

The Church: 1970

Up From Shiftlessness

By Fr. Andrew Greeley



"Most of them were members of the thrifless, less desirable class and though they lived in extreme squalor they seemed to be, in their own way, comfortable. They do not care about the shabby apartments in which they live. They look forward to the time when they can afford a three room apartment and they would never willingly leave their beloved ghetto."

Shiftless, undesirable, indifferent—this could be a description of any poor group in contemporary American society — American Indians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, or blacks. They are the ones who Edward Banfield, in his recent book *The Unheavenly City*, suggests may well be beyond any kind of help. They lack the ability to postpone immediate gratification for some future hope of improvement and are, if Banfield is to be believed, destined never to break out of the iron grips of poverty.

But it is not the American Indians or the blacks or the Spanish speaking, not the migrant workers, not the abject poor of contemporary American cities that are being described, and it is not even the nineteenth century Irish who, as readers of this column are well aware, were accused of absolutely everything of which today's poor are accused.

No, it is another immigrant group being described, a group which today is thought by everyone to represent the epitome of thrift, industriousness, sobriety, and ambition — the Germans.

One is staggered by such a quote taken (with slight editing) from Father Jay Dolan's recent study of the Catholic church in New York City during the first half of the nineteenth century. That the Irish could be accused of being "shanty" is credible, but that the Germans could be considered shiftless, unambitious or lazy seems, from the perspective of our time, to be absurd. The point of the quote of course is not to criticize the Germans or the Irish or the blacks or the Indians or the Mexicans or the Puerto Ricans, for that matter. The point is rather that no immigrant group to the American cities ever looked particularly good during the initial transition era after immigration began. Professor Banfield suggests that the urban poor of the nineteenth century not only died, but they died out; he argues that since they lacked the ambition to break out of the culture of poverty, and since there is no evidence of their offspring still within the culture of poverty, obviously they did not reproduce themselves. It is a quaint line of reasoning but, as an alternative hypothesis, one might suggest that the grandchildren of the shanty Irish and the shiftless Germans are very much in evidence in the most prosperous and well-to-do suburbs in our country. Or, if it is not their grandchildren, then one must assume that the Irish and German suburbanites appeared on the scene by spontaneous generation, which would be quite a feat even for such talented ethnic groups.

I do not wish to be too critical of Professor Banfield's *The Unheavenly City*. Though the book is badly flawed by its

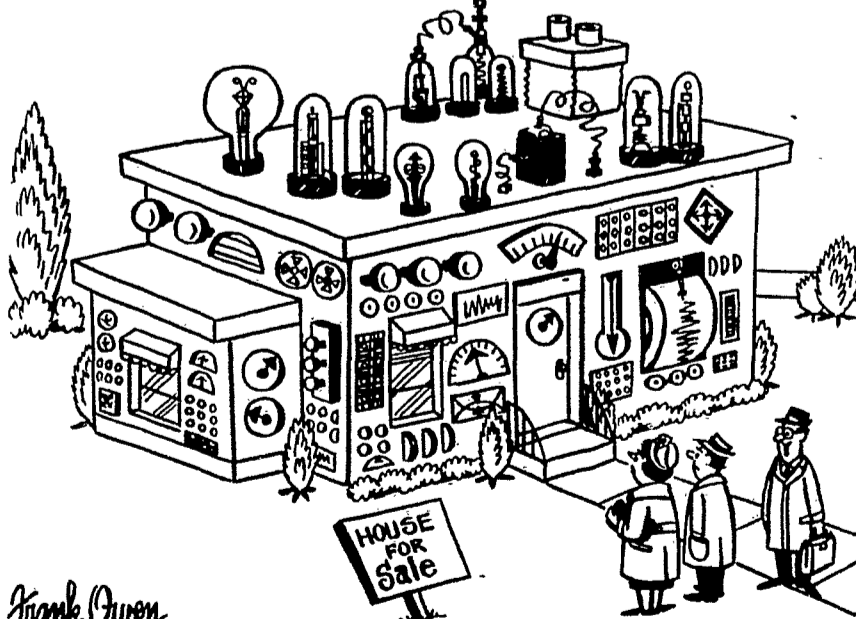
tendency to push the "lower class" theory further than any one has ever pushed it, it still raises many important issues about urban problems and serves as a marvelous antidote to those who think that there are simple, easy solutions to the difficulties of the city. He is also correct in noting that indifference, apathy and shiftlessness are part of the problem of poverty. The record of the shiftless Germans and the shanty Irish would indicate that these need not be insoluble problems, not at least for most human beings.

One of the currently fashionable cliches says that if we could put a man on the moon we ought to be able to solve the problems of poverty (or pollution or any other problem with which the nation is faced). The only honest reply is to say that putting a man on the moon is child's play (probably in more senses than one) in comparison with the problems of poverty and discrimination. To get a man on the moon one had to solve problems of power and engineering, which are well within the limitations of present human knowledge, but the problems of the urban slums require skills, competencies and knowledge that we do not at the present time have.

There was a time when it was possible to be a social reformer and acknowledge that progress would take time, effort, energy, resources and, above all, patience. But patience has gone out of fashion. Instant solutions or despair — that is the alternative.

However, one might be forgiven if one would hazard the guess that it is at least possible that by the time the Republic celebrates its three hundredth anniversary—if it has not been torn apart by civil war or destroyed by senseless foreign involvements or choked to death by its own affluence — a good many of the grandchildren and the great grandchildren of today's presumed hopelessly and incurably poor will be living in well-to-do suburbs in peace and harmony with neighbors who are descendants of the shiftless Germans and the shanty Irish of the nineteenth century. One even suspects that they will regard the controversies of our time on the subject of poverty with distaste, if not disbelief.

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Frank Owen

"It's designed for people who don't like to think for themselves!"

On The Right Side

Customs Die Hard

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



Customs die hard. Despite all the instruction people have received these past 20 years, the custom of not being anointed unless the undertaker is en route still persists in many minds.

Even poorly instructed Catholics, up to recently, knew that the Sacrament, variously known as Extreme Unction, Anointing of the Sick, Last Rites, and "The Priest Saw Him," has a double purpose: first, to give strength to the sick body if God sees fit, and second, to give grace to the soul. One would wish that an appreciation of this Sacrament could be more quickly realized.

A good beginning would be if people who are quite sick, but not sick unto death, would ask for the Sacrament.

Thirty years ago I was an assistant to Father William Byrne in Ithaca. I called on a nice elderly woman who lived alone, and suggested cautiously: "You're not well. Don't you think you should be anointed?" She startled me as she replied with great cheer: "Why, of course, Father, if you want to!"

In her charity she wasn't going to stand in the way of my happiness. So she was anointed. But I wished she wanted it first, for her own physical comfort and her own spiritual help.

Thousands in this diocese knew and loved Father John Merklinger, who died suddenly on May 5 during his brief tenure as Spiritual Director of

Becket Hall. He was admired for many things: his prayerfulness and his veneration for the priesthood, his solicitude for the Sisters, his direction of the Legion of Mary, his service to the people, his generosity — and his care of, the sick.

I had the privilege of living with him for a year, 1950-1951, at St. Ann's rectory in Rochester. I was assistant to Msgr. William Naughton. Father John was Catholic chaplain at Strong Memorial Hospital, with residence at the parish rectory. He often told this story.

"Mrs. V. was brought in critically ill. The interns were concerned lest any anxiety worsen her condition. I told the doctors I would anoint her. They objected, saying: 'You'll only upset her.' 'Oh, no. Come along with me and see for yourself.' So I went into the sick room, with the interns standing curious in the background, watching. To prepare her for the Sacraments I greeted her: 'Well, Mrs. V., so you've decided to be sick. I've come to give you my blessing.'

"Well now, thank you, Father. I'll be glad to have your blessing. But I want the Sacraments even more. Please anoint me."

A year ago the phone rang in my quarters. It was 4:45 a.m. A nurse spoke: "They've brought Mrs. X into the Coronary Care Unit. You better come over." I hustled across the street to the hospital and went to the Unit. It was like

the TV Hospital dramas, with people, needles, pressure gauges, coronary equipment, oxygen, et al.

Mrs. X. could hardly breathe. She looked at me and gasping for breath said solicitously: "Glory be to God, Father! What are you doing here at this hour of the morning?" The doctor, who wonderfully combined his medical skill with his deep Faith and compassion, spoke up: "Now, Molly, Father has the early Mass and just stopped by to see you."

As sick as she was, she gasped: "What a shame to be getting you out of bed at this hour! Ah, Father, anoint me, and let me go!" I grinned at her: "Well, Molly, I think I'll anoint you and we'll hang on to you instead." So I gave her absolution and the short form of anointing, as the medical staff continued unhindered.

Molly stayed in the hospital for a month, and then returned to her home and children and grandchildren, to her beloved toast and hot tea, to her prayers to the Sacred Heart, and to her rosary beads. And thanks to good medical and hospital care, and a good anointing, she continues to carry on her domestic life and her queenship over her devoted family.

Customs die hard. But by dint of persistent instruction, our people will some day ask for Anointing even when they are not sick unto death.

The Morriss Plan

New Scandal In Abortion

By Frank Morriss



The sickening revelation that live aborted fetuses have been sold for scientific experimentation in Britain not only exposes the anti-human callousness of a part of the scientific fraternity, but also completely destroys one of the main arguments of the pro-abortionists. That argument goes something like this: a woman has a perfect right to deal with her body as she chooses.

I do not, of course, admit that premise, for if it were true there could be no laws against prostitution, none against sui-

cide, none regulating the activities of certain disease carriers, etc.

Even if we were to admit that premise, it is difficult to apply it to the cases now exposed in Britain in which the aborted life from the mother's womb is supported for weeks after the abortion, and then deliberately ended.

Again, I do not admit the truth of the suggestion that a fetus, even when attached by its umbilical cord to its mother's bloodstream, is merely a part of the mother's body. The fact is, it has a completely independent physiological and biological identity, and its attachment to its mother is for nutrition, and the womb is to provide an environment.

But again, even were one to admit the idea of no separate identity for the child in the womb, it is impossible to extend that idea to deny a separate identity to a fetus living completely removed from the mother, with perhaps the mother living in New York and the fetus being kept alive in London.

It is a medical fact, as any honest doctor can tell you, that the aborted child does not directly die by separation from its mother. It will, of course, eventually . . . in some cases perhaps almost immediately . . . die after such separation unless kept alive artificially. But the truth of what I have

just said clearly shoots down the idea that a woman in consenting to an abortion is doing in essence no more than when she might consent to the amputation of an arm.

No one can seriously maintain that an amputated arm continues to live after amputation in the manner a fetus continues to live after abortion. There is no need to take further steps to destroy the arm. But positive aggressive action or a period of inhumane neglect must be brought against the fetus.

In view of these facts, the blithe use of the argument that a woman has the right to deal as she chooses with her own body becomes positively dishonest, and depends for its success only upon the ignorance of those using it and those accepting it.

There is only one step beyond experimentation with fetuses, and that is experimentation with those fortunate enough to have been born. Such experimentation, we know, has been carried out in totalitarian regimes with the cooperation of unscrupulous scientists. It is unthinkable, however, that a free society based on Judaic-Christian principles could countenance it.

What has happened in Britain; however, may help open the eyes of some as to just what we invite by approving abortion. Unfortunately, those eyes may be opened too late.