

Clergyman says you can have God and sex

By SHIRLEE IDEN

"You call yourself Eccentric, but I leave it to other people to call me that."

So said Dr. Chad Varah while admitting he prefers to refer to himself as "idiosyncratic."

A prominent Anglican clergyman, Dr. Varah is the foremost spokesman for what he calls "Christian liberation" and is the founder and chairman of Worldwide Samaritans.

On Christian liberation, he contends: "Nothing has turned people away from Christianity more than the feeling that in their youth they had to choose between God and sex because they couldn't have both."

He founded the Samaritans 25 years ago "to befriend the suicidal and despairing." Newly ordained, he was called upon to conduct a funeral for a young girl who thought her first menstruation was a sign of venereal disease and took her own life.

"SAMARITANS are a humanistic and not a religious group," he explained, and now exist in 20 countries on all five continents with a membership of 25,000. The first American chapter was organized five years ago in Boston with two others added since.

"What I'm doing now is making a world tour, visiting Samaritan branches and starting new ones," he explained. In Michigan, he was the guest of Penthouse Publications, publishers of Penthouse and Forum magazines—which this month contain articles about and by him.

Dr. Varah said he enjoys expressing contrary views, but likes to get people to argue back. What does he speak out about?

"Pornography should be available to adults."

"A woman should be able to choose for herself whether or not she wants an abortion."

"A civilized state must protect the rights of the prostitute to work within the law."

"Sometimes adultery will be the loving thing to do."

They're not the usual types of statements by the neighborhood clergyman, but Dr. Chad Varah is not your garden variety clergyman.

He's a fighter. He's forthright and outspoken and he's got quite a sense of humor, too.

"When I was asked to do an article for Penthouse my reaction was 'Who wouldn't?' After all, 20 million people read it," he said, smiling.

DR. VARAH didn't start out wanting to enter the ministry and even today considers himself a scientist.

"As long as I can remember I called myself a scientist," he said. "Although I started writing a novel at age 8."

"Anna Karenina" was the first book he ever read and he hardly ever stopped reading since early childhood. "The only books in those days were in gentlemen's libraries and I was fortunate that my father was a Church of England priest and had a huge library," he said. "I didn't believe things because people said then I had an immense curiosity."

Despite a great deal of illness in his youth, he did well at school. "So I studied philosophy and psychology."

"I ran clubs and took girls out too," he said. Later he taught, did chemical research in a brickyard and some free lance writing.

He was urged into the ministry by an elderly bishop who was a friend of his family who had sent him straight about sex at the age of 12.

"I went to the same school my father went to to study theology, but I couldn't be ordained," he recalled. But finally, he was.

Shortly after his ordination came the incident of the 13-year-old suicide which directed him to forming Samari-

tans and trying to combat human despair.

"IF YOU'RE suicidal, you want someone to listen to you and care about it," he said. And that's what he has tried to arrange: People who care to be available to people with crises.

"In only 25 years, we have achieved 92 per cent adult awareness of the Samaritans," he said. "We have brought down the suicide rate 38 per cent in the last 13 years while other countries' rates have remained static or gone up."

"The answer is listening, loving and accepting people. If you're depressed because your mother died, you need lots of help with your grief work, but if your chemistry's gone bad, you can be helped pharmacologically in at least five weeks."

Dr. Varah said Samaritans are taught to adopt a practical approach when they talk to clients, to talk and get them to talk. They are people carefully selected for their human qualities.

"What the other person needs is befriending, not counseling, simply befriending," he said. "I love to walk through and hear the Samaritans doing their befriending."

On his travels, Dr. Varah has been asked repeatedly about Anita Bryant and her controversial views about homosexuality.

"Anita Bryant is a totally unscientific demagogue," he said. "I am disgusted that anyone should say the things she does in the name of Christ."

'If you're ever given the choice of God or sex, choose the latter because you're being offered a false God instead of a precious gift he's given.'

—Dr. Chad Varah

In England they say 'I have made up my mind, now don't confuse me with the facts.' She assumes that people decide to be homosexuals in puberty and any psychiatrist will say that decision is made for you by the time you are 3 or 4."

DR. VARAH added that Bryant implies that homosexuals are totally different from others but there is a degree of homosexuality or heterosexuality in everyone.

"Everybody has some homosexuality in them," he said. "If you put them in a prison camp with the same sex for a long period of time, it will come out."

"Anita Bryant assumes people can be pushed from the minority to the majority, but it's possible only with a very few borderline cases who are strongly motivated to change."

He said there is no such thing as a "cured" homosexual.

"What we try to do is to get them to accept themselves but someone deeply homosexual won't be changed and I'm here to tell him God says he shouldn't change."

He said it is propaganda that homosexuals are not fit to be teachers. "That implies that heterosexual kids in the classes will be attracted to the homosexual life."

"There couldn't be this effect and most teachers wouldn't want this. If that were true, we could just put all the homosexuals in one class and let Anita Bryant fix them."



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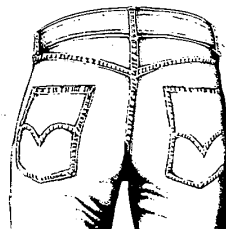
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