

Dominican Studying At Yale Seeks To Help Nuns Cope With Anxieties

By JOHN KNOBLE
Register Staff Reporter

"The case of the nervous nun," would seem to be a contradiction in terms, what with the religious life being structured for the achieving of spiritual tranquility, but sisters are human like anyone else and the modern world places special tensions upon the hearts of the devout both within and outside the cloister.

The Catholic Church, according to the Rev. Edward Doyle, Order of Preachers (Dominican), is making serious effort to aid those who have vocations, "in coping with pressures and ambiguities in a time of restructuring of monastic life." Father Doyle, who lives at St. Mary's Priory on Hillhouse Avenue, a graduate fellow of the Yale Divinity School, is one of many priests being specially trained in preventive mental health counseling, guidance and therapy to help women religious to deal with anxieties.

That a Catholic priest should be assigned to study at a theological seminary long associated with training leadership for American Protestantism poses no problem at all to Father Doyle. The Yale Divinity School is well established as a pioneer in giving specialized training in pastoral counseling in cooperation with psychiatry. In fact, "in the offing, possibly two years away, a joint degree program with the Yale Medical School in psychiatry and theology, having as its aim the treatment of 'the whole man,' physical, mental and spiritual.

Besides that, other priests

have taken courses at Yale, and have served as members of the faculty. Yale's distinguished professor, Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette, a Baptist, author of scores of books including the multi-volume "History of the Expansion of Christianity," has done research in the Vatican, and has produced scholarly works in cooperation with Catholic scholars.

What is different about Father Doyle being enrolled at Yale is the object of his studies, the zeroing in on the problem of women's religious orders. What Father Doyle has in mind is preparing himself to be able to conduct group meetings with nuns assisting them with their problems of identity, and in which the range of possible anxieties is confronted, and know-how provided with which to cope with them.

"There is nothing at all wrong with having anxieties," Father Doyle says. "Healthy anxieties are much a part of our society. They indicate cognizance of problems we find in daily life, and recognition that some change must take place."

Father Doyle is making use of the vast library resources of Yale to study "the current literature in personal and social variables in maturing in our society" and is exploring "the implications for spirituality of present and future women religious."

The smiling priest in white habit pictured here holding his glasses in a manner he picked up from serving under General Dwight Eisenhower as an infantry chaplain in World War II,

came later to his specialization in working with women; his apprenticeship was in working with men, and boys. But the priest's gentle humor and delicate touch in conversation suggest the kind of capacity for understanding and insight which would be appreciated by a woman in a counselor.

Learned From Sisters

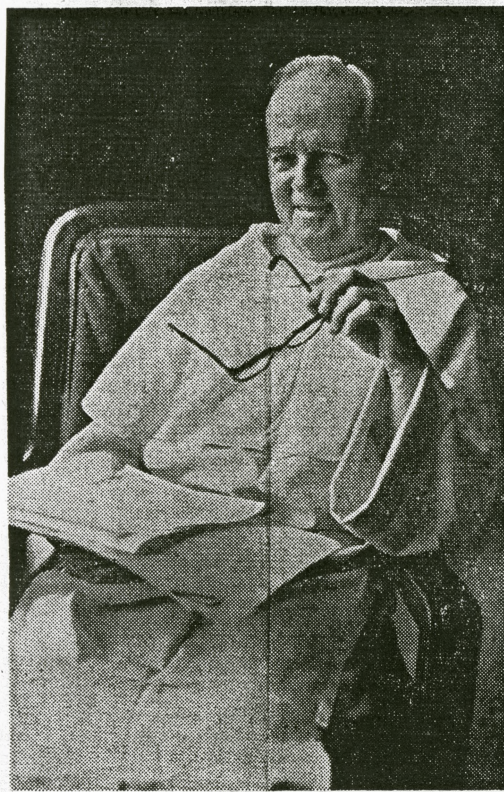
There were three girls in his family. But there were also six boys. From his sisters he learned a great deal, he says, which makes him sympathetic to some of the objectives of Women's Lib. "They need to have equal opportunities," he says, "but of course they make a mistake when they abdicate from the particular glory of being a woman."

He lists as women's common needs "To be themselves, to feel worthwhile, to serve, need for privacy to relax, to recreate themselves."

As far as nuns are concerned, he says there is a liberation going on in the convent. The common needs of women "are being more and more fulfilled by the religious."

He sees sisters as not being defeminized by their religious vocation, but on the contrary. "In the secular world the physical aspect of womanhood has often obliterated the appreciation of their distinctive femininity of intellect and spirit. For many girls the religious life brings this spiritual femininity to a degree which they could not otherwise experience."

In an hour-long conversation with Father Doyle which went all too fast, the words kept run-



The Rev. Edward R. Doyle

Register Photo by Joe Pettis

ning through the mind, his constant awareness of the "sacredness of woman's personality."

A Total Person

"When a girl comes to a convent she brings all her emotions with her, what she is as a total

person," he said, "(what we used to call passions; now on a shallower level feelings, on a deeper level emotions."

Referring to new approaches in convent administration, where suggestions are replacing

commands, he told of a Yale psychiatrist who made a cassette illustrating the difference between the effect of using the word "should" and the expression, "it would be nice if."

"Women particularly respond to 'It would be nice if,'" Father Doyle suggested. The thought ran through the mind, maybe a husband could try that on his wife.

"Women have three special gifts," Father Doyle went on, "they are gentle, they have sympathy and they had intuition."

"Do you think that the role of religion in the life of a woman is different from that of religion in the life of a man?" he was asked.

"It says in scripture," he answered, "that 'in Christ there are neither male or female.' Don't you think this means that ultimately their religious needs are the same? But," he continued, "I think that when much of modern society began to cease venerating the Mother of God, men switched to venerating the particular girl of their dreams, and this put too much of a strain on women. To see the spirit of ideal womanhood in a girl, and to respect and honor her for it is one thing. To expect her to be at all times the ideal, and to turn from her and become cynical when she can't keep at that level is another. I think this is what women resent, and what has produced some of the more bitter side of Women's Lib."

Must Know Identity

Getting back to the particular problems of nuns, Father Doyle said the sisters face the need to know their identity and to be an individual and at the same time to know how to derive strength to be an individual from the support of community. That means putting one's self into the community. The church must find "the proper role of structure to produce supports for daily living with dedication."

As to sisters putting aside distinctive habits and mingling in the world in ordinary street dress, Father Doyle thinks a better solution would be to devise attractive but distinctive modern habits, which he believes calls for an art in itself.

Religion

"The change toward this kind of thinking is so recent, we must not expect that by now the perfect dress design, fulfilling the role of distinctive dress for a nun in the modern world would have been created. Give it a little time and something meeting the needs will appear."

Father Doyle was graduated from Sienna Heights College in Adrian, Mich., then obtained a B.A. degree from Providence College. He won his M.A. from Catholic University in 1941 and a Ph.D. from Aquinas Institute in 1962.

He has taught boys at Providence College, was chaplain with the 104th Infantry in France and Belgium during World War II and was discharged as a major. His outfit entered Cherbourg in July after the invasion and went under General Terry Allen to the Ella River.

He taught at Seton Hill College, Greensbury, Pa., from 1954-57 and at Mt. St. Mary's College in Newburgh, N.Y. until 1963. He was director of the School of Catholic Studies serving the University of Virginia in 1965, and is presently professor of sacramental theology and comparative religion at Sienna Heights College. Since 1932 he has been a member of the Dominican Order.

Warmly Received

Praising the warm reception he has received from Yale Divinity School faculty members and students he cited a class in clinical pastoral education which meets on Thursdays including in its 15 members representatives of several faiths. Catholics, beside himself, include a nun and a deacon.

Every Wednesday at St. Raphael's Hospital there is a group of priests and ministers who discuss pastoral psychology, with Dr. Clarence Birmingham.

"The cold war between psychiatry and religion is ended," Father Doyle declared. Quoting Dr. Karl Menninger, the famed Kansas psychiatrist, who pointed out that "for centuries religion has been the world's psychiatry," Father Doyle said re-

ligion has now ceased to regard psychiatry with competitive jealousy. "Priests should know enough psychiatry so that when people come to them in confessional with as much trust as it takes a psychiatrist years to establish in therapy sessions, they could carry on from there with insight comparable to what the psychiatrist could make use of when he reached that point."

Church doctrine itself, Father Doyle said, can be of help in mental health, but new formulations of the deposit of faith are needed, so people can understand their insights. He quoted Pope John XIII at the opening of Vatican II when he called for "a leap forward" . . . toward "a doctrinal penetration and formation of conscience corresponding more completely and faithfully to the authentic doctrine which itself should be explained and elucidated in accordance with the methods of research and literary formulation familiar to modern thought."

Recognizing that we live in a time of change, Father Doyle suggested gently, "but it will be good if it is gradual and understanding, won't it?"

He quoted, "Among conservatives change brings about anxiety; among liberals anxiety brings about change." And the Mayo brothers, Rochester, Minn., surgeons "a balanced life would have four segments: worship, work, recreation and love."

The problem with young people he sees as just that "they have a compulsion to do everything NOW. Some are really rigid conservatives about not wanting to give up the stance of the revolutionary, even when the system is accomplishing the needed change within itself. Some of them see need for change but are not acquainted with the pain involved in change. They see the problems which need change, but not the problems in change."

He smiled mildly, "Who was it who said if we reject history we will be forced to live with it?"

And then the dinner bell at the priory rang. With a clear-eyed smile, Father Doyle said goodbye and bowed himself into the cloister.