FR. ANDREW GREELEY

The Church 1971

I must say that I am surprised at one very frequent reaction to my suggestion that the only way out of the present structural crisis in the Church is the nomination of bishops by the priests and eventually the people of the diocese for which they are to be the witnesses to the rest of the Church.

I am told that such a return to ancient practices would introduce "politics" into the Church and corrupt the selection of bishops.

First of all, I don't happen to think politics is corrupt behavior. It is the ancient and honorable art of human government. Furthermore our separated brothers manage to select their leadership without any more controversy or "polarization" than that which presently affects us and probably a good deal less.

As one Anglican priest remarked to me — not without appreciation of the irony of dramatic historical change implicit in his statement—"when our two communions are united again I think we may be able to teach some respect for the necessity of Church structure."

However, I wonder how my critics think bishops are currently selected if it is not by a political process? Do they think the Holy Spirit writes the name of the next bishop of Cahokia on a parchment paper with gold ink in a sealed room in the Vatican? The competition for dioceses is just as intense, the campaigns just as well thought out, the party lines just as clearly drawn as in any political process. The difference behind popular nomination and the present process is merely that in the former more people would be involved and the issue would be worked out in the light of day rather than in secrecy.

The second difference is extremely important. Secret politics is utterly demoralizing to those who are the victims of it — as the recent events in the American Republic have shown. Clergy and well informed laity have a vast folklore which in many cases is shockingly scandalous. I will not repeat any of these stories, not for fear of weakening anyone's faith, but because I have no way of knowing whether they are true — though like most of my colleagues I incline to believe the worst.

The point is that when a political process goes on in secret everyone is inclined to believe the worst — even if it turns out not to be true.

But surely no one thinks that it is an accident that so many American bishops in the last quarter century happened to be from Cleveland or New York. This is not to criticize the men who have come from either of these cities — and they include in their number some of the best bishops in the country — but to suggest that a process might have been at work not unlike that which we in Chicago call "slate making," a process in which one man has an extraordinary amount of influence.

I am not against slate making — at least not in principle. But slate making, either civil or ecclesiastical, is a political mechanism and politics is likely to be both more effective and less corrupt when it goes on in public and not in private. The danger of secret politics is not so much that they are always corrupt or even that they are more easily corruptible; it is that everyone suspects that they are corrupt and loses confidence in the political process.

This is what has happened in the American Church. A large proportion of the clergy and the well educated laity have lost confidence in the politics by which bishops are selected. More than seven out of ten priests in the country want a change.

Eventually the pressures for such a change will be irresistible; the real question is how much conflict the Church will have to experience before it does come.

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St. Lawrence To Hold Auction

St. Lawrence Church will hold its second annual auction on Sept. 11, at 11 a.m., at 1000 North Greece Rd. Melvin Martin will be the auctioneer.

Items wanted are: books, toys, clothing, tools, furniture, dishes, lamps, or anything saleable.

All donations are tax deductible. For pickup call Mrs. James Curtis at (716) 225-0290 or Mrs. Peter Grant at (716) 225-3987.

Donations may be delivered to 106 Mason Ave.

PENTECOSTALS MEET

Father David McKeon will address the persons interested in the Charismatic Renewal (Pentecostalism) Sunday, Sept. 12, at 7 p.m. at St. John the Evangelist, Humboldt St.

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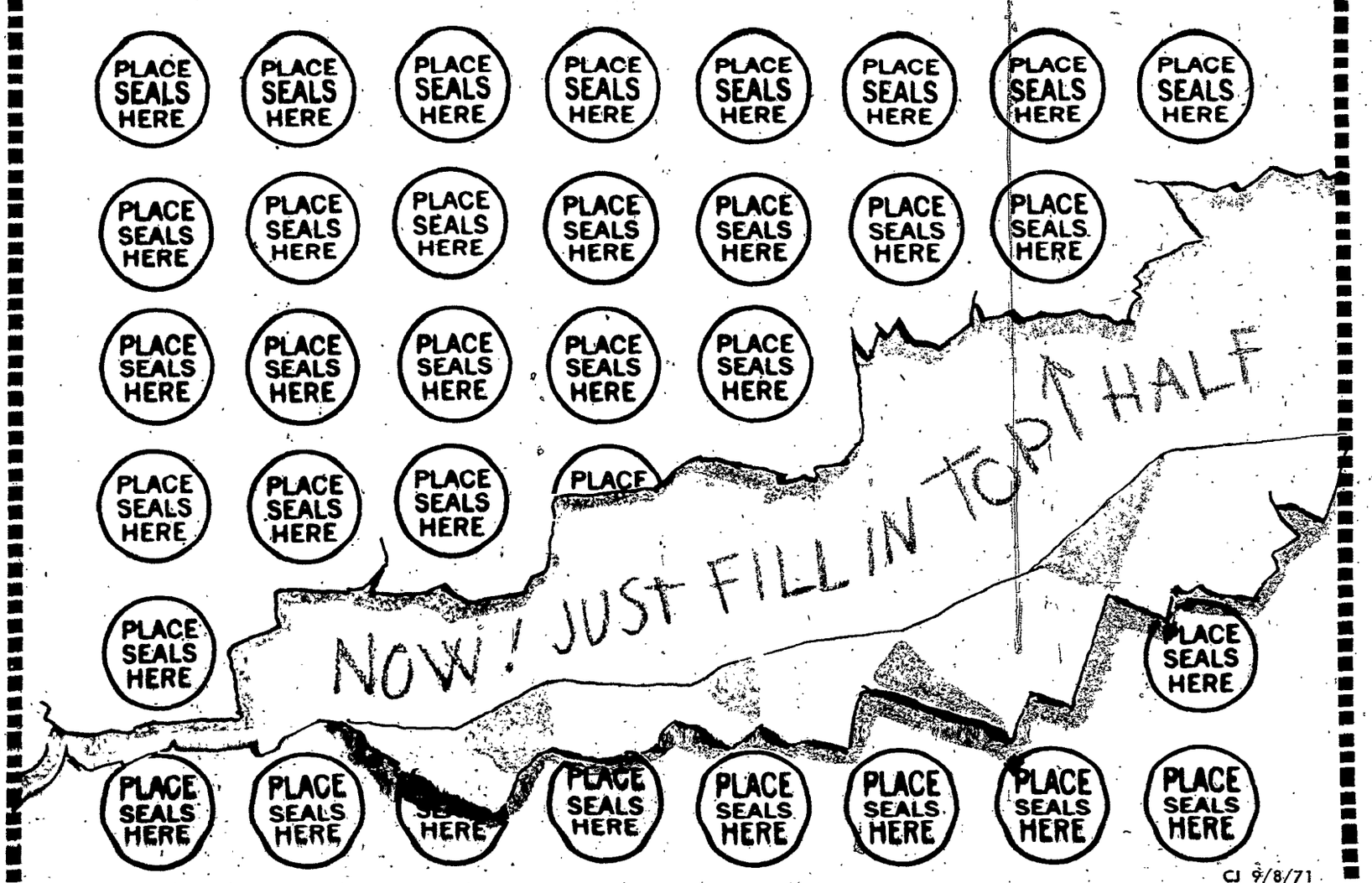
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