

HUMANAE 15 Years Later ... Still an Issue

VITAE

2nd of a 3-part series
By Cindy Wooden

Washington (NC) -- For Jesuit Father Richard McCormick, professor of Christian ethics at Georgetown University's Institute of Bioethics, some important questions addressed in

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Spending A Few Days With a Friend

Father Michael Kavanagh, SJ, of St. Augustine's parish, Rochester, is the brother of the late Father Ambrose Kavanagh, of Mrs. Mary McMahon who taught for many years at St. Augustine's School, and of Sister Ann who got her burses training at Mercy Hospital Nursing School, Auburn, about 40 years ago, and is now a Poor Clare nun in Bolivia.

He is a cousin of Father John Ball, now living at St. Ann's Home, and the late Msgr. Ed Ball of Geneva. We were classmates at St. Andrew's Seminary. In 1928 he went to the Jesuit novitiate in Poughkeepsie, and I remained for St. Bernard's and the Diocese of Rochester. For over 50 years we have preserved a good friendship. He is retired and in residence at St. Thomas Manor parish, Port Tobacco, Md., 40 miles south of Washington.

In early July he said, "Why don't you come to Maryland and spend a few days?" A fine set of cassettes by Father Bernard Basset, SJ, entitled "Beginnings of the Faith in the New World" has given me a strong interest in that territory.

This is the Maryland of the English convert, Lord Baltimore; the locale of Jesuit Father Andrew White; of Bishop John Carroll; of the colony which granted religious toleration to all. So I phoned Father K. He picked me up at the Washington Airport at 2 p.m. on the hottest Sunday, July 17.

We stopped at the Smithsonian capsule exhibit, had a leisurely dinner at Hogate Restaurant, then off to St. Thomas Manor rectory, founded in 1641. About 9 p.m., he said, "You will be staying at our Loyola Retreat House at Faulkner."

So, off in the 1972 Volkswagen, about six miles away, where Sister Audrey Steck welcomed me and gave me Room Three. The retreat house accommodates 72 retreatants, has a staff of eight Jesuits, plus petite Sister Audrey who administers temporalities efficiently.

Now, wise men who host a visitor combine entertainment with business. And this was so. Father K. has always been creative and artistic. In 1928, at St. Andrew's he used to paint delicate

miniature Sacred Hearts on the face of wrist watches for 50 cents, combining piety with economics.

The 350th anniversary of the founding of Catholic Maryland will be celebrated in 1984. Father K., using his artistic talents, has designed an attractive placemat with miniatures of all the Catholic churches in southern Maryland, plus three suggested tour guides on the back of the mat.

But to finance his project, he needs advertisements at \$60. each from 40 advertisers as on our church bulletins. So on Monday we set off to tour churches in the area and to pick up bulletins for potential advertisers, and to alert pastors of the project.

Thus I saw both historic and contemporary churches, met several pastors and many and diverse parishioners, especially blacks. The Negro slaves in Maryland were relatively well-treated. Very little of the savagery portrayed in the TV "Roots." Today their descendents are firm, devout Catholics who love the Church greatly.

From 1946 to 1954, Father Kavanagh was pastor of tiny Morganza, Md. I remember the Courier-Journal carried an article and pictures of a project which he initiated.

Most Negroes were desperately poor, with families of 10 and 12 jammed into tiny shacks. Father K. organized a self-help corporation. With \$7,500 and a blessing from Cardinal Boyle, he bought a tract of 115 acres. He sold parcels of five acres for a minimal price; arranged for FHA loans at 4 1/2 percent to buy materials for the houses.

When he left in 1954 for India, 50 homes had been built and owned by local blacks. Today there are over 100 such homes. With just pride he brought me to several families where this good shepherd was welcomed with enthusiastic affection.

We were regaled by accounts of the families, now in neat, comfortable homes with running water, plumbing and TV sets; and walls proudly carrying pictures of handsome children and grandchildren.

How I hope the strong Catholic faith of these Maryland blacks will be shared by our Rochester blacks. Perhaps Father Bob Werth's apostolate at St. Bridget's will bear the fruit of a zealous Catholic presence among our black brothers and sisters. For this we earnestly pray.

the encyclical "Humanae Vitae" in 1968 remain unanswered today.

But John F. Kippley, co-founder of the Couple to Couple League, a natural family planning organization, welcomed the encyclical and called it a relief.

Patty Crowley and her late husband, Pat, who had founded the Christian Family Movement, served on the papal commission on birth control. She said she considered the document a disappointment then but now it is simply a "non-issue" in the lives of most Catholics.

And amid those reactions are concerns of the pastoral problems the encyclical poses for priests who may not agree with the document and concerns that a lack of compliance with the document makes Church teaching less credible.

After 15 years, Father McCormick said, the basic question remains: Is every contraceptive act intrinsically evil?

"We know from experience that the theological foundation (for saying that it is) is extremely shaky -- it's just not there," he said.

Prior to the issuance of the document, many Catholics thought a change in the Church's official teaching would be forthcoming. In 1962 the birth-control pill made its public debut and some thought that since it was a chemical, not a mechanical barrier, which prolonged a woman's cyclic infertility, it would meet with Church approval.

The proponents of change were also encouraged by the majority report of the papal commission set up by Pope John XXIII in March 1963 to examine the birth control issue. The 57-member commission included theologians, priests, three married couples and three women.

The majority opinion of the commission, voted on only by the theologians, stated birth control was not "intrinsically evil" and that the Church's teaching on the matter could be changed so that married couples could be free to follow their consciences on birth regulation, provided they were open to having children at some point.

When the document came out with a different position, there were a number of dissenters, including 60 Washington priests who issued a "statement of conscience." Cardinal O'Boyle criticized the action and admonished the signers "not to preach, teach, or counsel against the encyclical."

For Kippley the encyclical was a "relief," he said, because it cleared the confusion which abounded about the Church's position on modern birth control methods in the face of worry about population growth and of changing women's roles.

While much "practical non-compliance" with the encyclical's teaching does occur, Kippley said, most people are not dissenting. "They have not been instructed about the teaching of the Church."

A Princeton study released in 1978 which showed 71 percent of U.S. priests disagreeing with the teaching and 72 percent of the laity in non-compliance with it is "not a coincidence," he said.

Many couples are, in effect, being told that "God has no expectations above the cultural norms," Kippley said.

A study conducted in 1975 by the Princeton Office of Population Research showed that 76.4 percent of married Catholic women from 18 to 45 were using some method of birth control, including rhythm. Of Catholic women married less than five years, only 9.5 percent were following the Church's teaching on birth control and only 4.5 percent of women married five to nine years were in compliance, the study showed.

AT YOUR PARISH

St. Thomas More

St. Thomas More Church will be the site for the next program of Focus on the Eucharist, 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 4. Father Dennis Bonsignore will cele-

brate the Mass. The evening includes Evening Prayer, and the recitation of the rosary.

St. Helen

Two big tents of activities will be featured at this year's Country Fair sponsored by St. Helen's Church Aug. 5-7. Other features include a kid-dieland and dinners.

McAloran Here

Seamus McAloran, human rights activist and founder of "Silent Too Long," an organization of persons caught in the crossfire of violence in north Ireland, will complete his U.S. speaking tour 8 p.m., Aug. 9, at the Knights of Columbus building, 670 Thurston Road. His appearance here is sponsored by the Rochester Chapter of the Irish National Caucus. Admission is free.

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Sheila Daley of Chicago Call to Action said most of the dissent stems from people carefully following their consciences.

The main thing "Humanae Vitae" did, she said, "was bring married couples into conflict with the Church. It forced them to look at their own consciences and many came to see their consciences as better informed than the document."

The conflict, Mrs. Daley said, resulted in a "painful struggle and a growing up" which she said she sees as positive. But for Diane Daly, president of the American Academy of Natural Family Planning, the encyclical's teaching leads not only to physical health, but also to health in a marriage.

Mrs. Daley said she and her husband have used natural family planning for the 16 years of their marriage. By studying and following the encyclical, she said, married couples "experience growth in their sexuality."

If the encyclical has caused some difficulties for the laity, it has done the same for the clergy, Father McCormick said, because they must decide whether or not to "simply repeat the authoritative teaching without their own reflection."

Father McCormick said that the roles of priests as representatives of Church teaching and as pastors of souls "normally complement each other, but on contraception they are opposed."

Father Charles Curran, professor of theology at the Catholic University of America, thought that in 1968 "Humanae Vitae" was a "mistake," and his feelings haven't changed.

Father Curran led the theological dissent in the United States after the encyclical's release, issuing a statement signed by over 600 theologians.

One significant outcome of "Humanae Vitae," he said, "is that the vast majority of Catholics see they can disagree with the Church in theory and in practice and still be faithful Roman Catholics."

The pastoral problems created by the encyclical are not great, he said; "I think most people have made up their minds." The major problem he sees is the encyclical's effect on the credibility of Church teaching.

"When you admit three quarters of your people don't go along with your teaching, you have a credibility gap," Father Curran said.

The Church's teaching on birth control should be changed, he said. "It makes Church teaching less credible on other matters."

At an international conference on the family in Milan, Italy, in 1978, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Poland said that "contraception is opposed to love."

Two years later, as Pope John Paul II, he continued to defend "Humanae Vitae" after Indonesian bishops stated that artificial birth control was permissible in some cases.

He told them: "Let us never fear that the challenge is too great for our people. They were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ; they are his people...It is he, Jesus Christ, who will continue to give the grace to his people to meet the requirements of his word, despite all difficulties, despite all weaknesses."

NEXT: A boon to natural family planning.

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