



The Church: 1970

Politicization, Polarization

By Fr. Andrew M. Greeley



There is no doubt that at the present time one of the most serious structural problems the Church faces is the inability of the leadership to modify institutional patterns quickly enough to cope with the changes in attitudes and values caused by the Second Vatican Council. However, as the present decade goes on, it seems very likely that the principal problem will not be the obsolescent structure but anarchy.

It is almost an iron law of history that a failure to modify obsolescent structures will generate anarchy; as one looks around the American Church at the present time, one can see already the signs of an emergent anarchy.

Three signs are especially apparent: politicization, polarization and fractionalization.

By politicization I mean the increase in the number of issues which are solved by political methods, that is to say, by a majority vote. Increasingly around the country, groups of priests (and nuns and laity, for that matter) are taking stands on major issues by casting ballots. Whatever stand obtains majority support is taken to possess total validity.

If the majority of priests want optional celibacy, then optional celibacy is the only valid choice for the Church. If the majority of the priests want pastors to serve for only five years, then that issue is solved. If the majority decide that a pastoral council ought to have the right of selecting a bishop, then no further discussion of the issue is possible.

I happen to be in favor of at least some form of the changes cited here but I do not believe that parliamentary politics is the best way to arrive at an intelligent, balanced, well reasoned decision to a complex problem.

The celibacy issue, for example, ought to have been approached in the Church by discussion, consultation, research, and experimentation. The attempt of leadership to close off the issue succeeds only in removing the issue from the area of dialog and putting it in the area of politics.

The failure of the Church to develop meaningful organs of dialog has created a situation where voting becomes the first form of communication because it is the only one available.

One of the inevitable results of politicization, however, is

polarization. We are now witnessing a situation where both the clergy who want a change on celibacy and the hierarchy which refuses to discuss the issue are escalating their responses to one another. Each new refusal to discuss the problem leads to a more militant stance and each new militant statement hardens the refusal to discuss. For the hierarchy to admit at this point that it is possible to discuss the question would be to beat a significant retreat from a previous stand; for the more militant priests even an offer of discussion from the bishops would not be nearly enough. What they are demanding now is not discussion but change.

In other words, if dialog is postponed long enough, then it becomes politically unacceptable to both sides.

In the situation of politicization and polarization, fractionalization is hard to avoid. More militant priests break off from less militant priests; moderates separate from hard liners; compromisers disengage from those who demand all or nothing. And the inevitable law of life of the American life is that the more militancy there is the more factions emerge.

There are those who rejoice in an anarchical situation because, they argue, it leaves room for freedom and spontaneity. However, the lesson of history runs in the opposite direction. Freedom and spontaneity can only flourish in an atmosphere of order. Just as repression generates energy, so anarchy, in its turn, leads to repression. Chaos and confusion are intolerable, at least over the long run.

The American Church, with some very notable exceptions, does not have strong leadership at the present time. Under such circumstances, democratic institutions in the Church are not likely to emerge. One would very much like to be able to say that there is still time to turn away from the path toward anarchy but in the absence of leadership that is strong enough to be able to engage in honest and trusting dialog, anarchy is going to be hard to avoid.

It may be a sincere, well-behaved anarchy, one that is even skilled in the tactics of parliamentary procedure, but it will be anarchy just the same. And, let it be clearly established for the historians of the future, who it was who refused to dialog first.

On The Right Side

Motu Proprio By-Product

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



The best sermon I ever heard on the Blessed Sacrament was given by Father John Loughlin at a Holy Hour for the Clyde Catholic Daughters. Few can equal him in his gifts of expression, his grace of unction or his sense of humor. He had been chaplain of the Hornell Ladies of Columbus before I was assigned here. Shortly before my coming he retired to Florida. He was a great loss to the diocese.

Since I was new and unattached, I became the new chaplain. The duties are simple, viz. to attend the annual banquet and to lead the grace. This year the banquet fell on Wednesday, May 20.

About 3 p.m. of May 19, the anxious voice of the L. of C. President came over the phone of my office. "Oh, Father. We're in a terrible bind. We'd be very, very grateful if you will help us out." "Of course, if I can." "Our banquet is tomorrow night. We had the Moose Ladies Auxiliary Kitchen Band for the entertainment, but something has happened and they can't come. Will you be our speaker instead?"

Now I have seen and heard the Moose Ladies Kitchen Band in action. It is a cheerful group, with funny costumes, funny hats and funny instruments. In fact, Clara, the cook at St. Ann's

rectory, is first trombonist, and her ample girth swathed in costume and her evident delight would lift the spirits of Scrooge, even without trombone.

It struck me that discourse by the incumbent chaplain compared to the Kitchen Band would be pretty dull stuff. However I knew that the L. of C. are an amiable and kindly group. Good food makes them more so. And a bit of Pineapple Punch served before the dinner in some way I have never understood seems to exhilarate their whole being. So with some diffidence I replied: "I'm afraid it will be pretty dull compared with the Kitchen Band. But perhaps with a bit of humor and local color, it will do. I'll be glad to." So great a sigh of relief as came over the phone was hardly warranted. The President sounded as if the door which crushed the body of the English martyr, Blessed Margaret Clitherow, had been lifted from her body.

Because of my conviction that Our Blessed Mother wants devotion to her rosary firm and devout I began with a brief encouragement of the rosary devotion. I frequently preface a talk to a receptive group with an explanation of the Scriptural Rosary, and recite one decade with the group. Here are reactions from people in three different cities.

"Father, thank you for the talk on the rosary. I had begun to feel I was the only one who said it any more." (I think this feeling of isolation is felt by many traditional Catholics.) "It's so good to hear about the rosary again. Thank you, and I'll pray for you." "Two years ago you introduced us to the Scriptural Rosary. I haven't missed saying it one day since."

Eastman Kodak's main products are cameras and film. Yet their by-products are even more important to many people. For example, Kodak subsidiaries produce plastics, vitamins, capsules — all sorts of things. These by-products meet the needs and desires of many who are less concerned about the main products.

The talk to the Ladies of Columbus was on Pope Paul's MOTU PROPRIO ON MIXED MARRIAGES. The talk was interesting, practical and fairly short. But I think the by-product, i.e. devotion to the rosary, was more important than the explanation of Our Holy Father's MOTU PROPRIO.

Every time I have written of the rosary in the Courier-Journal, several people have written expressing their thanks, their comfort and their affirmation of devotion to Our Lady and the rosary. May this be no exception.

The Morriss Plan

40 Martyrs . . . Their Lesson

By Frank Morriss



The canonization of 40 English martyrs next October comes most providentially at a time when the lessons of what they lived and died for are desperately needed. Could it be that their patient wait through the centuries for this long-deserved honor was arranged by the Holy Spirit so that the Church, in a new time of agony, could turn to their example as patrons and patronesses of constancy?

That is the first and foremost lesson of the English martyrs. They teach us to be faithful as they were faithful. These martyrs, and others before them, put into practice the truth that it is necessary to cling to, to guard and conserve, the essentials of a divine revelation.

It is highly pertinent for us today that the point the English martyrs chose to die for was papal primacy. Surely the Church in honoring them is upholding their position — that no other authority can be interposed between the faithful Catholic and the Vicar of Christ, Bishop of Rome — the Pope. What was true in regard to King Henry, Cardinal Wolsey and the English hierarchy and Queen Elizabeth is equally true in regard to any body of bishops today, or the body of the faithful, or any council or senate of priests, nuns, the laity. None of these can stand between the Catholic conscience and the Pope.

It is also significant that at the center of the maelstrom into which these clergy, religious and lay persons were

swept were the sacraments — particularly Confession and the Eucharist. The young Jesuits like Edmund Campion who cheerfully returned to what they knew was certain death in England did so simply to take the sacraments to the Catholic people. The Mass had been proscribed, and a man-made ritual substituted for it. The Jesuits were not banished under penalty of death because they were political enemies of the crown, but because they were dedicated to keeping the Mass alive in their homeland.

The Mass was the final and irrefutable answer to the claim of the British crown to be also the supreme religious authority.

If I am not mistaken, one of the martyrs was a young housewife, Margaret Clitherow. Her crime was harboring priests so that they could continue to hear confessions and confect the Eucharist. When she refused to plead either guilty or not guilty, the usual persuasion was applied. A sharp rock was placed beneath her back and on a board placed upon her stomach heavy stones were placed one by one. Margaret Clitherow remained silent until she was crushed to death — a decision made even more heroic since she knew that the unborn child within her must die also. I trust the blood of the martyred mother sufficed to baptize this baby.

Why didn't Margaret plead? She evidently appreciated that to do so would be to admit that harboring a priest was in fact a crime, which of course it could not be. Her lesson for us is twofold — first, a rejection of the claim of civil authority either to make a crime what is not,

or to make legal what is criminal.

Secondly, Margaret teaches us that the retention of valid Catholic truth especially in its outward expression such as the Mass is worth any sacrifice. She is not like those liberals of today who feel that all such concerns are much too philosophical and not existentially relevant.

There are three further lessons that this marvelous decision for canonization offers. One is a lesson particularly for the Jesuits, who gave to the Church several of these brave young heroes. The glory of the Society of Jesus was its fidelity to its founder's purpose — service to the Pope without question or hesitancy. Perhaps St. Edmund Campion and the others can help that society refine its almost deserted purpose.

Secondly, the martyrdoms came in an age that considered itself one of the most humanistic and progressive. Its sophisticated concern was man. Its art was brilliant but licentious. Its dress was immodest. It had all the earmarks of our own very humanistic age. But it produced the most ferocious despotism and waged relentless war upon men's consciences. The lesson is clear.

And finally, in regard to ecumenism the canonization will tell the world that the Church cannot ignore truth or turn aside from history or spiritual fact in order to obtain a type of "peace" with others. If we are to be a reunited Christendom, it will have to be on the basis of what is, not on what some would like to be.