

# Does The Church Approve Of Psychiatric Treatment?

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I'm very upset about my married sister. She became quite nervous after having her last child. Now she is constantly depressed, is suspicious of the neighbors, and seems unreasonably worried about family debts. How can we help her? Sometimes I'm afraid of what she might do. What does the Church think of psychiatric treatment?

You have good reason to be worried about your sister, Mary, though she may only be run down physically and require a good rest to snap out of her present condition.

Hence you should have her consult her physician at once, and if she is unwilling to do this, some member of the family should seek his advice concerning her condition without delay. If she needs a rest or temporary assistance, this should be provided at any cost since she is obviously near the breaking point.

On the other hand, it is necessary to face the possibility that she may be suffering from some mental disorder and consequently needs psychiatric care. Unfortunately, the terms "mental disorder," "mental illness," or "mental abnormality" still frighten many people unduly so that they are reluctant to admit that one of their family may be mentally ill.

Nevertheless, mental disorders rank high among the seriously debilitating illnesses in America today. Over 180,000 persons are admitted for the first time to mental hospitals each year, and another 70,000 to 80,000 are readmitted to such institutions.

On any given day, roughly 750,000 persons are hospitalized for mental illnesses and approximately 55 per cent of all hospital beds in the nation are currently occupied by these patients.

These statistics cover only a small segment of the total psychiatric problem for they do not include a count of private hospitals, nursing homes, or general hospitals, nor do

they take in neurotic patients who are bodily handicapped, psychosomatic cases, alcoholics, addicts, the retarded, or the great group of patients who need but have not yet received hospital care.

What is mental abnormality? It is sometimes defined as the opposite of mental health. However, no two authorities can agree on an acceptable criterion of mental health, so this doesn't help us much.

Perhaps we can put it this way: A normal person is one who conforms to the average in his methods of thinking, feeling, and acting, is reasonably happy, emotionally balanced and adjusted, and positively oriented toward future goals. The abnormal person, however, is one who, to a greater or lesser degree, for a more or less prolonged period of time, deviates from the average in ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, is unreasonably unhappy, emotionally unstable and unadjusted, and poorly oriented to future goals.

If we use the above as working definitions, it follows that there is no clearly defined line between mental normality and abnormality; abnormal mental conditions are merely exaggerations of the normal.

Experts are far from agreeing on the classification of mental disorders or on their causes, and consequently there is considerable diversity in current views on how to treat them.

It is interesting to note that different therapies, using different types of treatment based on different theories of mental illness, are successful in helping some cases and failing others. This suggests that we are far from understanding the basic causes of most mental illnesses or the essential elements in their cure.

The human person is extremely complex and we are only starting to discover some of the factors that make him "click."

How can we help family members suffering from such illnesses? The first step, of course, is to put them under expert care. This implies that we accept the possibility of mental illness as we do that of physical sickness.

Both types occur frequently, and we have to face up to them. Because we know so little about mental illnesses or have misconceptions about their causes, we tend to consider them a blot on the family tree and consequently blame people for having them. This is like blaming a person for getting catarracts or cancer.

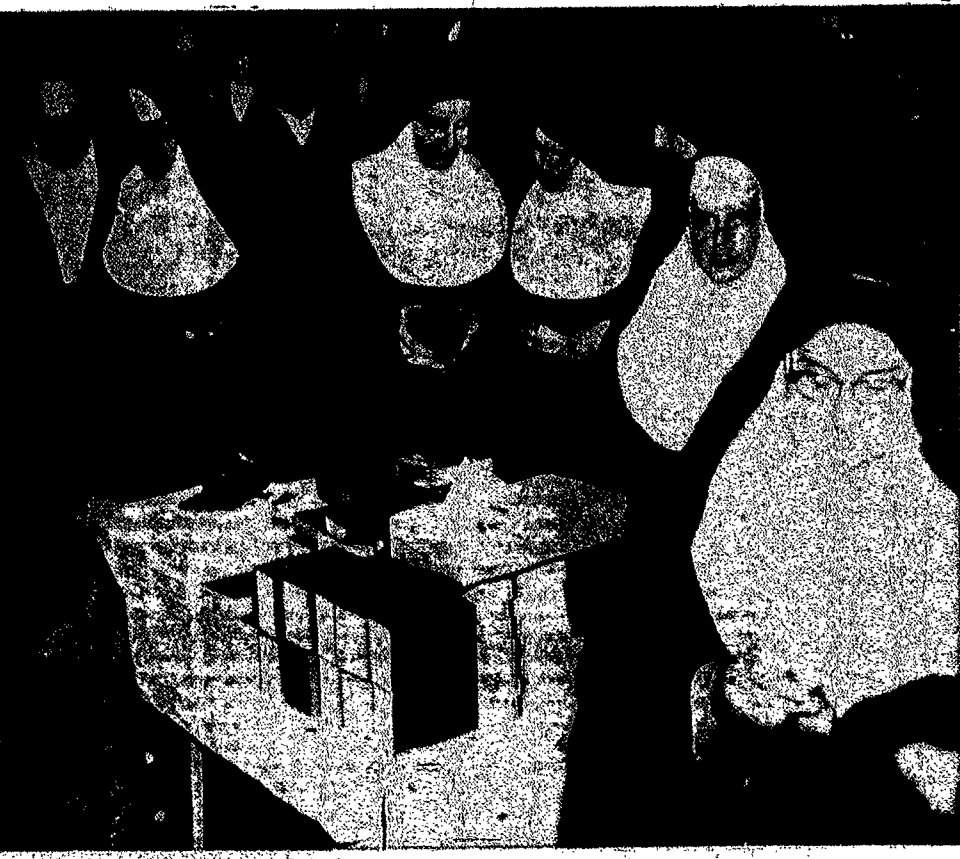
We must also recognize that persons suffering from mental illness are really sick. Because their trouble is psychic, we sometimes imagine that they can get rid of it if they want to, so we try to talk them out of it.

Further, once the patient is under treatment, other members of the family should cooperate with the therapist and follow his advice closely. Most cures take time and will endure only if the family circle lends patient support.

What does the Church think of psychiatric treatment? As we have seen, this is a broad term, covering a great variety of techniques and approaches.

In general, the Church relies on the prudent judgment of trained therapists. As in medicine, the Church insists that treatment must not involve immoral acts, and must be directed to the good of the patient as a person. Hence clients are never to be used like guinea pigs for experimental purposes, and if a new type of therapy is to be tried, there must be reasonable assurance that it stands a good chance to help the patient.

Mental illness, like all illnesses, offers an excellent opportunity for the display of true charity. It may make heavy demands on our patience, kindness and tolerance. But the exercise of real Christian charity is never easy — unless it is prompted by love.



Nuns spent Columbus Day holiday listening to speakers and viewing exhibits at Catechetical congress.

# Bishops Unite To Shape Latin America Apostolate

Washington — (RNS) — A history-making conference will open here Nov. 2 when members of the Catholic hierarchies of the United States and Canada gather with a group of Latin American bishops to discuss problems and needs of the Church in Central and South America.

Marking the first time that bishops representing the entire American continent have met in joint sessions, the conference, which will continue through Nov. 5, will be held with the active co-operation of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America in Rome, the Latin American Bishops' Council, and the National Catholic Welfare Conference in this country.

SPECIAL DELEGATE to the meeting will be Archbishop Antonio Samore, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs and president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.

# Jesuit Charges

# U.S. Imports Degrade India

Cleveland — (RNS) — Birth control groups in Asia, sponsored by American organizations, are tearing down individual and national morality, a Jesuit priest who has spent 32 years as a missionary in India charged here.

Father John J. Brennan, S.J., said that "in the name of social and material uplift" such groups are "degrading the very people they claim to be helping."

THE PRIEST also criticized trashy U.S. magazines and movies now being distributed in India which, he said, make many believe that America is a materialistic nation.

"American materialism is symbolized by birth prevention," he said.

Father Brennan noted that India was one of the first countries to make birth control a national policy. In doing this, he said, it went contrary to the belief of the late Mahatma

Gandhi, father of Indian independence, who strongly opposed conception prevention. Gandhi was responsible for sending Margaret Sanger, pioneer American birth control advocate, out of India when she tried to promote birth prevention there, Father Brennan said.

The priest labeled artificial birth control "contrary to nature" and said it was specifically condemned by God in the Bible. Moreover, he said, by removing a "natural deterrent" to temptation, it invites irresponsibility and promiscuity and works towards the breakdown of family unity.

It also denies the "spiritual destiny" of man, he declared, making him "no more than another mouth to feed."

# Canada Prelates Gird To Aid Latin America

Quebec City — (RNS) — Co-ordinated efforts to help the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America meet its needs for more priests and lay missionaries were discussed here at the annual meeting of the Canadian Catholic Conference.

THE CONFERENCE usually meets in Ottawa, but it was decided to hold the sessions here this year to coincide with celebrations marking the centenary of the Canadian hierarchy during which special tribute was paid to the memory of Francois de Montmorency Laval, the first Bishop of Quebec.

Archbishop Paul Bernier, Bishop of Gaspé, who is president of the Conference's administrative council, said the bishops of Latin America have appealed to the hierarchies of both the United States and Canada to help them meet the needs and problems of the Church in Central and South America where a grave shortage of priests and

promising fields of Catholic Action demand a strong lay apostolate.

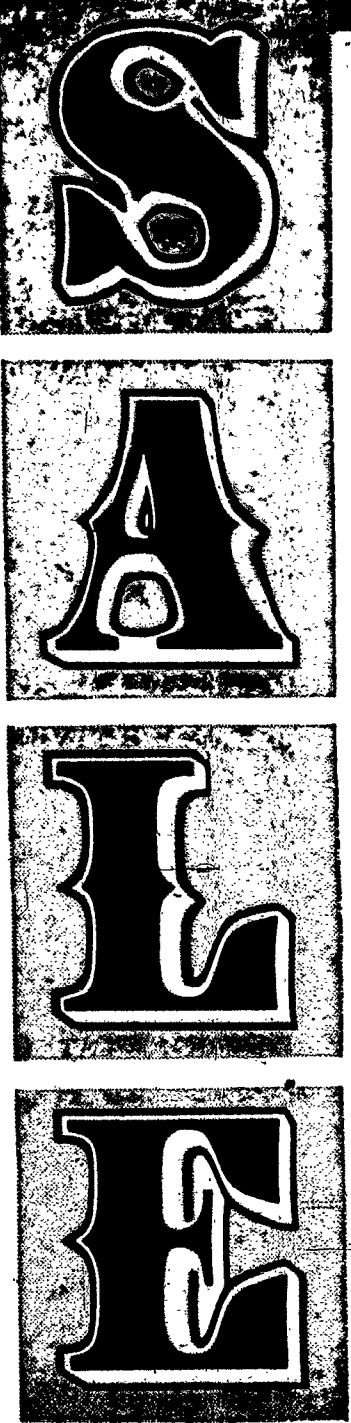
"The Latin American countries," Archbishop Bernier said, "have a crying need for priests, professional men, teachers and technicians. It is the duty of the countries more highly favored in matters of religion to help these countries. Canada already had hundreds of missionaries laboring in South America, but many more are needed to relieve the shortage of priests."

Missionaries Ordained Schoenebeck — (NC) — Twenty-four seminarians of the Society of the Foreign Missions of Bethlehem in Switzerland were ordained at the society's seminary here, by an African Bishop.

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