

REVIEWS

Some 'got Rhythm'

THE EXPERIENCE OF MARRIAGE. Edited by Michael Novak. New York: The Macmillan Company. 173 pp. \$3.95.

Reviewed by JAMES F. COLAIANNI, *Managing Editor of RAMPARTS.*

THIS IS A COLLECTION of 13 essays, written anonymously by 13 married couples, on the human relationship of marriage. Some write as a team; others offer their dual testimony in a single essay by one of the spouses. The purpose of *The Experience of Marriage* is described in the editor's introduction: "This volume . . . represents early, sometimes faltering steps toward a just estimation of the experience of marriage. Each of the contributors . . . has tried to take marital sexuality on its own terms, as it entered into his or her experience . . . the editor hopes that in coming years much more of this face-to-face questioning will take place among the Catholic people."

Michael Novak is one of the new breed of self-starting, American Catholic intellectuals, committed to engagement in his Church's vigorous attempt to develop her insights into the meaning of man and to articulate a richer definition of the one-male/one-female relationship. In a broad sense, the current probe is a means of final admission that woman is more than a "sicked she-ass" (in the view of an 8th Century Doctor of the Church)—or a utilitarian baby-machine. This and much more

fans out from the narrow confines of the reexamination of the traditional Catholic teaching on birth control, and more particularly, on artificial contraception (the book's point of departure).

Like it or not, celibate moralists will not be able to continue their inquiries without hearing at least echoes of the lay voice. Honest dialogue between essentialist priest-theologian and empiric layman is beginning to take hold, and the grassroots finds Catholicism's slow grind toward a new, "Open Church" style, attractive. Dissatisfaction, discouragement and dissent hereafter will be compelling reasons for closer engagement rather than alienation. Old sets of abstractions will be augmented by new formulas tested in the laboratory of reality.

Catholic teaching, while finally recognizing the value of responsible child-planning, still admits of only two legitimate means of achieving this goal: rhythm and continence. All forms of artificial contraception are categorized as "intrinsically evil," and therefore immoral under almost all circumstances (one exception: a nun in danger of rape).

The book's Mr. A. relates how fidelity to this moral tenet has af-

fected his marriage: "The calculated continence of living with rhythm, and the anticonjugal continence of living with 'heroism,' have both in fact killed something in our common life which was able, at its best, to provide a tone of harmony and joy which could support us through the inevitable tensions and trials of family life, which could actually *help* us to behave like Christians. Now, with that one lost, we find it more difficult than ever to maintain

**"David Halberstam
should be
barbecued, and I
would be glad
to supply the fluid
and the match"**

—MADAME NHU

A controversial, uncompromising indictment of American policy in Vietnam, by the Pulitzer Prize correspondent of *The New York Times* whose on-the-scene dispatches were so informative they became required reading for official Washington.

THE MAKING OF A QUAGMIRE

By **DAVID HALBERSTAM**

\$5.95, now at your bookstore

RANDOM HOUSE
457 Madison Avenue
New York 10022

a visible spirit of Christian love, to be patient and kind toward each other and toward our children. Fidelity to the obligations of Catholicism in one direction has erected new obstacles to living a Catholic family life of charity."

Mrs. B., mother of ten, worries about her sense of responsibility vis-à-vis the population explosion: "Is there any way for us to continue to show our love for each other through sexual intercourse without burdening the bursting world? For us, within the limits of natural law as taught by the church, almost none. Because of my double ovulations in one month, the rhythm system is without value." Her husband reflects the mentality of many Catholics who find security in the total subordination of conscience to ecclesiastical authority. "Before I start to worry about limiting my own family for such global, demographic reasons I think it will be necessary for somebody like the Pope or an Ecumenical Council to tell me so. It (artificial contraception) is just too sensational a departure from everything they have been telling me up to date."

This "My Church right or wrong" attitude, while comforting to many, fails to recognize that papal and hierarchical pronouncements on moral issues can serve the truth only to the extent that the community of persons who are the Church, on all levels of its visible structure, have participated and contributed. The layman has not the right to demand that Pope and bishops take all the risks. To be real, the Christian commitment must be conscientious, free. The process of becoming is full of risk. Mr. B., too, must be willing to lecture his Pope and bishop. Without benefit of an experience that is uniquely his, their efficiency is weakened.

Mrs. C., another rhythm sufferer, describes a bizarre husband-wife relationship resulting from loyal submission to ecclesiastical discipline. Gestures of affection are "resolutely

repressed"; kisses are "mere perfunctory pecks . . . to keep some appearance of affection before the children"; the atmosphere makes them "brusque and impatient . . . more critical of each other . . . like college roommates . . . like two friends who are used to each other through long habit." Mr. C. agonizingly queries, "Is there no other alternative to this 'service station' solution?" He is tired of sermons and pamphlets burdening him with his 'carnality.' He envies Protestant friends "living devout and joyous lives . . . untrammelled by the kind of sexual sludge that swamps so many Catholic marriages."

That the essayists are conscious of the editor's admonition to refrain from "a polemic against church discipline" is obvious; that they are unable to totally suppress the urge to address themselves to this larger question is also clear.

The testimony of Mrs. F. is a direct challenge. In empirical terms she states her case for resorting to artificial contraception (the method is not revealed). In effect she puts it to the Catholic moralist to impugn her good faith — and her Catholic orthodoxy. Even the most immobile traditionalists are finding it harder to make this judgment these days.

While few Catholic theologians identify the papal instruction on the intrinsic evil of artificial contraception with infallibility, many hold it to be an expression of immutable truth, therefore irrevocable. However, the groundswell of controversy has pushed the door open. Although shoving continues on both sides, it appears likely that, when it stops, the snap-lock will have been removed in favor of a swinging door.

THE IMPLICIT RAILING at the traditional view of church authority in non-dogmatic areas, made by most of the book's contributors, is not easy to summarily dismiss. It is difficult to see how reservations about the Church's artificial contra-

ception stand do not at once attach to the traditional claims made for the church's "ordinary teaching authority." Pius XI's condemnation of artificial contraception is unequivocal; Pius XII's affirmation is just as rigid. A Pope is either fallible or infallible when he instructs outside the context of formal definition. Mrs. I. hopes that "the Church will reexamine its attitude on Catholic marriage, especially birth control." She hopes, therefore, that Pius XI and Pius XII were wrong and that the Church will admit it. When she asks, "Can we continue to insist that natural law forbids contraception?" she questions authority to the extent that it attempts to impose the neo-Scholastic theory of "natural law" on all Catholics (since the theological conclusions of Pius XI and Pius XII are based upon neo-Scholastic philosophical premises).

It is not merely a matter of rejection through sin. The real question is one of orthodoxy. The Catholic who conscientiously accepts the contraceptive ban, and lives by it, commits no sin, and is orthodox. But what is the status of the Catholic who *conscientiously* rejects the ban? Surely his fidelity to conscience eliminates the question of sin, but is he orthodox? All prior attempts to fix on the binding character of non-dogmatic papal and hierarchical statements have ended in ambiguity. Has a dominant school of theology tried to say too much in the name of the Church? Has there been a false identification of neo-Scholasticism with the Church?

If the marital experience of most of these couples is representative, then it is clear that the theologians will have to be open to the possibility of back-tracking.

Mr. and Mrs. D.: "The celibate theologian is obliged to think of sex in a depersonalized way, but a man or woman living in the sacrament of marriage is thinking of another human being and the relationship with him or her. There is a world of difference between the two view-

points. It is time Catholics stopped talking about marital love in terms of rights, indulgences, and the al-
laying of concupiscence. Quite
clearly, a major part of the problem
is that those who have been doing
most of the talking (and legislating)
have never tried to build a marriage."

Mrs. G.: "I insist we are not sel-
fish slobes for preferring sex on Sat-
urday to sex on Tuesday—and every
third Tuesday at that."

Mrs. H.: "... sexual union seems
to be the most powerful means at
our disposal of putting to death the
selfish and evil urges we feel when
our impaired natures are too much
strained in their task of commitment
to complete self-giving. The most
marked complaint I have found in
our long abstinences has been the
preoccupation of my consciousness
with continual petty complaints and
resentments."

Mr. H.: "We cannot nurture our
love until the pressures that now
take all our mental and spiritual en-
ergies are released. Looming large
among these pressures is the rhythm
method."

Mr. I.: "Until Catholic discussion
gives love and the psychology of
marriage at least equal time with
birth control, I do not see how any-
one with a conscience can take it
seriously."

Mr. L.: "Cannot one sin by hav-
ing children?"

The Christian believer in monog-
amy affirms that marriage and sex in
marriage are at the service of love.
The Catholic emphasis on the bio-
logical aspects of sex has diluted the
value of sex as a profoundly unique
experience in learning how to love.
Hopefully *The Experience of Mar-
riage* will be of service to the de-
fenders of "tradition" as they work
toward placing due emphasis on the
whole person (who loves with his
whole person), on two whole per-
sons (who love in the marriage un-
ion), and on the whole family (who
seek fulfillment as a concrete human
society), in their further efforts to
distinguish between good and evil.

Advertising's Thurber

DANGER: MEN TALKING by William Schneider. New
York: Random House. 90 pp. \$3.95.

Reviewed by WILLIAM L. RIVERS, *Professor of Journalism at Stanford University.*

JAMES THURBER used to get a re-
sounding laugh out of reading
the critics who solemnly judged
some of his cartoons to be art of a
high order. Thurber was proud of
his prose—for understandable rea-
sons—but he began drawing only
for his own amusement, and to his

last day he was amazed that his car-
toons were printed. Art critics, he
concluded, were at least a little mad.

William Schneider takes quite a
different view of his own drawings.
An advertising man, Schneider has
made a serious avocation of illustrat-
ing semantic concepts, usually for

A masterful, prophetic analysis of force in the
modern world, and of the potential deliverance
of mankind from the rule of force, by one of

America's most
influential social
scientists



"His work conveys a better sense of
political realities than that of almost
any other political scientist, and his
methods of moral persuasion meet
the most rigorous standard of clarity
and candor.... The moral aim of all
his books is central and consistent;
to explain and defend the theory and
practice of democratic govern-
ment."

—The New York Review of Books

"Robert MacIver... has put his gifts
to good purpose. He has enlivened
and clarified a large subject and ex-
tracted its main meaning."

—The New York Times Book Review

"A summing-up by one of America's
greatest students of man and soci-
ety.... A deep sense of concern for
the individual, for society... moti-
vates *Power Transformed*."

—Book Week

At all bookstores \$5.00

POWER TRANSFORMED

by Robert M. MacIver

author of *The Web of Government*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY