

Our Family's 'Togetherness' Leaves Me Exhausted

By FATHER JOHN L. THOMAS, S.J.
St. Louis University Sociology Professor

My problem is family relationships. I feel swamped with the weight of family ties. We have five children of our own, but every weekend we must join dozens of our clan for a big meal with our folks. That's wonderful and feel hurt if we stay away, yet the work and noise leave me exhausted. Besides, my husband is home only on weekends, so we spend little enough time as a family. What can I do?

Your letter made me smile, Patricia. With most sociologists I assumed that few examples of what we call the extended family system had survived suburbanization. Evidently you belong to one that is still quite active. The extended family served a useful purpose in maintaining a sense of unity and mutual responsibility among its members, though it appears that the system also may have its price — one can have too much solidarity!

Your problem is significant because it raises delicate questions concerning the entire set of in-law relationships. Newlyweds in particular often find it difficult to work out mutually satisfactory ways for dealing with their relatives — parents, married sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, and so on. Our society no longer clearly defines the nature or extent of such relationships.

Not only do individual families differ widely in this regard — as they probably always have — but there exists no ideal type that the majority accept and attempt to follow in practice.

Different societies have devised a great variety of workable kinship structures. Our traditional Christian family system of the West tended to emphasize an extended kinship structure, that is, a system in which a fairly wide circle of relatives recognized a definite pattern of social rights and responsibilities among themselves. Although national groups developed different patterns, individual members of each group knew what was expected of them and what they could expect from their relatives.

Americans have no clear-cut kinship system to follow not only because the original



settlers and later immigrants introduced their own distinctive national patterns, but contemporary social conditions are also producing change. The extended family system does not fare well in an urban, industrialized, open-class society that places a high premium on spatial and social mobility, individualism, and independence.

Emphasis has shifted from the extended family to the conjugal type composed of husband, wife, and immature children. Individual family clans may maintain close-knit, mutually supportive relationships, but this is neither common or regarded as obligatory.

Why are these facts pertinent? They show why there is little agreement on how to deal with one's in-laws. They suggest that no all-over, ideal pattern can be devised — we must honor our parents, but the manner will differ from society to society; "blood is thicker than water," yet the practical implications of this principle differ in each culture. They also indicate that

although couples may face a delicate problem here, in-laws are not outlaws. Kinship bonds are both intimate and natural — they may support as well as swamp you.

What norms should you follow? Remember, your marriage and the family you establish have a primary claim on your loyalty, affection, and interest. They must be your first concern. Justice and charity demand that equal respect and consideration be extended to the relatives of both partners. Moreover, parents and other relatives must realize, or be made to realize, that marriage involves a couple in a new social unit having prior claims on their allegiance.

What can you do, Patricia? First, acknowledge that you've allowed yourself to be trapped in such a narrow web of in-law relationships that your own family unit is being stifled. Then consider whether your brothers and sisters will cooperate in changing the pattern, perhaps by each family taking turns on weekend visits.

School Dispute Erupts In New Political Party

San Juan — (RNS) — Election year finds mounting Church-State tension in Puerto Rico where the recent formation of the Christian Action Party has provoked — according to some observers — a sharp conflict of conscience among the predominantly Roman Catholic population.

While Cuban Catholics must deal with the threat of Communism and those in the Dominican Republic with the suppression of human rights, the faithful in this other key Caribbean area are embroiled in a controversy following the emergence of a fourth party whose proclaimed purpose is to defend "Christian principles ignored by our laws."

Triggering the formation of the Christian Action Party (CAP) was the issue of "released-time" religious instruction for public school children. In early June, the legislature failed to take action on a bill to permit such instruction.

Shortly afterwards, Bishop James P. Davis of San Juan, who was later made an archbishop when his diocese was raised to archepiscopal rank, told a protest rally attended by some 100,000 persons that Catholics were free to form their own political party. They did.

Prime mover in the party's organization was Bishop James McManus of Ponce, who stressed that CAP did not in any way compromise the Church. The point was underscored also by other members of the clergy who insisted that the Church was not entering into politics, but that island politics were entering into the spiritual realm of the Church.

They said the Church was not interested in political power or the new party beyond those questions which directly affected the Church. Among these issues they cited not only the introduction of released-time education but the repeal of certain birth control laws.

Although the churches have been at pains to point out that the Church and CAP are two separate, distinct entities, many Catholics never-

Nuns Stir Protest

Washington — (RNS) — Protest of the arrangements for religious freedom, rather than be taxed to build a newly-organized Protestant group which is seeking to "articulate religious issues of concern to Protestants" in the current campaign, has apologized to Gov. Michael V. DeSalle of Ohio for a reference to him in connection with a legal decision authorizing — gabled — nuns — to teach in Ohio's public schools.

In some few rural areas with predominant Catholic populations, Ohio state school authorities have arranged with existing parochial schools to teach Non-Catholic pupils and have recognized the schools and the nuns who staff them as part of the public school system. The Non-Catholic parents voted ap-

proval of the arrangements, rather than be taxed to build separate public schools.) THE GOVERNOR demanded an apology after he pointed out in Columbus that he had nothing to do with the legal ruling in question, which had been made by a professor in the present attorney-general's office under a former governor.

In a statement concerning religious issues which Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, minister of Marble Collegiate church in New York, released to the press after a conference of some 150 Protestant clergymen here, the Ohio today (a state with a Roman Catholic governor), accord-

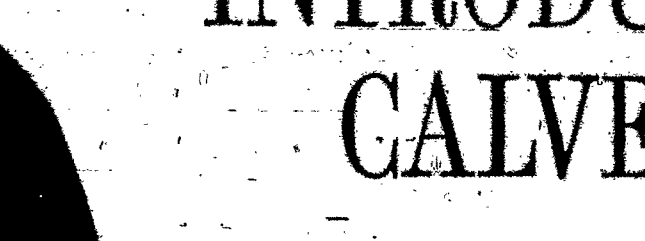
The opposition's chief argument is that the best interests of the Catholic Church cannot be served by formation of a political party. They claim that these interests can be served much better within the framework of the island's three existing parties — the Popular Democratic Party, the Republican Party and the Independence Party.

CAP opponents have minimized fears expressed by some clergymen that although Communism is not yet a threat in Puerto Rico it would be naive to think that seeds are not being planted here.

The critics insist that the history of the island further refutes this argument on behalf of CAP. They say that even when Puerto Rico hit an economic bottom in the 1930's, Communism was unable to gain a foothold, and there is no chance of its becoming an issue now or in the future.

There has been talk that CAP might consolidate with the Republican Party if the religious issues are adopted in the latter party's platform. Stated as the prime concern of the Republican Party and Bishop McManus has professed sympathy with this goal.

Toronto — (RNS) — Sister St. Maurus, the first nun in Canada to graduate as a pharmacist, is celebrating her 50th anniversary as a Sister of St. Joseph. She served 27 years in the pharmacy of St. Michael's hospital in Toronto and today supervises a staff of five graduate pharmacists at St. Joseph's hospital.



Nun Pharmacist

King had been arrested in Filadelfia, Pa., on August 5, on the charge of ethical libel on the basis of his distribution throughout the United States of copies of the "bogus oath" attributed to the Knights of Columbus.

In so doing, however, he invited the governor to take the lead in remedying through legislation or court action what he termed a "serious breach of separation of Church and State."

The record in Ohio speaks for itself," said Mr. Gill. "If Gov. DeSalle will investigate, he will find in many Ohio communities Roman Catholic nuns, who are under vows of total obedience to their Church and religious superiors, are teaching the distinctive doctrine of their faith in the public schools and are receiving salaries from public tax funds which revert, without income tax deductions, to their religious orders."

Under Ohio's constitution, the attorney general is an independent, elected official; not responsible to the governor, nor has the governor any control over local school boards or their policies.

The Rev. Donald R. Gill, executive director of the new Citizens for Religious Freedom group, said, "Apparently, no one the governor and attorney general will make one."

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