

FR. HENRY ATWELL

## Toward Tomorrow



The Chinese, I understand, will observe 1972 as the "Year of the Rat." It's not expected to be one of the best of years.

Catholics may observe 1972 as the "Year of the Dead Dodo" — that is, if the eminent Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen is correct.

He said recently that the Church is dead because, in his words, "The Church has lost Christ." As evidence, he cited the fact that nuns have shortened their skirts.

I think it's a bit pretentious, however, even for so lofty a prelate as he to speak for the whole, worldwide, 500 million member Catholic Church. He may indeed be competent to speak about his fellow bishops but I'd be reluctant to admit that even they have "lost Christ" completely.

More and more bishops, like more and more priests, I'm convinced, are aware that they themselves are not the whole Church, nor even the most important group in the Church. The old, silly pretensions that the clergy, especially bishops, are God-appointed generals to run the Church, and the lay people are to be spoon-fed and hand-led like stupid blind sheep — those notions happily died in Rome at the Vatican Council ten years ago.

I am more and more convinced that the lay people in the pews, like the parishioners in St. Agnes Church, Avon, have more faith and more common sense than all the mitred heads and collared necks in the world combined — and it's a wise clergyman who recognizes that.

In seminary days, we were taught that the Church has two parts, the "ecclesia docens — the church teaching" and the "ecclesia discens — the church taught," and we slipped into the notion that the clergy were the teachers and the lay people were forever just learners. If anything, it's quite the other way round!

And that is why I gladly differ with the esteemed prelate who once headed our diocese.

I have high hopes for 1972 and for every year to come.

I don't think the Church is either dead or dying — and certainly the "gates of hell" have not prevailed simply because nuns slipped a few inches from their hemlines.

The Church, thank God, is people — all of them, all kinds of them — and I have an abiding confidence in people.

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

## On The Right Side



Q. What do you think of Fr. Atwell's return to the Courier?

A. I am curious about the significance of the title of his column: "Toward Tomorrow." It reminds me of an article I read about the seeress, Jean Dixon, written before the Vatican II Council. She looked into the future and prophesied that the Catholic Church would have three popes. At the time I shrugged my shoulders — this was before the Council — and thought: "Sister Jean Dixon is reported to be a devout Catholic, attending daily Mass, loving the Church. I suppose one can be devout and still be theologically awry." However, events evolving from Vatican II demonstrated that there have sprung up not just three popes — Pope Paul plus the prophesied other two — but a multitude of non-papal popes, proclaiming their own infallibility as they reject the infallibility of Christ's Vicar.

Q. What a strange approach!

A. Strange? Do you mean it is strange to equate the contradictory infallibilities of certain elite modern theologians with the genuine infallibility which inheres in the office of Christ's Vicar? Yes. That is strange. If you mean my thought that Jean Dixon, whose Sibylline double-talk anticipated a three-pope trinity as a symbol of infallibility extended to an elitist group, I think she may have prophesied symbolically and rather well.

Q. Don't you exaggerate?

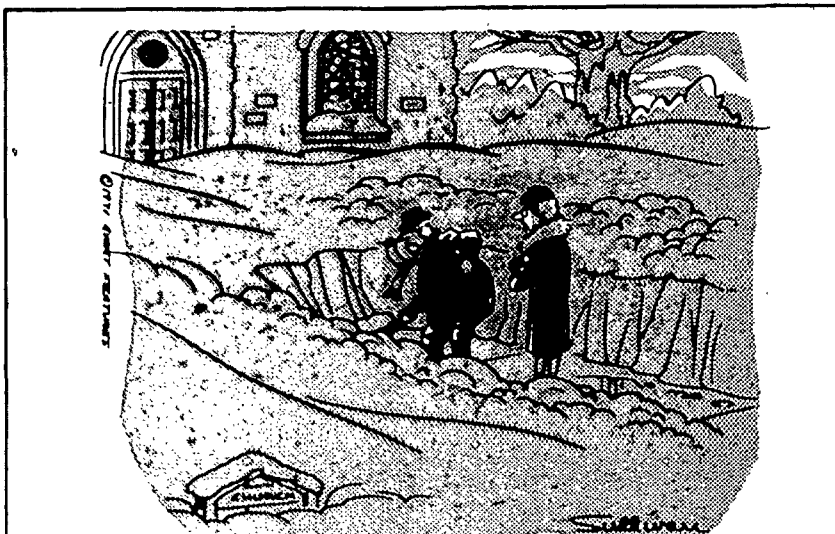
A. No. I don't think so. Have you read *Decline and Fall of Radical Catholicism* by Prof. James Hitchcock? (\$6.50 Herder and Herder.) It is a sad book; an illuminating book; and in a way, a hopeful book. Do get a copy. Catholic vandals have worked havoc in the Church for a decade. Now they dissipate their strength by leaving the Church, or the movement. When the Vandals sacked Rome in 455, it took decades to rebuild the city. Such is the fate of the Church now: undermined loyalties and love and understanding of the Church will not be rebuilt quickly. The elitists are our 20th century Vandals.

Q. What do you mean?

A. By an elite I mean a small, closely knit group who considered their group superior to the people and to their simple faith; to the Holy Father and his traditional faith; and held in a kind of contempt the lack of comprehension of those who did not agree with them. The former Editor of the NCR, Robert Hoyt, wrote: "It is simply true that the religious texts of today are vastly different from those of yesteryear, that progressivist views dominate most Catholic religious and theological training, that in consequence the Catholicism of tomorrow will be something new on the earth. There is a liberal conspiracy, in the sense John Courtney Murray used the word of 'breathing together'. Liberal theologians dominate the public prints, the catechetical training centers, the publishing houses, the professional association, much of the Catholic bureaucracy. . . I would not pretend that the situation now obtaining is the consequence of an intellectual victory. . . Indoctrination is anathema to liberals on principle; but there are ways and ways of indoctrinating." (*Decline and Fall*: p. 58) Editor Hoyt, a truly honest radical, was fired from NCR this past year.

Q. Do you think Fr. Atwell a vandal and a radical?

A. He is no vandal. He has had radical tendencies even as all of us have the consequences of original sin. However, he writes in such a style that he may well be misread by many: conservatives will read what he doesn't quite mean; liberals will read what he doesn't quite mean. He is a bit of an intellectual and theological pixy — and as such will be read with interest and puzzlement; which will delight his soul. He loves the Church, the Holy See, the Blessed Sacrament; and he not only says the rosary personally but instructs converts to do the same thing on their third lesson. This surely indicates a profound orthodoxy and devotion which is to be remembered as readers ponder over his ideas.



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