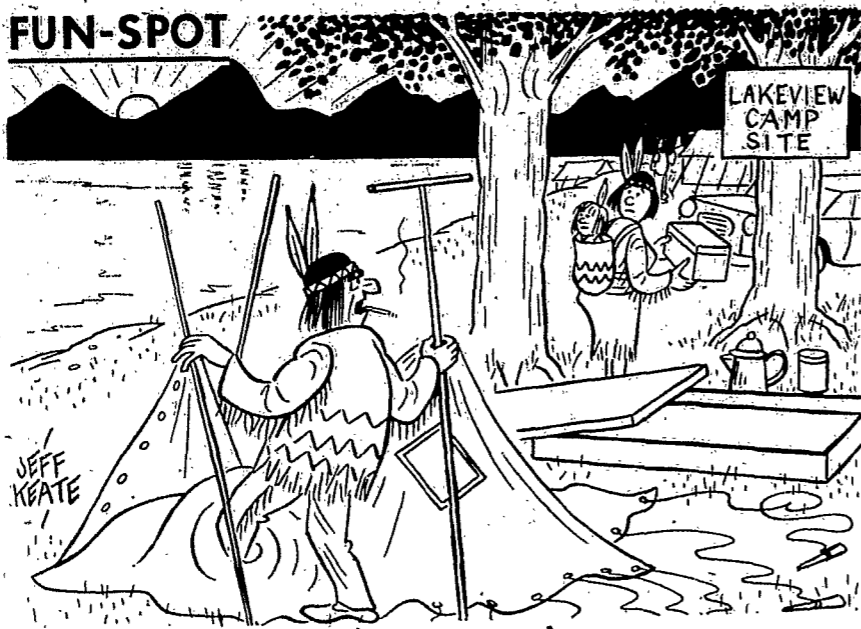


FUN-SPOT



"Look in the box, dear. Surely instructions came on how to assemble this tent!"

COURIER / Commentary

The Church: 1970

A Meritocratic System

By Fr. Andrew Greeley



A friend of mine who is a high academic official at a great American urban university tells me that the black students in that university who come out of the slum high schools as part of the university's open door admission policy are much more interested and much better at 17th century English poetry (the subject which my friend teaches) than are the white students from the highly rated academic high schools in the city. I asked him why. Can it be that the old stereotype about blacks having "natural rhythm" is actually valid?

My friend laughs and says he thinks not. The reason the black kids are better at poetry is that they have had a poorer grammar school and high school education than the white students. In other words, the natural sense of the poetic with which all of us are born is more likely to survive a poor primary and secondary education than it is likely to survive a good one.

It is not my intention, surely, to suggest that blacks are better off with the second-rate education they receive in so many slum schools. What I am asserting is that the so-called first-rate education is, if anything, worse than the so-called second-rate education, and that by any absolute standard of the worth of an education experience, almost all American primary and secondary education is inferior.

American blacks would be singularly ill-advised to want for themselves the same dehumanizing education that American white young people are receiving. They would be well-advised to band together with white Americans to improve the quality of education for everyone, an improvement which would take a radical rethinking of style, technique and methodology.

The basic assumption of the American educational enterprise is meritocratic. It has been designed to rate young people along a continuum which purportedly measures their abilities. Those with high abilities are marked high on the continuum, and those with low abilities, low on the continuum. But there is, for all practical purposes, only one continuum, and that is the continuum which measures a person's ability to do well in tests. The tests in their turn tap both the student's ability at memorizing isolated phenomena and his skills at narrowly rational models of cognition and expression.

The further one goes in the educational system, the more necessary it is to limit one's intellectual development to one's powers of abstract conceptualization. The ideal Ph.D. candidate is a young person who is very good at abstract reasoning, very clever at the articulation of theoretical language, and absolutely insensitive to all other forms of knowledge and expression.

Even though such rationalistic positivism has demonstrably failed both as a means of organizing young men and young women, it is still the official and almost unassailable philosophy on which American education and indeed much of the rest of American society is organized.

I am not suggesting that education ought to ignore powers of abstract thought and articulation of this thought. Quite the contrary, such powers are indispensable in the modern world, and education has an important role to play in developing such powers. But I am trying to make two points:

1. Abstract reasoning and abstract expression are not the only forms of human knowledge and expression. An education which is concerned with evaluation, and measures only these dimensions of personality growth is bound to be inadequate, deficient, and, indeed, subhuman education.

2. It is really impossible to develop capacities at theoretical reasoning and expression without at the same time developing the intuitive and the mythopoetic styles of understanding and expressing oneself. As the famous philosopher of science, Michael Polanyi, has repeatedly pointed out, the great scientist is not the man who has been able to repress his intuitive and poetic capacities, but is rather the one who is able to reinforce his activity of theoretical reasoning with the passion and insight of intuition and poetry.

Some of those who are most critical of the deficiencies of the educational enterprise organized around abstract reasoning are inclined to go to the other extreme (including many of the proponents of the so-called "free school" movement). They support an education in which reasoning of the theoretical sort is virtually excluded. But going from one extreme to another, while it may win one the title of erratic, is hardly a very intelligent strategy.

And where are the Catholic schools?

On The Right Side To Sharpen The Soul

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



Despite the contrary recommendation, I think it best to read the Scripture of the Mass with the reader. Good pedagogy teaches that we should use as many senses as possible to get a deeper and wider comprehension of a subject.

Thus a medical student must study medical text books. He must attend his professors' lectures. He must also experience what he learns through reading and hearing; in the laboratories, in accumulating research data. So in the understanding of medicine, which includes the human psyche as well as bones, tendons and organs, what do medical schools demand of students?

They demand the use of the sense of sight with medical books; the sense of hearing in attending lectures. They further demand the testing of what a student hears and reads, in practical experience in laboratories and with living ailing bodies. It would seem that God wants us to use all our powers to understand His Word.

There is a theory that the Liturgy of the Word is for a

hearer just to sit tight and listen. The basis of the theory is: as we listen to the Word proclaimed, whether well or badly doesn't seem to matter, the Holy Spirit will work within the soul and give the message.

Such is not my own experience. The presumption that the Spirit will blow God's message through the soul is Reformation theology. It was rejected by the Church at Trent and Vatican II. It has been rejected by most Christian bodies which are descended from the 16th century sadness.

The church teaches objective truths. The presumption that the Holy Spirit will rustle a correct interpretation through the hearer's being is just that: presumption.

Remember the eunuch of Queen Candace who was reading Isaiah, and wasn't getting to first base? Remember how the Apostle Philip was sent to him, and how he enquired: "Do you understand what you are reading?" Remember the response: "How can I understand

unless some man show me?" (Acts 8:30-31)

To listen is good. To listen and to read is better. To listen and to read, and to study intelligently and prayerfully is best.

Father Alexander Jones, who edited the Jerusalem Bible, wrote a book, *Unless Some Man Show Me*. It gives the fruits of biblical research for the non-professional student.

The small book is one of the *Deus* series published by the Paulist Press. It can be bought for 95 cents, the price of two packs of cigarettes. To study the Scriptures instead of expecting some charismatic inspiration from the Holy Spirit is humble and intelligent. From God's spirit does come the Gift of Understanding; but the Spirit, with some chosen exceptions, does expect us to use our intelligence and our senses.

Reading the texts of the Mass with the proclaiming lector or priest cuts down on mind-wandering, and sharpens the soul to the Word of the Lord.

The Morriss Plan

Heed Lessons Of History

By Frank Morriss



A sad incident involving the Colorado Catholic Conference has a lesson for Catholics everywhere. The facts are: That a "population planning" committee of the conference issued recommendations that the conference "endorse and urge the prudent use of all available methods of birth control;" that the recommendations, although supposedly secret, immediately became known to anti-life and zero-population growth people, who accepted it is the consensus of the Colorado Catholic Conference; that on the advisory board of the so-called population experts of the conference are in fact anti-people people; that the language used at subcommittee meetings of the conference population committee reflected the same type of population panic as is being foisted on the nation by the pagans and other assorted humanists.

At least some of the Colorado Catholic Conference members, for example, believe that man was "spawned" by his physical environment, and that environment is being threatened by "intellectual adventurism" and "military mobilizations."

They have adopted the feeble argument of the anti-life people that everyone who is brought into this world should "be wanted," which of course the same anti-life people use in order to justify contraception and even abortion. Some in the

Colorado Catholic Conference are only inches away from that stand when they conclude that "there is a need to do something to slow down population growth." They feel the Church cannot do anything but agree with this unproved prescription, and that the only question left for the Church can be the methods of achieving such a slowdown.

I have spent all the space above outlining the situation in order to cite some lessons and conclusions that are desperately needed in the current crisis of faith.

The first of these lessons is one that the Church should have learned when it first came out from the catacombs after the edict of toleration by Constantine. It is this: The sorrow and hurt brought the Church is almost in a direct inverse ratio to the true Catholicity of those it allows to be its administrators, confidants, or advisers.

Today, however, the official Church apparently is more impressed with administrative know-how, political aptitude, social adaptability, public relation mindedness, soft-hearted sympathy with popular faddism and blindness to popular fallacy — than with unflagging devotion to what the Church teaches.

It is easy to look back in history and condemn the Church's blindness to its association with attitudes that we now realized sapped the Church's strength and left it open to the diseases of disloyalty, separation, even violence. But what we should realize is that some of these associations were viewed as perfectly normal and eminently practical. The sincerity of the men involved in them is apparent. It was simply a case of

the Church's officials being too much with the world and not enough with Christ.

The present myopic and completely grotesque anti-population fad is a perfect example. In the time of the Renaissance, the Church saw as admirable the Renaissance gentleman. Such gentlemen became its advisers, and unfortunately even its prelates. The attitude of Renaissance princes became the attitude of Catholic Churchmen, and it was all most modern, up-to-date, and forward looking. The just-departed Medievalism was looked upon as absolutely reactionary; any suggestion of a return to its strengths would have brought at best a smile of condescension.

We have entered something far more deleterious than Renaissance humanism; we have entered the era of pagan scientific barbarism—and again we see many in the Church rushing to take on the coloration of the age, and laughing at all who decry the abandonment of our strengths and purpose of old.

The second lesson is that there can be bitterness, dangers, pitfalls ahead in our rush toward the "co-responsibility" that such bodies as the Colorado Catholic Conference represent. The trappings of monarchy had their dangers for the Church of old; they ill-became a Church which is transcendent, outside all political and civic orders, beyond all cultures. We are far too democratic to see the dangers and failings of democracy. One of them is that it subjects all who embrace it to the lowest common denominator. This has worked well in our balanced form of republicanism—but it can be insidious for the Catholic faith, which is called to perfectionism.

Editor's Note

The Courier-Journal attempts, by the wide variety of opinion columns, to give both sides of the major issues of our day.

No one column, however, is indicative of the editorial position of the paper.

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