writes Abrecht, executive secretary of the Working Group on Church and Society of the World Council of Churches.

U.S. churches contributed through the missionary movement to the process of national liberation in Africa and Asia. But now, when the Third World's poor and oppressed are demanding social justice and human dignity, the United States finds itself labeled the enemy of political and economic change: "We appear more and more as the opponent of the revolutionary liberation process that we helped