

# We're Told 'Don't Be Conformists' Are We Supposed to be Odd Balls?

By FATHER JOHN L. THOMAS, S.J.  
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We have just finished our annual school retreat, and as usual, we were urged not to become "conformists," or to set out of "human respect." I've always found this last term very confusing because nobody ever bothers to explain it. We just can't avoid paying attention to what others may think of us. How long will you be welcome in a group if you don't go along with them. Most of us aren't made to be lone wolves, yet that's what you'll be if you don't cooperate. Some of the instructions we get don't seem very practical, or am I missing the point?

Since I didn't make this retreat, Dan, I can't answer your last question. However, I think I know the point your instructor was trying to make in regard to human respect, and it's a point well worth making. Perhaps his treatment took too much for granted, and as sometimes happens when discussing spiritual matters, employed terms that remain meaningful only for those specially trained in religion.

At any rate, it's clear the instruction didn't get across to you and consequently merits further discussion.

By human respect we mean a particular type of fear, a fear of criticism or ridicule that induces a person to neglect doing his duty or seeking a moral good. In this sense, it is opposed to the general moral virtue of fortitude which gives one the strength to tackle and endure difficult things. Hence the term "human respect" has traditionally been used by spiritual writers to signify wrongly motivated or ill-grounded fear.

WHEN WE BLAME a person for acting out of human respect, we imply not only that he acted primarily or merely out of concern for what others might think of him, but also that the expected criticism of these "others" was not based on sound moral principles.

We must carefully distinguish the cowardly fear of criticism associated with "human respect" from the healthy fear of the just criticism of others that we all should experience. This salutary fear operates as a self-motivating awareness that if we do wrong, our good reputation will suffer; that is, others will justly blame us, and we will lose their valued esteem. Perhaps the source of your confusion, Dan, is that you tend to associate the term "human respect" with this healthy fear of just criticism. If properly explained, this could be a correct use of the term, though it would run contrary to the traditional definition.

Because the reality to which this term applies has practical implications for moral life, let us analyze it in greater detail. Human respect plays a very significant role in human affairs, for men are social by nature. To be sure,



as human persons we possess an independent, autonomous "self", but we are not autonomous.

We stand in need of others and are consequently profoundly affected by the kinds of relationships we maintain with them. More important, our conceptions of ourselves, our self-images, are formed and conditioned by what others think of us, or at least, by what we think others think of us. In other words, we tend to be to ourselves (our self-images), what we are to others; and what we are to others (the images they have of us), tend to be reflected in what we are to ourselves.

CONCERN FOR the esteem of others, therefore, is an essentially human trait, and it is precisely in this gap between our self-images and the images we present to others, between what we are to ourselves and what we wish to appear to others, that the roots of the problems associated with human respect are to be found. If our self-images are poorly developed, or if we are dissatisfied with them, we will seek consolation in the images we present to others, with the result that we will try to preserve and enhance these images by conforming our conduct to what others may approve.

In this connection it should be noted that not all "others" are equally important. Only those whose esteem we seek; for example, our parents during childhood, our "gang" or peer group during adolescence, our professional colleagues, business associates, or social "pace-setters" during maturity will be significant in this regard. Moreover, con-

## CRS Aids Self-Help Program

By FATHER IVAR C. McGRATH, S.S.C.

Pingtung — (NC) — Catholic Relief Services - National Catholic Welfare Conference is the executing agent in a new U.S. self-help project involving refugees and land reclamation in this southern Formosa county.

Officially known as Title II aid, the program consists of using food instead of wages for the assistance of habitually unemployed or underemployed persons.

According to the CRS-NCWC Taipei office, it is the first case in which a voluntary agency has acted as executing agent in a Title II project in the Far East.

The Pingtung project aims to help refugees from the Tachen Islands to reclaim land to support themselves.

In February, 1955 the Chinese government, with U.S. assistance, transferred some 18,000 inhabitants of the Tachens to Formosa. The islands, close to the China mainland and north of the Nationalist-held offshore island of Matsu, were deemed untenable in case of communist attack.

The 18,000 refugees have now increased to 25,000. The problems connected with resettling them led Father Bohmann, O.P., a young German Dominican priest of the Pingtung missions, to plan present project with the assistance of CRS-NCWC.

The project was cleared and approved by both the U.S. and Chinese government agencies involved, and since August 20, 1962, the Pingtung self-help project has been underway.

Each family has been given free housing by the government. Efforts have been made to bring the young men back from the factories and dockyards elsewhere in Formosa where they had gone for jobs and to make sure the land is reclaimed.

Through the Council for U.S. Aid, CRS-NCWC obtains rice, flour, and edible oil. Father Bohmann, two assistants, and the headmen of the five villages, supervise the work and the distribution of food.

"Each workman receives 750 grams (about a pound and a half) of food for one day's work," father Bohmann said. "The first dependent receives 600 grams, and each additional dependent a further 400 grams. Each person also receives one ounce of edible oil."

"There are 518 families in the five villages, with a total of 2,500 persons.

## Lay Increase In Missions

By KEN SCULLY

Sydney — (NC) — A new feature of the Pacific missions is the appearance of the lay missionary at the very core of the Church's work there. Before World War II lay missionaries were the exception rather than the rule. Now, however, the mission bishops and their clergy are relying more and more on these dedicated lay folk, some of whom have gone on a permanent basis, others only temporarily for a particular job in spreading the Church message in the Pacific islands.

These lay missionaries are also serving on the Australian continent's own missions — particularly in the north and north-west of the nation where the Sacred Heart Fathers and the Pallottines are still battling for the souls of the world's most primitive peoples, the aborigines.

SOME MARRIED couples are among them often the wife serves as a teacher or nurse while her husband may be a sawmiller, mission carpenter or a helper in some other capacity.

There is practically no limit to the occupations undertaken by the lay missionaries — men and women. There are aircraft pilots, missions ship captains and seafarers, carpenters, plumbers, nurses and teachers, millers, builders, cabinet makers, bricklayers and catechists... every kind of skilled tradesmen. So urgent is the need that the superiors of the 25 Australian mission territories even appeal for the unqualified — they can find jobs for all.

Hardly a day goes by that the Catholic press of Australia or the Pontifical Mission Aid Societies headquarters in Sydney does not receive a request for a lay missionary for some particular work.

It would be virtually impossible to estimate correctly the total number of Australian lay missionaries now serving in the Pacific and aborigine missions but a good guess would be 150.

The outposts are scattered over thousands of square miles of sea and islands, on mountains by lakes, in jungle, in villages and lonely trading centers — in New Guinea, New Britain, the Solomons, Fiji and the hundred other islands.

The tree-planting ceremony climaxed their trip. The forest, contributed by many groups throughout the world, is part of Israel's huge reforestation project.

Israel and Jordanian officials cooperated by providing guides and quick access to both Jewish and Arab sectors. The pilgrimage groups received the blessing of Pope John XXIII before leaving Vatican City.

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