



"SING ME A SONG ABOUT YOUR TRANSFER!"

The Church: 1971 Close Schools? Then What?

By Fr. Andrew Greeley



The National Association of Laymen is a splinter group of liberal Catholics. Recently, the NAL has entered a campaign against state aid to Catholic schools, a campaign well calculated to get the NAL much publicity from the traditional enemies of Catholic schools.

But far more sophisticated than the NAL is a recent article by John Deedy, which concedes that there will probably be state aid and that this will be a tragedy for the Church. Deedy's argument reaches a level of obscurity seldom matched by anyone in the Catholic school controversy.

"For the evidence mounts that the parochial school may ultimately do to Catholic life in America what secularism, materialism and all secular devils combined could never do: sink the parish financially (large influxes of public funds notwithstanding), fracture further what is left of the cohesion and harmony of the Catholic community, and in the end subvert the fragile chances for renewal and reform of the American Catholic Church. (John Deedy, "Should Catholic Schools Survive?", The New Republic, March 13, 1971.)

Deedy offers no real evidence for any of this, other than to describe a controversy which "polarized" his parish. But controversies have been going on about Catholic schools for a century. Deedy is the first to apply the magic word "polarize" and to suggest that since Catholic schools are controversial they ought to be closed.

It's a peculiar kind of logic: 75 per cent of the American Catholic population is in favor of parochial schools (as demonstrated by more than ten studies over the past two decades), but because 25 per cent is not in favor of them, the schools must be closed lest they "polarize" parishes.

I wonder if Deedy really thinks there would not be conflict in the emerging democratic structure of the American parish if the school issue was eliminated. Our separated brothers manage to have endless controversies in their parish councils without having to fall back on the school issue.

We are also told that,

"No one knows what the results would be if the priorities given the parochial school were given the parish

and to concerns which should be characteristic of parish life. Urban attitudes in many areas might conceivably be different if Catholic parishes interested themselves as much in interracial justice as they do in parochial schools. Perhaps there could be a qualitatively different Catholic orientation toward peace, toward poverty, toward a number of neglected concerns."

Again, one must point out that our separated brothers, who lack parochial schools, have not produced people more enlightened on interracial justice than we have. On the contrary, there is considerable evidence that Catholic education has a strong positive impact on racial attitudes. We must, if Deedy is to be believed, close down what we have with the pious hope that something better might come along.

The upper middle-class schools can survive if the people in such parishes want the schools badly enough. The critical financial problem is the inner city schools, which are subsidized by the Church and which provide an extremely important and highly valued educational alternative for those black parents who want something more than the custodial care public education often provides.

The Church should subsidize such schools, but the costs of doing so without some sort of state aid are fantastically high. Does Deedy think these schools should be closed too? And if he is talking about Catholic education, why does he not mention the service to the whole society performed by the inner city schools?

I am weary of Catholic liberals who ignore or minimize the generosity and dedication of the priests and nuns who keep these schools open at the cost of great sacrifice and heartbreak. I am equally tired of those who use the schools as a scapegoat for everything that is wrong with the Church.

Finally, I am tired of those whose conviction about their own self-righteousness makes them oblivious to the most elementary facts. If the American Church has troubles — and it does — the schools are hardly to blame. But what about those Catholic intellectuals who are willing to abandon everything of their own tradition without bothering to specify an alternative?

Last November I bought 1,728 little Bible storybooks, called the Arch Books, and wrote of the Arch Books, and in the Dec. 2, *Courier Journal*, in an article entitled "Scripture for Sesame Street," I wrote of this "good series of children's Bible stories." It has 42 shiny, colorful covers enfolding 30 pages of good print and charming pictures. The series was written for children of Sesame Street age, three years to eight. For all my sixtyish years I found myself enjoying them too.

Father Kress asked: "Are you going to give all those away?" "Oh, no. First, I can't afford it. Second, people appreciate books better if they pay for them. I want to introduce them to grass roots people, with the hope that enthusiasm for the books will spread. It's like a farmer sowing seed. This is the Word of God. The pictures, text, rhythm and rhyme: all help to instill the Bible's teachings in the minds of children."

In early December I stopped at Macedon to visit Father McFarland. He was out but I had a nice chat with the housekeeper, Mrs. Helen Brown of Spencerport. On leaving I presented her with five books for her grandchildren.

The following week Father McFarland wrote: "Will you drop off some children's Bible books? They will be good for our CCD library." He enclosed a check for \$20.00.

Clifton Springs. Father John Roach is a zealous catechist. He admired the books and said:

In a recent *Courier Journal* article, Father Andrew Greeley severely criticized the nine Detroit sisters who dramatically quit teaching in a Catholic school. They quit because they thought some recent decisions of their parish council were racist in nature and contrary to the Christian principles they were teaching.

Father Greeley felt the sisters' action was self-righteous. He warns that they should not judge lest they themselves be judged, and applies to the situation Christ's words: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

A response must be made — for Father Greeley is not attacking the Detroit sisters; he's attacking the whole concept of Christian activism.

Christian activists are often accused of judging others. They try not to. They try instead to judge the actions and inactions of groups. And after all, isn't that what Christianity is all about? Isn't it our role to try to apply the teachings of Christ to the contemporary scene and in instances where there is a conflict to speak out? Is it not our responsibility to Christianize our community?

Father Greeley suggests that the most effective way to Christianize is to work within the system and somehow change will come about because of our patience and influence. Unfortunately, all too often, our patience becomes complacency and our influence, while perhaps generating activity, doesn't really create a basic change. It simply maintains the

On The Right Side

The Word -- For Sesame St.

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



"Will you send me a complete set of 42?" I did. He hasn't paid for them yet, but his credit is good.

Stopped in Geneva and gave half a dozen to a good friend, Sister Paschal, SSJ, the principal of St. Francis DeSales School. She sent a thank you note, and I have been wondering since if from her strategic principalship, she has advertised the books to her fellow Sisters of St. Joseph. Imagine the breadth of the spread of the Word if so great a Community caught the enthusiasm for the Arch Books.

Before Christmas I gave a load to my secretary, Sister Teresita. "Will you act as agent to the 20 Sisters in the hospital? Some may want little books for Christmas gifts. Do not sell any single books. Make a package deal, three for a dollar. And that's a bargain." Many Sisters' nephews and nieces are now enjoying Bible stories as a result.

The Legion of Mary at St. Ann's in Hornell takes care of the church pamphlet rack. It is a large parish, so it was no surprise to me that 350 Arch Books were bought before Christmas—and are still selling strong.

On Sunday night, Jan. 17, the Auburn Curia of the Legion of Mary held its annual get-together in Geneva. The Curia embraces Auburn, Clyde, Geneva, Victor and Newark. President Virginia Wallace, R.N. invited me to come. So I came, lugging a suitcase of the books. There were some 70 Legionnaires

there, including six priest-spiritual directors. I gave one book to each person. Seventy more seeds were planted.

Now at the end of March, nearly 1,700 books are nourishing the souls of children and adults. Individuals wrote to me for books: for example, a CCD teacher from Wayland, a grandmother in Romulus, Rexville Rosary Society sold 80. I asked the clerks at Trant's religious goods store in Rochester: "Did you have many calls for the Arch Books?" They replied: "Around Christmas there was a heavy demand. And people still come for them."

At Notre Dame Retreat House I picked up a May issue of the *Catholic Digest*. It announced that six million Arch Books were sold in five years. Since last May another million have been sold.

St. Paul wrote: "Scripture says 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.'... But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? . . . Scripture says: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the gospel.'"

Praise the Lord for all the feet and hearts that bring the Good News to little children. Arch Books can be bought at book stores, from some CCD Schools of Religion and Catholic Schools, from many church book racks. And if these fail, write to me at St. James Mercy Hospital, Hornell 1484. I just put in a reorder from Nolan's Religious Shop in Auburn.

RACL Viewpoints

Activists Defended

By Robert Fien

status quo under a different form.

Look at the Church throughout the United States. We have countless hundreds of parish councils, and there is considerable more involvement in parish life than ever before. And yet, except for some notable exceptions, our parishes are not Christianizing their community. For all our activity we have, for the most part, succeeded in simply shifting the responsibility for building maintenance, school, use of the parish hall, etc. Nothing has really changed.

This dilemma exists because most of us find it very difficult to look at a situation as it really is and to respond as Christ would have us. That's why we desperately need the overt actions of the so-called "radicals" to force us to face

reality and to ask the question — "as Christians what are we going to do about it?"

Martin Luther King's radical activities forced us to face clearly the reality of our Black brothers' world. Father Dan Berrigan and Father Philip Berrigan are jarring us into taking a hard look at the killing in Southeast Asia. The radical action by the Detroit sisters should force us to look at our own parish. Is our parish really reflecting Jesus Christ internally and within our community? If not, what are we going to do about it?

Our renewal requires the insight and the courage of the Christian activists — the Kings, the Berrigans, the Detroit sisters and more. Some will call them self-righteous. Others will call them Christian Witnesses.

Poem In Tribute

(Msgr. Edward Ball died March 29, 1971)

There was a great priest named Msgr. Ball.
He loved everyone and all.
He did not hate any one race,
And always had a smile upon his face.

He lived to be seventy five,
And never gave us any jive.
He always helped us keep up the school.
I never saw him lose his cool.

He was always as happy as a flower;
And always obeyed the Lord's power.
We will miss Msgr. Ball.
He was loved by everyone and all.

—Kevin Lynch (pupil at St. Francis Grammar School, Geneva)