

The Church: 1970

'Hung Up' On Faith

By Fr. Andrew M. Greeley



I gather there is some dissent from my early stated position that one does not reform the ecclesiastical structure by leaving it. Such dissent in itself does not cause me any undue chagrin — quite the contrary. If this column should stop stirring up dissent, I would quietly fold it up and steal off into the hills.

The substance of dissent on this particular issue is interesting. The basic argument, repeated a number of times, is that my strong commitment to the priesthood and to the institutional Church is obvious evidence that my commitment is in fact quite insecure.

The substance of the argument is obviously superficial pop Freudianism and deserves and will get no direct response. But two comments are in order: First of all, the argument does not address itself to my principle contention that the lessons of history and sociology — not to say theology — are that one does not reform an institution by leaving it. The second point is that I have no doubt my critics are sincere. They really do believe that the only reason I would have strong convictions and commitments about the priesthood is that I am trying to cover up subconscious or unconscious doubts. Why else would anyone have strong convictions?

If one tries to trace the reason for this rather peculiar intellectual and emotional approach to faith one is forced to conclude that we are going through a period of reaction. There was a time when Catholics were expected to believe a vast number of things with absolute certainty. It turns out that a considerable number of these things were not in fact so certain at all. And now many of us find it difficult really to believe anything.

There is, I think, an ideology or conventional wisdom that lurks just beneath the surface of a good deal of contemporary Catholic controversy — in editorials, letters to the editor, articles about the development of the Church, resolutions and statements of priest groups, and the justifications of departing priests and religious. There are a number of elements in this implicit ideology:

- The research of Scripture

scholars has drastically reduced, if not eliminated completely the value of Scripture as a Sacred Book. Scripture means just about what anybody wants it to mean.

- Mankind has "come of age." Many men, particularly those who are most advanced, no longer need religion or the sacred.

- What the world looks for from its churches is not faith but social relevance.

- Therefore, the principal function of the religious leader, indeed the only one that has any real validity anymore, is to engage in social action.

- The most-up-to-date philosophy teaches us that it is practically impossible to say anything meaningful about God.

- Ecclesiastical structures, like all other structures, are going to be phased out in "institutionless" societies.

- In an ecumenical era, differences among religious denominations will no longer mean anything.

- There is, therefore, very little in the Christian and practically nothing in the Catholic tradition that is unique. It follows, then, that the tradition is practically worthless and must be abandoned. Those who really wish to be "with it" have to start over from scratch.

I do not think this description of the conventional wisdom is a caricature, though any largely implicit conventional wisdom does sound strange when it is stated explicitly. But I do think that the conventional wisdom is rooted in fear; a fear that everything from the past is obsolescent and that one, therefore, must divest oneself of it as quickly as possible in order not to be left behind.

The trouble with the conventional wisdom is that it is based on half-truths accepted, one very much fears, by the half-educated.

But if you do accept the conventional wisdom, then anyone who still has strong commitments to the Catholic religious tradition must be neurotic if not slightly psychotic. For if there is nothing left to believe in, then somebody who still does believe must really be hung up.

On The Right Side Concerning Campus Priests

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



There is a great monologue among ultra-liberals about polarization. The assumption seems to be that polarization is necessarily an evil thing. For people without convictions I suppose it would be. Yet I still like Chesterton's dictum: "People can be so broadminded they become flatheaded."

There is a great insistence among many that a continuing dialogue is the keynote to understanding and to progress. They seem blind to the fact that people DO understand quite thoroughly what another is saying, and understanding, they quite thoroughly disagree with them.

For example, I read about the Catholic chaplains of colleges in our diocese beating the drum to abandon the people of South Viet Nam to Communism. I have read nothing in their dialogue which refers to the killing of 6,000,000 Chinese and the enslavement of 700,000,000 Chinese people by the Chinese Communist Party. This was done at the time, the late '40s, when the party leaders were fobbed off by the New York Times, Life, Time, Commonweal, et al as agrarian reformers! And I remember at the time, that our own Rochester Maryknoll Father Charles Hilbert made a remark which I

recommend to the "Abandon Viet Nam to the Viet Cong" chaplains. He was reading the morning paper at Sts. Peter and Paul Rectory in Rochester. The papers were full of the State Department's line: the Chinese agrarian reformers propaganda.

With a combination of indignation and exasperation, Father Hilbert said: "Sure! Of course! If you don't care what happens to other people, give them over to the Communists!"

This statement came from a man who had spent almost his entire priestly life serving the Chinese people. He spoke several dialects. He knew the psychology of the people and their history. He loved them. He lived under the pre-war regime of Chang Kai Shek; during the Japanese occupation; during the post-war days. He lived for a while during the Communist take over. He lived in China as priest, teacher, administrator; as a Catholic American who cared about the people, and cared for them.

His words: "Sure! If you don't care about other people", give added impact to the words in an article in the Courier-Journal of June 3. The article, entitled "The Middle Domino," reads: "With 13 seconds of air

time for the interview left, the TODAY show's Barbara Walters asked a final question. It was directed to a tall good looking priest. In effect it was: Might it not be better for the U.S. and the people of Southeast Asia if this country withdrew from its commitments there and let the Communists take over? More seconds ticked by. The young priest said quietly: "Miss Walters, have you ever lived under communism?" She shook her head. The priest then added: "Well, I have."

In Father Mat Menger's book, The Valley of the Mekong, published by St. Anthony Guild Press, the Texan Oblate gives insights of "other people" about whom I wish our Catholic chaplains would be concerned.

Recently I asked the chaplain of a well known college campus why the Catholic chaplains are so voluble and visible about our Viet Nam commitment and were so silent and invisible when the abortion law regarding the killing of the unborn children was up for discussion and vote. He thought a bit. Then he replied: "I suppose because the Viet Nam-Cambodian affair is closer to them personally."

I did not press him about what he meant by that.

The Morriss Plan

Bigotry And Faith

By Frank Morriss



I hold no brief for bigotry, but there is one thing to say for it: bigotry holds to at least a tattered corner of belief, even though it has surrendered rationality about that belief. And I rather think it will be easier to restore rationality to a bigot than faith to those who have let go of the total fabric of belief altogether.

St. Paul, whose hatred of Christians can be blamed on nothing but blind, irrational bigotry, became the greatest of Christian missionaries. It took a supernatural flash of light to do it, and it will take something similar to bring about future acceptance of the Pope so that we may again have one Christian Church. But the point I would like to try to make in this column is that perhaps bigots like Saul are the only ones God may feel worth the bother of light from above.

These thoughts are prompted by some most interesting articles: a news story about a lieutenant of the violently anti-Catholic Rev. Ian Paisley; an America magazine article on the ecumenical future by the Rev. Dr. David H. C. Read; and the text of the second part of a directory from the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

The news article about Mr. Paisley's "man in London," the Rev. Brian Green, is headlined "profile of an anti-Papist." And that Mr. Green certainly is, as he proclaims on placards shouting "No Popery!" and in his crusade to save the souls of millions from "Romanism," which he calls the pit of hell.

Despite the classic and pathetic ignorance of it all, there is something refreshing about an intransigent son of the Reformation being openly anti-Papal, when so many professed sons and daughters of the Catholic Church are being indifferently or sub-consciously anti-Papal.

We are far more likely to make followers of the Pope out of Mr. Paisley and Mr. Green (with God's help, of course) than we are out of some of our own theologians who are willing to engage in the most subtle sophistry in order to avoid accepting what the Pope teaches. In the former case there is at least some recognition that the Christian religion somehow centers on just how one feels about the Bishop of Rome.

I am afraid that may not be the case with the more ecumenically oriented Presbyterian, Mr. Read, even though the burden of his article is that both Catholics and Protestants are being more or less driven together in a world that "is rapidly discarding the most basic beliefs we have in common." Mr. Read sees "Church to Come" as one in which we live "for one another" apparently by not being overly concerned about narrow dogmatism, sectarian barriers, or "tired concepts" such as "apostolic succession."

I am somewhat happier with a bigoted Mr. Paisley who does not consider that concept tired, but rather extremely important, than with an ecumenical Mr.

Read who wishes to brush it aside like a bit of embarrassing dust from times past.

I do not think the release of the Vatican Secretariat's Directory Part II gives any support to such a view of ecumenism, although most commentaries and press reports may tend to deceive you in this regard. It cites as the purpose of ecumenical programs "to increase among students a deeper knowledge of the faith, the spirituality and the entire life and doctrine of the Catholic Church," toward the end of having wise and fruitful ecumenical dialogue: It calls for courses in philosophy which do indeed treat contemporary trends, but which first must provide "a solid and coherent understanding of man;" in commending studies of other religions, it specifies this be done by "properly instructed Catholics," and qualifies the matter further, "so long as they firmly maintain their Catholic heritage."

While stressing openness, the guidelines also stress doctrine, truth and heritage. They recognize the deposit of faith and the need of faithfulness to it, while reminding that students should distinguish between those things essential to it and other things that may be Catholic because of custom or mere theological theory.

Needless to say, restored unity must take precedence over mere stubbornness; but fidelity to the Catholic truth is more important even than unity.

THINK, III TANK
PROGRAMMED BY JOE RYAN

Food prices have risen to the point where anyone can diet by sticking to his budget.