

Easy Abortion : Part V

Psychiatric Reasons: How Valid?

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In our last article (Courier Journal 3-8-68) we began a consideration of the psychiatric indications for abortion and found that in many cases such abortions were done for "social" reasons rather than for medical or psychiatric indications.

Today, we consider those regarded by some as valid psychiatric indications.

Dr. Alex Barno of the Minnesota Maternal Morality Committee and the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Minnesota School of Medicine discussed in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology the record in his state between 1950 and 1965.

He stated, "As the medical indications for therapeutic abortion have dwindled to almost nothing, the psychiatric indications have become more prominent. Sixty to 85 per cent of all abortions are said to be recommended on this basis, the principal criterion being the likelihood of maternal suicide. Again, however, data from the Minnesota study indicate this fear to be unfounded. There were only 14 suicides, 1 per 92,982 live births during the 15 year period. (This is less than 1 per year in Minnesota...)"

"Not a single one of these was illegitimately pregnant and not one had requested a therapeutic abortion."

Suicide in pregnancy is rare, occurring 0.4 to 0.2 per 100,000 population as compared to 3.1 to 5.2 per 100,000 population for all females.

Dr. Barno also quotes Lindberg (another Swedish medical author) who "has shown that suicide is not a risk for patients who wish a therapeutic abortion and are refused. In his study of 304 patients where requests for therapeutic abortions were refused, not one committed suicide even though 82 indicated that they would do so if their request were refused."

Dr. Barno concludes, "How can pregnancy cause such a psychiatric upheaval or turmoil to alter the psychodynamics of an individual to the extent that she will commit suicide? If she is not going to commit suicide, psychiatrists tell us that she will be very unhappy or upset. Are we all happy and content all of the time? Isn't there some unhappiness and turmoil in all of our lives? It is what is known in common parlance as everyday living."

"This all seems a most nebulous, nonobjective, non-scientific approach to medicine. It would seem that psychiatrists could accomplish more by using the

available modalities of their specialty in the treatment or rehabilitation of the patient instead of recommending the destruction of another one."

Dr. Myre Sim, a psychiatrist of Birmingham, England, wrote in the British Medical Journal that "Psychiatric indications for termination of pregnancy should not be based on sentimental guesses but on a strong body of facts. Over a period of 12 years he investigated and treated 213 patients with puerperal psychoses (after-delivery mental illness).

He concluded that "The most remarkable aspects of patients with previous puerperal psychoses was the difficulty, if not impossibility, of forecasting a further breakdown. ... Because of the very favorable prognosis in puerperal psychoses, many patients who had an episode and who inquired about the risk of subsequent pregnancies were not discouraged and the vast majority had no trouble."

Regarding (emotional) instability during pregnancy, he reported that "Patients who were referred for termination be-

cause of instability during pregnancy scarcely ever developed a puerperal psychosis."

Dr. Sim stated, "It is an axiom in medical practice that a measure designed to avert a situation should not in itself precipitate such a situation. ... He may be told that the patient is threatening suicide or be regaled with the dreadful social consequences. The answer is still not to recommend termination, which may indeed be harmful, but to nurse the patient through her unstable phase."

He concluded: "The psychiatrically abnormal find it more difficult than the psychiatrically normal to stand the stress implied in a legal abortion. This means that the greater the psychiatric indications for a legal abortion are, the greater will be the risk of unfavorable psychiatric sequelae after the operation. ... Sigfried found 99 per cent of guilt reaction in his

series of therapeutic abortions."

In his summary, Dr. Sim concludes, "There are no psychiatric grounds for the termination of pregnancy. Pressure may be brought to bear on the psychiatrist to recommend termination. He may be told that the patient is threatening suicide or be regaled with the dreadful social consequences. The answer is still not to recommend termination, which may indeed be harmful, but to nurse the patient through her unstable phase."

If we were to ask either the taxpayers or the legislators whether they wanted a law permitting abortion on demand, the majority would answer "no." In my opinion, however, the psychiatric clause in the Blumenthal Bill (now before the New York State Legislature) is loose enough to allow exactly that.

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**Msgr. Boyle Named to Commission**  
Monsignor Charles V. Boyle, of St. John the Evangelist, Humboldt Street, will succeed Archbishop John E. McCaffrey as the Bishop's representative on the Pastoral Office today.

Bishop Kearney established the Pastoral Commission on July 1965 to work with other church officials in projects for religious unity and peace. The Bishop's Pastoral Commission is the Bishop's channel for communication, interaction with Jews and Protestants within diocesan boundaries.

In appointing Msgr. Boyle, the Bishop said, "Your gracious cooperation with all people, your knowledge of the ecumenical movement and your prudence and above all, your priestliness make you the ideal person for such a post. ... I am certain that the prayer of Our Lord at the Supper, 'that we may be made one' will become more and more a reality through your efforts with our brethren and the Jews to whom we owe so much."

Other members of the commission are Monsignor J. Emmett J. Father Joseph P. Brennan and Edward Zemel.

**Vatican Fears For Papal Trip To S. America**  
By FATHER ROBERT GRAHAM, S.J.  
Vatican City — (RNS) — The Vatican is worried about the possibility of a kidnapping of a Guatemalan bishop who is expected to visit the Vatican in August and if so, how he would proceed in order not to be misled by the extremists.

The Pope can still back out of the trip to the Congress since no announcement has been made. He can take a calculated risk rather than lose a unique opportunity to give a strong push to the program of pastoral and social action in the rapidly growing subcontinent.

The problem of violence and terrorism has long bedeviled the reform action in Latin America. The crisis is getting worse.

**Costa Rican Pope Tilaran**  
By VIRGINIA EADE, NC News Service  
Tilaran, Costa Rica — The Latin American village where a "Yankee, go home!" heard.

Tilaran is a little Costa Rican community not far south of the Nicaraguan border. It is surrounded by coffee plantations, banana fields, and a high percentage of the men of the region are living in the fields. Their income more than \$1 a day, it is not uncommon to find them living in a family of 12 or 14.

Tilaran is without a single street, and during the 9-month season the place is a morass of mud. The houses are almost all of mud, with a few of pink, or both. When the rain comes, the mud is everywhere.

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