

BOOKS

**Priest's Sex Book 'Erroneous,'
'Incompatible with Church'**

Sexuality: A Christian View, By Father Gennaro P. Avvento, Twenty-Third Publications (Mystic, Conn. 1982) 193 pp., 7.95.

By William E. May
NC News Service

Father Avvento, who teaches Christian Ethics at

Fairfield University, is a Brooklyn priest who received his doctorate in Moral Theology from the Academia Alfonsiana in Rome. There he studied under the well-known Redemptorist Theologian, Father Bernard Haring, who provides a highly laudatory foreword to the book.

The volume begins with a discussion of human sexuality and a consideration of moral values and norms. From his presentation of human sexuality it is obvious that the author regards its relational character as its humanly significant and personally valuable aspect; its procreative character, of itself, is biological in nature.

In considering moral norms Father Avvento proposes what has come to be known as proportionalism in moral theology. According to this view, there are no inherently wicked choices and acts. Rather, all acts entail some pre-moral or "ontic" evil (even in choosing to do one good thing we leave another good thing undone); thus we are to determine which act among several options to do by assessing the alternatives and then choosing that which promises a greater "proportion" of good over evil.

The author, after a brief chapter on women today (in which he opines that there is no reason why women ought not to be ordained), then turns to specific issues of sexual morality: contraception, sterilization, masturbation, artificial insemination, extramarital sex, sex and single persons, and homosexuality. The volume concludes with brief chapters on abortion and issues in genetics and laboratory generation of life.

The author's positions are quite predictable. He is in the mainstream of theological opinion today, holding that contraception is a good moral choice under given circumstances, that masturbation is not of itself something wrong, that the best one can expect of homosexually oriented persons is a relatively stable relationship rather than promiscuous behavior, that fornication, euphemistically termed "premarital sex," can be all right. His positions are predictable because of the moral theology he espouses, one that justifies the choice to do evil if doing so helps realize proportionately great enough good.

Anyone who has read the study on human sexuality commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America (The Father Anthony Kosnik, Et Al, Book, "Human Sexuality") or Father Philip S. Keane's book on sexual morality will find nothing novel here. One rather has the experience of deja vu.

Suffice it to say that the author's fundamental theory is quite erroneous and in my opinion incompatible with the teaching of the church, particularly as found in the "constitution on the church in the modern world."

The work, in my judgment, is more suitable to followers of "Dear Abby" than to those who wish to follow worthily the vocation to which they are called by Christ. For those who enjoy this kind of writing and the positions it holds the Father Kosnik book is better and cheaper, for it is now available in an image edition. Father Avvento says nothing new.

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Report From Kenya, E. Africa

While we in the States puff and stagger from few vocations to the priesthood, few vocations to the Sisterhoods, a bit better with the Brotherhoods, the closing of seminaries and other religious institutions, contestations by clerics and nuns against the Holy Father and Rome, it is heartening to have a good report from Bishop Raphael Ndigni of his diocese of Nakuru, Kenya, East Africa.

In October, 1981, I took a group from the diocese to Kenya. Father Reinhart of the Propagation of the Faith wrote to many bishops and priests notifying them of our coming, and of our interest in the work of the Church. Then I became a friend of Bishop Raphael, who was a student at St. John Fisher College in 1967-69, and who assisted Father Wohrab weekends at Good Council parish.

Father Joseph Hart spent a week with the bishop in Nakuru when he was a student at Rome, and they are good friends. I had written to Bishop Raphael in February, enclosing two checks: one for his work, the other the stipend for Masses to be said. Mass stipends are important for the support of priests in the Missions.

In my letter I spoke of the generosity of our people at the Thanks Giving Appeal for our bishop's work, garnering more than \$3 million, and mentioned an article I read in a paper which said there was a threat of a serious schism in the Catholic Church in Africa and wondered if there was any truth in it. I also asked him to salute two of our missionaries I met in Nairobi — Maryknoll Father Walter Gleason of Phelps; and Maryknoll Sister Mary Bowes, who was a public health nurse in Wayne County and a sister of Father Vincent Bowes, an Elmira Carmelite. His reply will interest many readers:

"Dear Father Cuddy,

"I thank you very sincerely for your letter of Feb. 16, enclosing two cheques. May God bless you and your many generous friends, among them Father Paul

Wohrab. Congratulations to the Diocese of Rochester and its people for being so generous. Last year we had what we call a Fund Raising Drive, and managed to raise barely \$22,000 for the diocese. But all the same it was a great effort on our people.

"As far as I know there is no sign of a schism in this part of the world. There are splinter group churches, but our number of catechumens increases each day. The other day I went to visit a parish and the two priests were working from 9:00 in the morning until 6:00 in the evening on confessions and baptismal instructions on the second and third stages of baptism. It is very encouraging indeed.

"Last year we had two ordinations. This year there are prospects of three, possibly four. Our major seminarians number about 35. It could rise to nearly 40 by July. We professed 11 Sisters and we are starting a novitiate for Franciscan Brothers. We praise and thank the Lord for His blessing. Thank you for the book, 'Crisis of Truth' by Ralph Martin. I found it very interesting and thank you for sending it.

"When you go to Ireland in May I would like you to greet, at least by telephone, Father Gerard Ellis, CSP, Gabra West, Dublin. The Masses will be taken care of immediately. Our Synod preparations are progressing well. Our people are very enthused. We thank God for this grace. I hope to visit Rochester in two or three years' time. Give my greetings to many friends in Rochester."

From a once troubled layman:

"To answer your question, yes, I'm still hanging on. Maybe the thing that puts things into better perspective for me was a statement by a priest who said in a sermon: When it's all over, you're not going to be asked, 'How did your pastor do? How did your bishop do? But, How did YOU do?' And I always remember you fondly, for your columns made me feel I wasn't alone, and helped me to hang on when I was disturbed about the many excesses so prevalent at the time, and some still to this day. Thanks again, and may the Lord keep you well."



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