

Increased Attention Given Plight of Retarded Child

(By Religious News Service)

"Your child is mentally retarded."

Cruel words. Perhaps the cruellest a parent can ever hear... to learn that the child in whom you have invested so much love, around whom so many plans have been made, may grow in body but not in mind.

Yet they are words heard frequently. According to the report of the President's Panel on Mental Retardation, there is one case of severe retardation in every thousand births, usually the result of organic defects. Mild retardation occurs in 27 of each 1,000 births.

In New York, the testimony of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) before a hearing on care of mentally ill and the retarded by some of the state's institutions provided shocking details on treatment, facilities, lack of space, lack of supervisory personnel.

Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller, a Republican, replied that New York led the nation in care of the mentally ailing and the severely retarded, emphasizing that in 1965 the Democratic majority in the state had "arbitrarily" cut \$30 million from the budget proposal to carry out the program.

Thus the problem, a growing one, has become a challenge for the state — and for the church.

The parent of a retarded child has written: "To know that your child is not normal

is a devastating heartache that can gnaw and grow to the point of self-destruction — or grow and develop into a blessing."

Religion's ministry, to the retarded must begin at that point, churchmen say, by helping the parents adjust to tragedy with faith, not despair. The goal is adjustment, not acceptance, according to Rabbi Isaac Maltes, president of the Maimonides Institute for Exceptional Children in New York.

Father Michael J. Tabit, Catholic chaplain at Apple Street hospital for retarded children, Wooster, Ohio, put it somewhat differently: "Suppose a woman expecting a child were to be visited by an angel bearing this message from God: 'I can assure you that this child you're going to have will never commit a serious sin.' That mother would be the happiest woman in the world."

This is the case, he said, with seriously retarded children.

It is estimated that there are five million mental retardates in the United States, or roughly one out of every 33 citizens. Lifetime care for a severely retarded child, according to the National Health Education Committee, can come to \$100,000.

It is only in recent years that mental retardation has been given the attention from both private and government agencies that has long been focused on physical diseases — such as polio and tuberculosis. Much of

the credit for bringing the mentally retarded out from the shadows belongs to the late President Kennedy and his family.

Instead of hiding the fact that one of the President's sisters was retarded, the family established foundations and centers for diagnosis and care of the mentally retarded, and has given sizeable financial grants for research. But probably the Kennedy's greatest service was to focus public attention on a condition that for centuries had been buried in superstition, guilt and fear.

Churches have long maintained institutions for custodial care of mental defectives. But as research and experimentation reveal that persons once condemned as hopeless can respond to training, churches have increasingly begun programs of special education.

Catholic, Protestant and Jewish groups are working in the field on three levels. They are developing religious education classes in local churches and synagogues to help mentally handicapped youngsters discover the resources of religion. In a handful of the larger metropolitan centers, parochial day and boarding schools have been established for retardates.

In addition, extensive programs are underway to develop effective teaching materials and train teachers in special education techniques.

In New York City, for example, the Kennedy Child Study Center of New York Catholic

Charities and Yeshiva University's Albert Einstein College of Medicine have crossed religious boundaries to undertake a research and educational program in child mental retardation. Each institution retains complete autonomy in administering its own program, but they have linked their clinical and educational resources to further the cause of the mentally retarded.

Church-oriented institutions are making important discoveries which will be of benefit to all who work with the retarded.

Nuns teaching at the Joseph P. Kennedy Institute in Washington, D.C., for instance, discovered that children with low I.Q.'s can learn much better from colored slides projected on the wall than from books. Mentally retarded teenagers who were able to concentrate on a book for only four or five minutes at a time watch a slide lecture attentively as long as 25 or 30 minutes.

This discovery is expected to be used in other schools.

Growing interest in the religious education of the mentally handicapped prompted the International Journal of Religious Education, published by the National Council of Churches, to put out an entire issue this year on "persons with special needs."

The publication pointed out that the church is "probably the most essential institution" to foster understanding of the handicapped person. "The ministry of Jesus was that of person to person. The epileptic, the blind, the lame — each was accepted as he was. So must we learn to accept both the lovely and the ugly among the handicapped," the Journal said in a lead article by Charles W. Palmer of the Woodhaven Christian Home for Children, Columbia, Mo.

No accurate figures are available on the number of special classes held for mentally handicapped children in Protestant Sunday schools. But the long list of resource material for such classes in the special edition of the International Journal would indicate that the number is sizeable and continues to grow.

Rabbi Maltes, whose Maimonides Institute effects a unique combination of religious and secular education, believes that retarded children need the resources of their religious faith even more than normal children. "These children are so much alone, so often unable to communicate even with their own parents," he explained. "If they are aware of a Father in heaven, it is a great help to them."

The repetition of ritual and prayers also brings to the retarded child the sense of comfort and security of the familiar.

Unlike public school classes for the handicapped, religious institutions dealing with the mentally retarded must cope with the universal theological question of the parents: "Why — why did this happen to me and my child?"

Rabbi Maltes, who accepts non-Jewish as well as Jewish children at Maimonides, has faced this question often. "It isn't so much a question as a

protest, he maintains. "You can't suppress a protest when you're hurt, you cry out. But when he is finished protesting, you tell the parent several things."

"We don't know why it happened to him, but we have to analyze why he is protesting. He may be protesting because he feels he's been rejected by God and now he's looking for an excuse for destructiveness. This you must warn against."

"You have to alleviate his sense of guilt. That his suffering is not necessarily the result of sin. You need to get his questioning into constructive lines; you must get him thinking, 'What can I do now?'"

The parents of a mongoloid son, who have struggled to create training facilities in their small Indiana town for other handicapped children as well as their own, discussed that publication in The Christian, a publication of the Disciples of Christ. After 13 years of patient effort to develop every potential the boy possessed, Mr. and Mrs. James Stuart of Clear Creek, Ind., could write:

"We don't know why God asked this special favor of us. But we do know we would never have had this understanding or compassion for others if we had not experienced this ourselves. We feel that Jimmy is a special blessing and he has brought more into our lives than we ever dreamed could be possible. We have learned to thank God and be grateful for the privilege of bringing hope to others."

Sermons Stress Law, Order

Baltimore — (RNS)—Roman Catholic pastors here, at the request of Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, Archbishop of Baltimore, preached sermons exhorting their parishioners to have more respect for law and order.

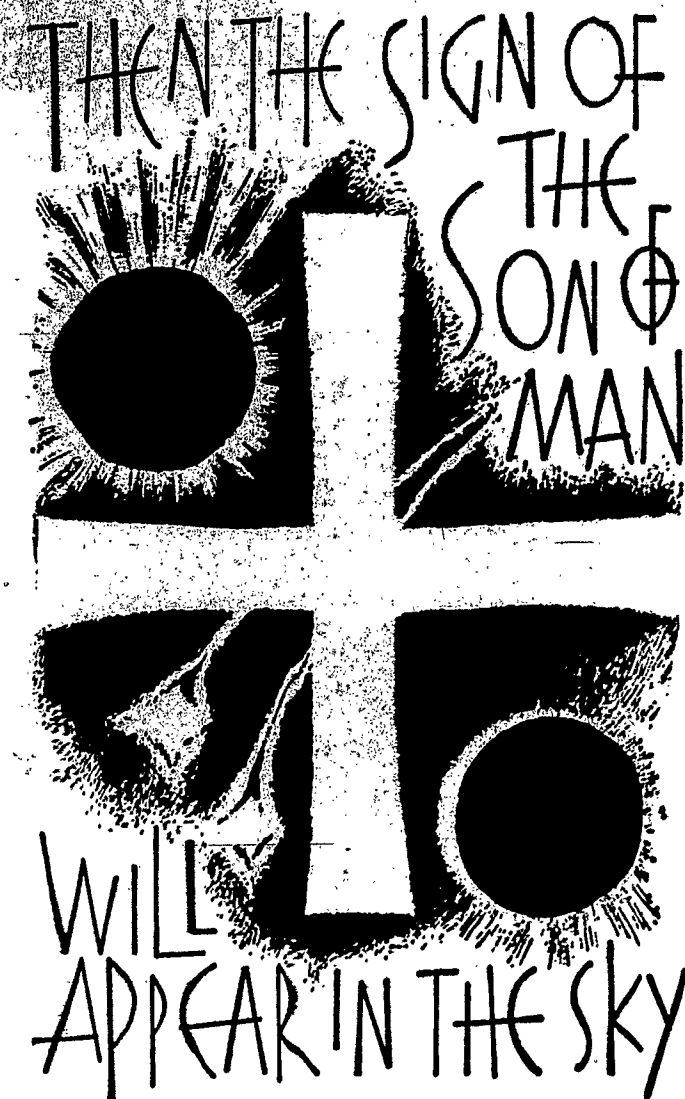
Cardinal Shehan had sent letters to the archdiocese's priests urging that a "unified attempt" be made in all Catholic parishes "to bring home to our people the importance of respecting and observing the law."

The cardinal also sent background information for possible use in preparing sermons which included FBI statistics on crime and violence. He also noted that similar pleas for law and order had been made by the Federal Bar Association's Law Observance Committee.

Among priests speaking on the subject was Father Joseph M. Connolly of St. Gregory's church, located in the heart of the city's western district — one of the toughest in Baltimore.

He told parishioners that when "we have seen magistrates and jurors allow murderers to go free," it becomes hard for "Americans of ordinary situation to really believe that we can become a country of justice."

The priest referred to Haynesville, Ala., where a Klansman recently was acquitted in the slaying of a white woman civil rights worker, and Mississippi. These places, he said, were locales of injustice.



Text and Symbol, 24th Sunday after Pentecost

Christians or Jews

Who Most Needs 'Absolution'?

One of the nation's outstanding ecumenical leaders revealed his Achilles' heel this week.

He relies on newspaper headlines—a fatal weakness!

Presbyterian Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, in a Sunday sermon, objected to the Vatican Council's decision "to absolve Jews" of the crucifixion of Christ.

Nowhere in its decree does the Council speak of "absolution."

As a matter of fact, if anyone is in need of "absolution" it is not the Jews but Christians and, specifically, Catholics.

The decree is a reprimand to Catholics who in the past still today are antisemitic in their attitudes and activities.

The Council says it wants Catholics and Jews "shoulder to shoulder" to deepen their mutual understanding of that "spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews" through biblical and theological study and through "fraternal dialogues."

The sad history of twenty centuries of Christians irresponsibly charging all Jews with the death of Christ "cannot" be allowed to continue, the Council states emphatically.

It is, therefore, not a question of "absolving" the Jews—as if they were all of them guilty of the crucifixion—but rather a directive from the Catholic Church's highest authority telling its own members once and for all to drop the charges against these persecuted people.

Newspaper columnist Harry Golden recently proposed a parallel "Jewish Schema on the Christians" to absolve Christians for the Inquisition, the Crusades, the ghettos and expulsions, the badges of shame and pointed caps, the burning of synagogues and that attitude of mind which made possible Hitler's "final solution" of the Jewish question.

The whole point of both the Vatican Council's decree and Golden's sardonic comments is that Christians are the ones in need of absolution.

Dr. Blake, in his sermon, revealed he is like other men, impressed by headlines—many newspapers have used the misleading term "absolution" in headlining reports on the Council's statement on the Jews—but he apparently was too pressed for time to read the complete articles. This revelation of his human frailty, however, does not destroy his long and widely respected career as an outstanding religious leader.

What both Catholics and Protestants most need to do at the present time is admit before God, as the German Catholics did in all their churches in 1961 —

Lord, God of our fathers, God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob! Father of mercy and God of all consolation! . . . We confess before You: In our midst, innumerable people were murdered for no other reason than that they belonged to the stock from which comes the Messiah according to the flesh. . . . Grant to the murdered Your peace in the land of the living.

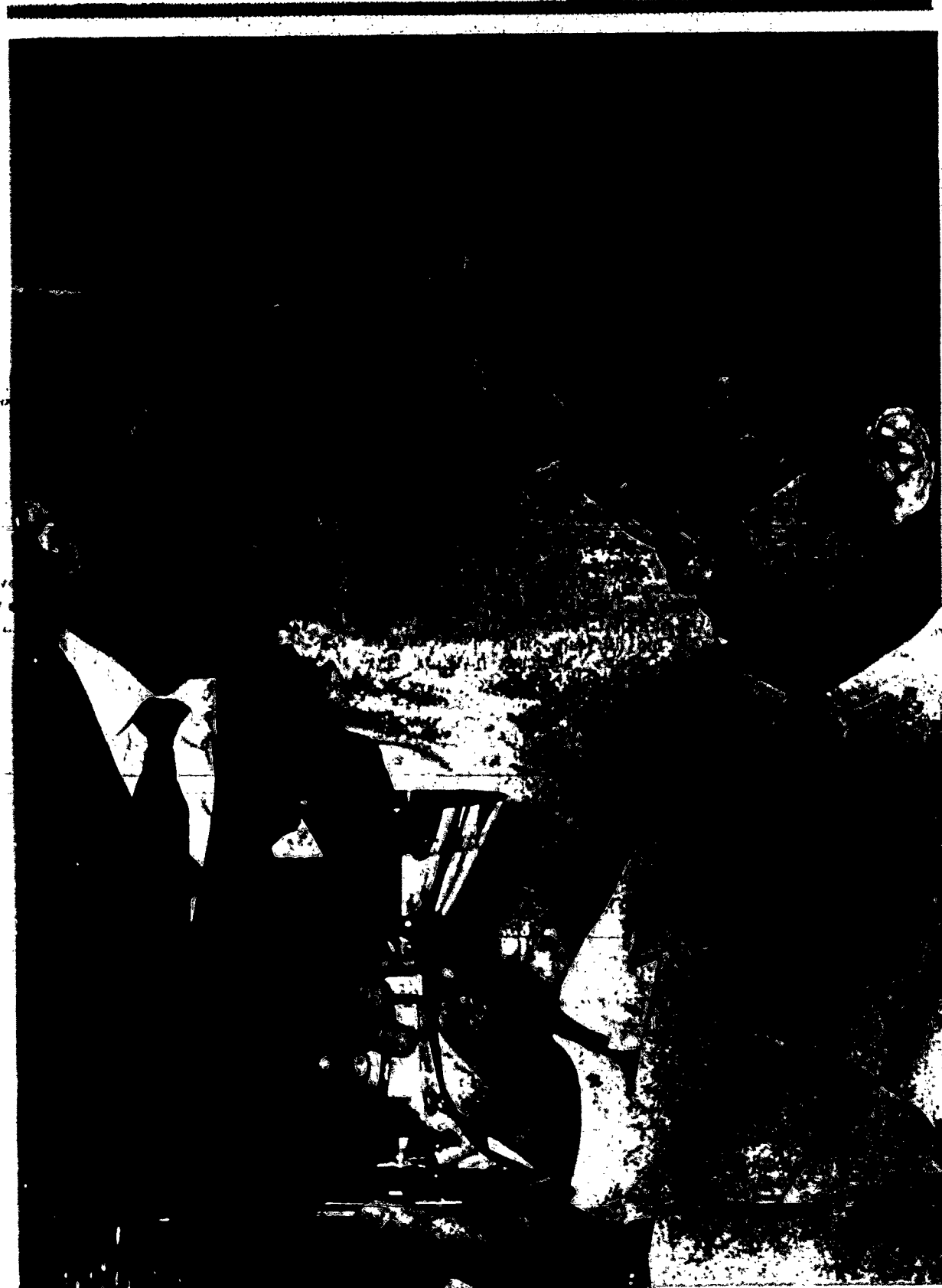
If this becomes increasingly the direction in which we pray and think and speak and act then we will know that words spoken long ago were meant to include us also, "Father, forgive them . . ."

You can continue to help Bishop Kearney in his work for immortal souls.



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Children 'Adopt' Japanese Priest

Cleveland—(RNS)—A Japanese priest, Sacred Heart Father Augustine Hiroshi Kobayashi, offered his first Solemn Mass in Cleveland's Our Lady of Good Counsel Church because the 1,049 pupils of the parish school adopted him. The children tried to raise enough money through bake sales and raffles to bring the priest's parents to the U.S. for his recent ordination in Fall River, Mass. Failing this, they decided to buy the priest a chalice. Making the presentation here are David Harden and Mary Ann Benedict. The children heard of Father Augustine, a theologically student in the U.S. since 1958 and the first Japanese native ordained in the Sacred Heart Fathers, through a priest of the parish who served as a missionary in Japan. Father Augustine is a convert from Buddhism.

Lay People Prepare for Changes after Council

By GARY MacEOIN

Rome — "When we organize similar meetings back in the United States to promote implementation of the Council decrees, the proportion of lay people to priests and nuns should be considerably higher."

The comment was made by a participant in an evaluation session which ended three days of discussions by some 50 Americans on ways to put Council decisions into effect. The clergy present led in approving the suggestion. One priest noted that the heavy clerical weighting of our meeting had resulted simply from the smallness of the American lay presence in Rome.

I looked around the room. Not fewer than half of us were lay people. The proportion was obviously lower than that of the laity in the Church. On the other hand it was so much higher than one is accustomed to finding when Church matters are being decided that I thought I'd be willing to settle for it as an immediate target.

Here in Rome, in particular, few are concerned about the layman's views. "Do not kid yourself," John Copley has said.

"This is a clerical affair, and the layman is more of a Hollywood extra than a supporting actor. In fact, the Protestant clergyman is more 'in' in Rome than the Catholic layman." Even a technical commission like that on the communications media has only a token number of lay members, and some—lacking technical backgrounds—for window dressing.

Each Council session has, nevertheless, increased the lay presence. The latest official list shows 42 lay auditors, 13 of them women. There are also 10 auditor nuns, often listed with the laity though called clerics by canon law. Even more than the laity, they constituted the silent Church, but thanks in particular to Mother Mary Luke of the Loretto Sisters of Kentucky, they can hardly ever again be ignored when decisions affecting their life and work are taken.

Clerical Rome has made the lay auditors observe protocol in the Council. When seldom they spoke, they confined themselves to obviously well-censored platitudes. The one exception I can recall was James Norris's fine statement on world hunger, and that speech dealt with a subject on which others hold strongly conflicting opinions, strictly within policy lines approved by the United States hier-

archy and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

Outside the Council hall, several auditors spoke more frankly, and undoubtedly with significant impact, to groups of bishops and priests. None, however, attempted an organized effort of public relations except the dynamic and colorful couple from Mexico named this year to represent the Christian family, Jose and Luz Alvarez Izasa.

Some have criticized the bourgeois atmosphere of their operation, as of the Christian Family Movement in general. The Roman "palazzo" where they live with their retinue of 15 or 20 volunteer helpers, undoubtedly project the typical Christian family as belonging to a Church of the professional classes rather than a Church of the poor. So, however, does the whole Council, and certainly all of the lay auditor apparatus. Within this narrow spectrum I think the Alvarez Izasas deserve congratulations for making so much of their opportunity.

Particularly important is their investigation in depth of the concerns of the Christian family. Instead of talking off the top of their heads, they decided when named auditors last March to get a cross-section of the views of married people

They reached Rome with more than 25,000 answers to a questionnaire, from North and South America, Western Europe and Africa. This concrete support for the opinions they express has properly carried great weight.

The answers reveal an extraordinarily wide area of interest and concern on the part of parents. I was very impressed by their sense of their inadequate preparation to understand each other and their children, and their feeling that their priests should here be able to give them more help than they usually do. They not only urge a specialization of more priests in family matters, but a change in priestly training so as to keep candidates close to their own families during their years of preparation.

These views will undoubtedly influence the decisions on auxiliary education to be taken by post-synodal commissions. They confirm criticisms from other sources of the warping of the mentality that can result from isolation of youngsters in anti-lay and anti-feminine atmospheres. Such practices are common in many countries, including Italy. Until they change, it will be difficult to implement the Council's concept of the Church as the assembly of the entire people of God.

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