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The Adolescent and Self-Identity

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Book Reviews

THE ADOLESCENT AND SELF-IDENTITY

THE ADOLESCENT: His Search for Understanding. Edited by William C. Bier, S.J. New York: Fordham University Press, 1963. x, 246 pp.

A sign of the growing awareness among the clergy of the great discoveries of modern psychology is the continuing Pastoral Psychology Institute held once every two years at Fordham University in New York since 1955. The Institute runs for a week, morning and afternoon, and is attended by clergy of various faiths, sitting around in a circle with psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists. The area of discussion is the no man's land between moral theology on the one hand and modern psychology and psychiatry on the other.

The encounter of these two very different lines of thinking has been surprisingly fruitful. Each of the Institutes has resulted in a book containing the papers read therein. The proceedings of the 1955 and 1957 Institute were distributed in paperback form to the participants. The best articles were selected for wider distribution and will soon appear as Volume I of the Pastoral Psychology series. Volume II, the outgrowth of the 1959 Institute was published in 1962 under the titles, *Problems in Addiction: Alcohol and Drug Addiction*. The present work, *The Adolescent's Search for Understanding*, is Volume III of the series.

This book on the adolescent, as is true of the other volumes of the series, contains mostly popularized papers treating pastoral problems. There is a minimum of charts and tables and other paraphernalia of scientific psychology and sociology. Nevertheless, some of the articles contain some very deep insights into the subject.

The adolescent is seen as a person in search for an identity. His task is self-definition. He has to learn who he is, what he really feels. He chooses his role in society. He clarifies to himself the life-goals towards which his life will run.

The "self-concept" continually makes its appearances in these papers, the theory being that the adolescent will act according as he perceives himself, his ideals, his own body. There is little talk here of formal conceptualized instruction. Much more emphasis is placed on experimental knowledge, the hard core of self-identity as formed by life experiences.

An outstanding paper is one by James Cribbin on "The Problem of Vocational Choice." Dr. Cribbin sees the choice of a career as a process, starting off with fantasy. A realistic but tentative choice is made at adolescence, which is then tested out against reality until a final commitment is made. The choice involves much more than the evaluation of abilities and interests but includes the testing out of one's values, one's self-concept against life realities. It is in this reality testing process that the guidance counselor helps the adolescent. Vocational guidance becomes a process of clarification of the adolescent's own experience. This view on guidance is in contrast with the method employed by those counselors who on the basis of test results alone tell the adolescent, at one sitting, how he is to run the rest of his natural life.

Another excellent paper, though unfortunately too brief, is one on the Pastoral Counselor, by George Hagmaier, C.S.P. He advocates in the priest-counselor a certain amount of "permissiveness," suggesting that he should not value 'sharp, absolute and legalistic compliance to a moral code above the slow, stumbling, yet certain emergence of attitudes towards morality which will, later on, make it possible for the mature adolescent to bring a meaningful and joyous obedience to God's laws." Furthermore he suggests that a large amount of counseling with teenagers can be done through a judicious use of group contact, rather than through large numbers of individual interview.

The first three parts of the book, general perspectives, sexual adjustment, and juvenile delinquency, are rather uneven in their treatment of the adolescent's problems. The best parts of the book are the last two, which deal with the emotional adjustment and with the vocational choice of the adolescent. The book is a good stimulant for discussion when high school and college counselors get together.

JAIME C. BULATAO

ON CHURCH AUTHORITY *

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* Translated from the Spanish by M. A. Bernad, S.J.