

FR. HENRY ATWELL

Toward Tomorrow



An old, quite corny, waltz-time hymn, long popular with Protestants, says, "There's a wideness in God's mercy."

Protestants, like Catholics, too often try to nail up fences to narrow down that mercy.

The two million member "Church of Christ" recently bounced out of its membership singer Pat Boone because he violated one of his denomination's regulations — he spoke in tongues, a sacred gibberish which has characterized extra-enthusiastic Christians since the days of the apostles.

Catholics have also played the bouncing out game for a long time. They even had a special agency to do it — it was called the Inquisition, and 'tho the name's been changed, you can still get drummed out of the holy corps if you don't toe the mark.

Chief victims of this penalty called excommunication are usually those people who are already victims of overwhelmingly anguished situations. People who need evidence of the "wideness in God's mercy" rather than in the narrowness of a denomination's regulations — people who are trying to make a happy home after a previous marriage collapsed in divorce, or a woman who thought

an abortion was the only escape from humiliation, or a priest or nun who prefers to be honest and human when an ecclesiastical bureaucracy dawdles months on a decision it could settle in minutes.

I'm no where near competent to decide whether rules made on a mountaintop for nomads wandering in the Sinai desert four thousand years ago are still God-willed for today's urban, mobile, harried people, but I do know that I heartily agree with good Pope John when he told the world's Catholic bishops at the opening of the Vatican Council ten years ago that the Church today should "make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity" and that he wanted the worldwide Catholic Church "to show itself to be the loving mother of all, benign, patient, full of mercy and goodness."

This new year of 1972 will mark the 10th anniversary of the start of the Vatican Council. I can think of no better way to mark that anniversary, and to honor the memory of the saint who had such hopes for it, the lovable Pope John, than to proclaim over and over that there really is "a wideness in God's mercy" and it can be found in rectories, chantries and maybe even in the Vatican.

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

On The Right Side



Christmas mail brought a kind of overall sense of somberness from friends scattered in many places. There is a sense of souls hanging on in the midst of a storm.

To all I recommend *The Rise and Fall of Radical Catholicism* by Prof. James Hitchcock. (\$6.50; Herder and Herder.) It is a somber book, but it reveals the background of the troubled Catholic Faithful. Do get it. Read it. Share it. And take courage!

From a friend, with whom I lived at Lackland AF Base: He is a convert to the Church; first generation Chinese American; an engineer by profession; the father of three lively children. They live in Oklahoma, and visited me this past summer. He had described to me his parish, which some would call progressive; others, swinging; and I, tortured:

"We really enjoyed our visit with you. Have been busy with our Boy Scout activities and other activities. As you probably know, we now have a new Bishop. Also our former pastor has resigned to consider marriage. This really caused some eyebrow-raising here. Our new pastor was formerly a missionary at Guatemala. He has given some stability to our parish. Hope he can survive the changes."

From a high school teacher who has always regarded me well, but who has not always regarded my ideas well:

"You are still one of our favorite priests. Other favorites — Father Kress, Father Kanka — and Father Curtin, Father Merklinger, Father Tuite — Good company! Lately I agree with your column — every other week!" (Well, that's progress. He used to agree every other month.)

From an AF friend now living in Florida, to whom I had written: "A patient with a sense of humor as well as a sense of reality said to me, as she lay in the Coronary Care Unit: 'I said to the doctor: 'From 45 on it's just maintenance and repair!'"

"How true, 'Over 45 maintenance and repairs.' Clary (his brother) is doing better from a long sickness. Now has an ear infection and I've

been home a couple of weeks. But, back to work Monday. Flew up to Boston for Joe Solomont's 4th son's Bar Mitzvah on Thanksgiving Day. He has a wonderful family."

From a Brother at Mt. Saviour, Elmira, whom I had invited to spend a day with me at Hornell:

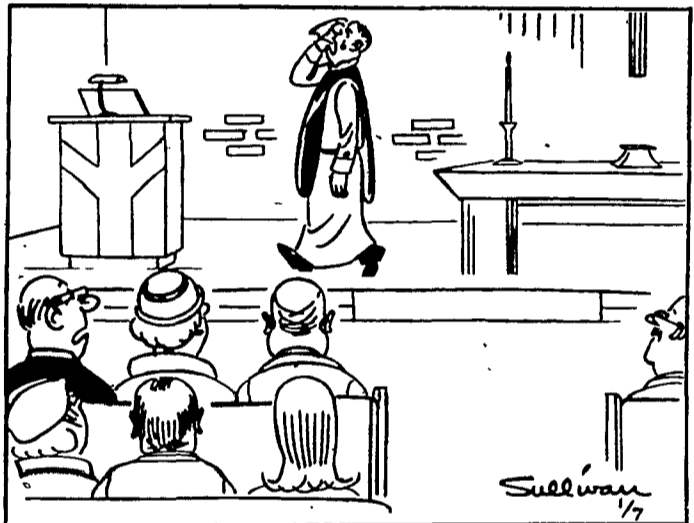
"In response to your suggestion, I'll make that resolution; but it might be easier to meet you in Jerusalem than to meet you in Hornell." (Brother would be a wonderful addition to the *Courier Journal* sponsored trip to Rome and the Holy Land. Maybe!)

From one of the finest women I have ever known. An outstanding wife and mother; a great Church worker; an intelligent and charitable woman from whose twelve children I had hoped to see priests and Sisters come. Now, she lives with her husband and their unmarried children in California, in that sad disquietude which is the bitter gift of radical Catholicism:

"We are looking forward to hearing from you — some words of wisdom and reassurance. The confusion continues to grow and people around me seem to have less faith in the Church. (She means her children, whom I remember as the salt of the earth.) I have been studying the Bible and find much comfort and joy and challenge there — but even the Bible has been losing credibility with some people who take it as myth. It leaves no basis for discussion other than psychological or humanistic. Help! I feel confident of where I am going, but the young people bring up impossible arguments. God bless your work and inspiration."

I wish it weren't so expensive. I have given five copies away and have kept one for myself. But considering the grief which this matron has suffered from those who have undermined the faith and confidence of her children, I will send her my last copy of *Decline and Fall of Radical Catholicism*. Maybe you have a friend in need of explanation of how the Church has suffered from those who claimed to be purifying Her, and instead have Crucified Her in Her members.)

Beyond the Stained Glass



"I THINK WE'RE GOING TO GET THE ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT!"

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