

The Church 1977



Fr. Andrew Greeley

James Lynch's new book, "The Broken Heart: The Medical Consequences of Loneliness," is one of the strongest arguments for marriage, family and by implication, local community to come down the beach in a long time. I don't know whether Dr. Lynch is a Catholic. His note in the introduction that part of the book is based on the social ethic his parents brought from County Donegal - love of God, love of family, love of neighbor - suggests that he might be a communal Catholic.

If Dr. Lynch is indeed a Catholic, he will be ignored by the church just as have all the other Catholic scholars of his generation in favor of the sloganizers, the second-rate, the sick. If he had to attend a meeting with German theologians he would also be dismissed as naive and inexperienced.

But I wish to reflect in this column on the implications of Lynch's book for the priesthood and religious life. I am at the age now in which I see many of my contemporaries being torn apart by the loneliness of the crisis of the middle years (which German theologians dismiss as unimportant because, according to them, it doesn't happen in the Third World). The thesis of "The Broken Heart" that loneliness has profound implications for physical health raises some disturbing questions to those of us who still believe in the validity of the celibate option (as a free

choice): it was clear all along that the celibate needs friends to survive psychologically. It is now clear that he needs them to survive physically, too.

As I see it there are three options: 1) The church abandons celibacy completely, save as an ideal for a few cloistered monks and nuns (this may well happen; if it does then a later age will rediscover celibacy). 2) Priests and nuns learn in their training years how to have sustained friendships with those who are not clergy or religious.

3) The structures of the priesthood and the religious life be reformed internally so that instead of driving one another to lonely early graves we provide support and reinforcement for one another.

I found myself a number of years ago pretty much thrown out of my own archdiocese - both by the bishop and by the priests (the offense is not what I write, since it isn't read, but that I write) It was one of the best things to happen to me because, more or less without paying much attention, I ended up with my closest friends beyond the boundaries of clerical culture, something I otherwise would never have imagined. The crisis of the middle years is much less lonely than it is for my age peers who are forced to lean on the frail supports of clerical friendship. (I resolved my crisis by turning to fiction and poetry; just now I think I'll sulk and not publish any of these efforts. I don't want to blow my reputation for not having unpublished thoughts). In talking to somewhat younger priests, I find that they are doing consciously and deliberately what I did unintentionally. As one priest put it, "I am not going to grow old relying on priests for friendship. They'll kill you." According to Dr. Lynch's book, his assessment might be literally true.

Life, Liberty and Law



Nancy Murphy

The Vatican Document on Sterilization in Catholic Hospitals reads as follows:

"This sacred congregation has diligently considered not only the problem of contraceptive sterilization for therapeutic purposes but also the opinions indicated by different people toward a solution, and the conflicts relative to requests for cooperation in such sterilizations in Catholic hospitals. The congregation has resolved to respond to these questions in this way:

"1) Any sterilization which of itself, that is of its own nature and condition, has the sole immediate effect of rendering the generative faculty incapable of procreation is to be considered direct sterilization as the term is understood in the declarations of the pontifical magisterium, especially of Pius XII (the allocutions to the Catholic Union of Obstetricians, and to the International Society of Hematology, and the encyclical Humanae Vitae 1968). Therefore, not withstanding any subjectively right intention of those whose actions are prompted by the care or prevention of physical or mental illness which is foreseen or feared as a result of pregnancy, such sterilization remains absolutely forbidden according to the doctrine of

the Church. And indeed the sterilization of the faculty itself is forbidden for an even graver reason than the sterilization of individual acts, since it induces a state of sterility in the person which is almost always irreversible.

"Neither can any mandate of public authority, which would seek to impose direct sterilization as necessary for the common good, be invoked, for such sterilization damages the dignity and inviolability of the human person. (Pius XI Casti Cannubii). Likewise, neither can one invoke the principle of totality in this case, in virtue of which principle interference with organs is justified for the greater good of the person: sterility intended in itself is not oriented to the integral good of the person as rightly pursued in the proper order of goods being preserved' (Humanae Vitae) inasmuch as it damages the ethical good of the person which is the highest good, since it deliberately deprives foreseen and freely chosen sexual activity of one essential element, (procreation). Thus article 20 of the medical-ethics code promulgated by the conference in 1971 does faithfully reflect the doctrine which is to be held, and its observance should be urged."

The Vatican statement will be continued next week.

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