



### THE CHURCH 1973 Fr. Andrew Greeley

Most letters that I get from priests are nasty. I don't mean that most priests are nasty, just that most of them who bother to write to me are nasty.

One writer had found a quotation of mine in which I made an easily documented assertion that there was no reason to assert that young people were any more given to sexual misbehavior today than they were 20, 30, 40, or even 100 years ago. He had also clipped a newspaper account of the so-called "Sorensen Report" that purports to be a serious study of the sexual mores of American youth. The conflict between what I was saying and what the Sorensen Report was reported as saying was sufficient grounds for this particular priest to aim his venom in my direction. It was not necessary, apparently, either to get the full context of my remarks or to read the Sorensen Report.

As for the latter, I think it can be said that it is a shoddy and second rate job that unquestionably will be destroyed by reviewers in the serious and scholarly journals. I am not suggesting that American young people are particularly virtuous in matters sexual, but a decline from previous virtue is surely not proved by the Sorensen Report, nor indeed is anything very reliable said about the sexual conduct of young Americans in that book.

The "sexual revolution" is a myth, pure and simple. If by "permissiveness" one means that certain segments of the human body (almost always female) now appear in motion pictures and magazines wherer they did not appear a decade or two or three ago, then we did have a sexual revolution. But there is no particular reason to think that slightly more public display of human sexual anatomy has any effect on sexual behavior. Most young people, indeed most human beings, don't need Penthouse or Deep Throat or Playboy or Last Tango in Paris to become sexually aroused.

As far as human sexual behavior is concerned, the sexual revolution is largely the result of the "good old days" fallacy.

To perpetuate the fallacy one first assumes that in the past there was a time when people were virtuous (or religious, or patriotic, or whatever else); then one collects data about the present situation and discovers (not surprisingly) that the present situation is not the same as the ideal which was postulated for the past. Then one announces with shock, surprise, or joy (depending on one's perspective) that one has encountered a "revolution."

The "good old days" fallacy, however, does not have a great life expectancy, because national surveys began in the 1930s and were quite extensive by the 1940s. Thus there are "benchmarks" against which the present situation can be compared.

The critical question, then, for the Sorensen Report and for my nasty priest correspondent is whether there was anything in the late 1930s or early 1940s that represented a different level of sexual morality than that which is to be observed among young people today.

A recent work (reported in the April issue of Human Behavior) by two sociologists at Michigan State, Arthur Venner and Cyrus Stewart, compared the sexual behavior of a large sample of young people with that reported for 1943 by the Kinsey studies and

calls into serious question the so-called "sexual revolution."

As the editors of Human Behavior note, "Compared to earlier studies, today's teenagers have little more or no more experience with intercourse itself than do other generations of young men and women from 1943 onward." And "Since World War II, everything — including the population count and the cost of being — has rise faster than the incidence of adolescent sexual experience."

Why, then, the myth of a sexual revolution? It is great press copy and has marvelous appeal for curious adults who can identify in their fantasy lives with today's presumably liberated youth. It is also useful for those social science textbook writers and theologians who somehow or other have persuaded themselves that a change in sexual behavior represents evidence of human progress — the only evidence left in a world which is rapidly losing faith in the dogmas of evolutionary progress. It would be inconsiderate, I suppose, to take their myth away from them.

Permissive indeed! But, as we say at the University of Chicago, relative to what? The England of the Regency or of the Restoration? The France or Versailles? The Rome of the Caesars or the Borgias? The Greece of Plato? Even Victorian England and Puritan New England, as these cultures existed in their sordid reality?

There never has been a time when chastity was easy or popular, and the only trouble with the myth of the New Permissiveness of the Sexual Revolution is that it makes chastity a little bit harder for those young people who would like to practice it but are persuaded by the mythmakers that somehow or other they are old fashioned. Statistically, what is old fashioned is promiscuity. The chaste have always been a minority and still are.



Photo by Susan McKinney

### Math Isn't All Work

Anunciation students, left to right, Ann Marie Costa, Lana Daley, Shari Crittendon and Theresa Damico enjoy the school's math fair held April 17 and 18. About 285 Anunciation students took part in the show, which had classes working about a month in advance, making games geared to grade levels first through eighth.

### Liederkrantz Celebrating Its Birthday

The Liederkrantz Choral Society is celebrating its 100th birthday this year with a concert at Aquinas Institute Auditorium Friday, May 18, at 8:15 p.m.

A musical variety show with the society, the Teutonia Liedertafel Choir, Rochester Saengerchor, Gleason Male Chorus and Barnard Exempt Firemen's Association Band will be followed by a centennial festival.

### Spring Follies

St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt Street will present its annual Spring Follies on May 4 and 5 at the Mercy High School Auditorium.

Old-time radio and vaudeville will provide the basis for sketches which will see the return of The Shadow, The Seven Little Foys, and the Lone Ranger.

Showtime both days is 8 p.m. and tickets are available at the door.

### A Tree for the Park.

We'll plant a tree in a county park for you when you enter Lincoln First Bank's "Tall Tree" sweepstakes. Win first prize and enjoy a free trip to San Francisco and Sequoia National Forest. Enter any time between April 18 and May 18 at any office of Lincoln First. There is no obligation.

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