

The Church: 1970

The 'Feeling' Of Competency

By Fr. Andrew Greeley



Back when I was a seminarian in the post-Tridentine church, there was a good deal of talk about competence. All the liberals and the radicals and the chaplains in Catholic Action movements insisted that laymen and cleric alike must bear witness by competency.

It was argued that one was not competent in order that one might make converts or that one might use one's profession to spread the word of God. One was competent because that was one's calling and vocation. The favorite illustration was, I think, from an article by Canon LeClercq. LeClercq argued that if a Christian was a baker, then he had to be a good baker, not because he used his bakery for winning converts but rather because he used the bakery as a means of service to his fellow men.

It all seemed fair enough. The opposite of a professional was an amateur. We had too much amateurism in the Church. There was a pious thought abroad in the Church that anybody who wore a Roman collar or a religious habit could do anything that their superiors assigned them to do; if the superiors assigned them to it, it was the will of God, and if it was the will of God, then however inept or incompetent one was, one's work certainly would be blessed with success.

Ordination or religious profession was assumed to bestow capacities for the exercise of almost any talent, and a degree in canon law represented graduate training on the competence. Canon lawyers could be newspaper editors, college presidents, ecumenists, human relations specialists, psychiatric counselors, seminary rectors, and, oh yes, of course bishops. (Mind you, I have nothing against canon lawyers; some of my best friends are canon lawyers, but I don't think I'd want my sister to marry one.)

And so because of the pioneer work of Father William Rooney's Catholic Commission of Intellectual and Cultural Affairs and the insistence of such movements as CPM and YCS on competency, many of us proceeded to obtain professional training. It turns out we were wasting our time. There is a new amateurism in the Church, and professional competency is no longer required, or expected, or even approved. What counts now is not so much competency, but feeling. If you feel that you can do something, then of course you can do it. You don't need training, you don't need practice, you don't need certification. You can just go ahead and do it.

So we have amateurs who are amateur survey takers, amateur editors, amateur moralists, amateur theologians, amateur mystics, amateur Scripture scholars, and even on occasion, one suspects, amateur bishops.

And it is almost immoral to ask these amateurs where they got their training, what their credentials are or indeed whether they know anything about what they are doing. And if one happens to labor under the handicap of having some kind of credentials, then one is a snob for asking such a question.

In my work I encounter a steady stream of priests, both American and foreign born, who want to come to our university to spend a year learning the social sciences. They hastily

assure me that they have no need for the Ph.D., no need to follow the requirements, no need to submit themselves to the discipline that other students must undergo. They simply want to learn how to be a social scientist, and, if the truth be told, they want to learn how to be it without much work, without much practice, and without much expenditure of time and energy.

I don't think the Ph.D. as such is all that important (mine hangs on the wall of my bathroom, for what that's worth) but I do think that discipline and training in the skills of professional research are extremely important and one can't get that in a year of sitting around listening to lectures. If one tells the amateurs that, they look at one in stunned disbelief. Of course one can learn how to be an expert in a year.

Archbishop Helder Camara, who heads the archdiocese of Olinda and Recife in impoverished, northeastern Brazil, is one of the most celebrated and controversial churchmen in the world. Most of us have heard of his activities or read one or another of his speeches, but have had little personal information about him. Some is supplied by Jose de Broucker in his book "The Violence of a Peacemaker" (Orbis Books - Maryknoll, \$4.95), which comes to us in an English translation by Herma Briffault and with excellent photographs by John Padula.

This is not a biography. It is, rather, a set of impressions, interspersed with lengthy quotations from the writings and addresses of Dom Helder. Indeed, the biographical matter it contains is mostly found in an epilogue written (or spoken?) by Dom Helder himself.

He was born in 1910, in the northeastern region of Brazil. He was named, not for a saint, but for a town in the Netherlands, this because his father had no use for religious practices at that time. His father was a journalist, his mother a teacher.

He went through minor and major seminaries and was ordained at 22.

The papal nuncio in Rio sent him to Rome and facilitated his discussing with the then Monsignor Montini the idea of an episcopal conference. Montini asked whether, since Camara was obviously the man to set up the conference, he entertain the ambition to become a bishop. Camara replied, "I know Your Excellency is highly placed, yet you are not a bishop. Even so, God uses you as the key man to handle the worldwide episcopacy."

The conference came into being, and Camara was its secretary general for 12 years. He became auxiliary bishop of Rio in 1952, auxiliary archbishop in 1955.

On The Right Side

Christian Optimism

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



Schmaltz stopped to welcome a new neighbor. He enquired: "And what do you do for a living?" The neighbor replied: "I'm an optometrist." Schmaltz pondered a moment and commented sadly: "One has to be these days." When our Bishop Kearney spoke at the consecration dinner of Bishops Hickey and McCafferty, he beamed at his delighted audience and said: "Well, something that I did must have been right." Pessimism obfuscates realities which give reason for optimism. Here are a few excerpts from Christmas notes, indicating that much is right with The People.

1. Art Avila was a handsome New Englander, active with the Church on the military Air Base near Casablanca in 1956. He was devout, liked beer, but much more he loved the Church which he served by good works graced by faith. He tested a religious vocation at Maryknoll for a few years; decided it was not his calling. He married and for the first time since 1964 he wrote a letter bubbling with humor and contentment.

"The last time I wrote to you was to autograph a Christmas

card. So here's a letter, with apologies. Do you get missionary pay for working in the vineyard way out there in Hornell? Maureen and I went for an overnight trip to Vermont this past summer. I checked the map of N. Y., hoping Hornell would be close to the state line for a short detour and visit. It would take the three-Wise Men and the shining star to find that place. . . . As 1970 comes close I must say I have a great deal to be thankful for. A marvelous girl for a wife. A peaceful home, steady work and steady pay. As Marlon Brando said in On The Waterfront, 'Someone up there likes me!' Love and cheers, P.S. I save the kisses for the women folk."

Comment: Let readers be assured that the women folk mentioned in the P.S., who are marked out for special affection are restricted to those women who have a claim on Art as wife, close relative, or an integrated platonic spiritual kinship.

2. Father X is a priest-student-teacher at a University.

"I frequently read your column with several grains of 'yes, but!' salt. But I remain a faithful reader. You are stimulating, as always. The life of a priest graduate student and teaching fellow is interesting, and humbling. . . . May the Lord Whose Infancy we honor bless us both with clear vision, large heart, and strong soul. . . ."

Comment: Such a blessing is worthy of placing next to I Cor. xiii.

3. Msgr. Y is a technically retired but actually active "older priest." "Thanks for giving us old timers a little encouragement that not all of us are 'nuts'."

Comment: Recently Father Herbert Sturmer of Cohocton was a patient in our St. James Mercy Hospital for four days, enduring not very patiently, a series of tests. One day I stopped in. "Sit down", he said earnestly. "I've been reading this commentary on the epistles of St. Paul. Poor St. Paul! Just when he got the Church established in some city, as soon as he left a bunch of yahoos would come in to undermine his work." Thank God for priests like Msgr. Y and Fr. Sturmer. "To think with the Church" is the sign of fidelity to Our Lord.

4. Al Coignet of Lake Jackson, Texas, shared the house owned by the Academy of Our Lady of Loretto, El Paso, Texas, with the chaplain, Father Payne and me, 1957. He was a young officer in the engineering section at Biggs AFBase. His wife wrote:

"All is well. Five children keep us busy. John is learning to be an altar boy, and stays busy with school and Cub Scouts. (I'm a den mother to seven boys.) Therese is still having asthma, joined the Brownies in Sept. and will make her first Communion in May. Kenneth started kindergarten and the two little ones just stay busy. Al besides guitar lessons, still stays active in the Legion of Mary. . . . One nice thing we did start was the weekly rosary for peace with another family. . . ."

Comment: We are not likely to see the Coignets on CBS Reports of family chaos or religious uncertainties. This family prays together and they and millions like them will stay together, bound by a devotion to one another in Christ, Jesus, Our Lord!

Balancing the Books

Controversial Archbishop

By Father John S. Kennedy

In 1964, Dom Helder was named to his present position, in the very poorest part of Brazil. The average annual income is \$100; seventy per cent of the populace is illiterate. The infant mortality rate is 50 per cent.

He once had faith in various governmental undertakings to secure the betterment of the poor but he no longer believes in them, because they have made the rich richer while doing nothing effective about the wretchedness of the poor. He has become convinced that there must be structural change in society before real justice can be achieved.

For this, he has been labeled a Communist or a dupe of the Communists. The charge is

baseless. Also, it has been alleged that he condones violence. He says that he can understand the violence of a Camillo Torres or a Che Guevara, but violence is not for him. He has relentlessly preached non-violence.

He strongly advocates popular education. People must learn to read; they must learn of the realities of the contemporary world; they must learn to put aside apathy and despair; they must learn their own power.

He presses for what he calls "the humanization of the people," bringing them up from a sub-human status and a sub-human life to the stature and the living conditions of men, to whom justice is due and to whom justice is rendered.

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