

FR. HENRY ATWELL

## Toward Tomorrow



One obvious fact about contemporary Catholic life is that more people are going to Communion more often but fewer and fewer people are going to Confession, and those who do go are going less frequently.

Bishop Hogan, in his letter to the people of the diocese at the beginning of Lent, asked that we do some serious thinking about our need for Confession — but he also indicated that in the future there will probably be authorization for communal Penance services without the requirement for individual Confession.

The pendulum of church customs swings back and forth, sometimes at a centuries-long pace, sometimes several times within a lifetime.

I think the Bishop senses that the penance pendulum is swinging back toward the way the very earliest Christians sought forgiveness from God and reconciliation with the Church.

Back in those ancient times, to become a Christian meant you might quite literally have to put your head on the executioner's block or get yourself thrown to hungry lions. Most people gave considerable thought to their conversion with hazards like that. Some took the step and then backed off when martyrdom actually faced them. Other Christians weren't quite ready to let these people back in simply for their saying three Hail Mary's. Adultery and murder were also considered serious enough, like apostasy, to require public, perhaps life-long penance.

When the persecution era ended and the hazards to conversion weren't any longer so frightening, floods of people came flocking to the faith.

The Irish monks soon noticed that just because people weren't in the habit of adultery, murder or apostasy, they still were far from being saints. They said that for lesser sins, the kind most of us still hanker for, there is need for some kind of penance, if not public or life-long, then at least private and less rigorous. From that grew the quite recent cus-

tom of frequent Confession.

A Latin maxim says, "In medio stat virtus — Virtue is mid-way between the extremes." And that's probably the healthiest attitude to have about Confession and communal Penance services.

Some people find individual Confession a source of great spiritual comfort and strength and they should be afforded the opportunity for this just as frequently as ever before.

Other people, for various reasons, have found Confession a very distasteful experience — sometimes because a priest is curt or obtuse — and much prefer a communal service where they need not worry about "how to say it" or whether they've tabulated their sins correctly. These people have a comparable right to be afforded an opportunity to seek God's mercy and reconciliation this way, just as others prefer the individual approach.

Any rigorist will jump in at this point and state emphatically that Jesus and his Church require individual confession of all mortal sins by name and number. The Church indeed demands this. But I'm in no position, and neither is the rigorist, to accuse those struggling, confused, badgered people as being in mortal sin just because they share the same weakened nature both the rigorist and I share.

Bishop Hogan spoke of our "baptismal orientation toward God."

I think it's high time we had a bit more confidence in God's launching power, rather than rush to push the panic button when all we need is a bit of a mid-course correction, an adjustment any reasonable and sincere person can make with a bit of quiet consideration.

The Christian life, after all, is meant to be a life of light and joy, of sharing and forgiving, of "passover" from the slavery of guilt to the freedom of new beginnings. Our Bishop has reminded us of this fact. I hope most of us listen to him.

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

## On The Right Side



Last week this column discussed an interview of a religious education priest by a New York diocesan communications interviewer. His offbeat remarks contained many faults. Included are: that Vatican II introduced parental responsibility in religious education; a snide conclusion about the religious knowledge of the present older generation from the influence of the Catechism; an inaccurate description of the Church, ascribing the inaccuracy to Vatican II. Today we continue a few more of the aberrations from the mind of the Fr. Ed. Specialist.

Fr. Interrogator: "What do you think is bothering people?"

Fr. Ed. SPECIALIST: (cheerfully) Church's undergoing change is threatening to people who had the question and answer method. I must be a realist. We are in a period of great change."

Comment: We certainly are in a period of great change, and I think it is hardly the result of the Catechism on people's minds and attitudes. I recommend a dreadful book, "Future Shock" by Alvin Toffler. (Bantam Book: paperback \$1.95) It is a kind of sociological Orwell's "1984", and indicates that threats to people's security are hardly from the Catechism. However, along with many other pressures, irrationality in religious instruction, of course, is a cause for uneasiness. A kind of anti-intellectualism is being foisted on normal, intelligent Catholics!

It is a kind of resurrection of Siger de Brabant. Who was Siger? He was an influential philosopher in the 13th century, a contemporary of St. Thomas Aquinas. He proposed a theory that a proposition could be true in philosophy and the opposite equally true in theology. A parallel in science would be this. If science taught the world is round, and theology taught the world is square, they would both be equally true!

St. Thomas exploded at this blasphemy and irrationality. Chesterton wrote: "In the abyss of anarchy opened by Siger's sophistry of the

Double Mind of Man, he (Thomas) had seen the possibility of the perishing of all idea of religion, and even of all ideal of truth . . . He came back with a sort of horror of that outer world, in which there blew such wild winds of doctrine, and a longing for the inner world which any Catholic can share, and in which the saint is not cut off from simple men. He resumed routine of religion, and for some time said nothing to anybody." (St. Thomas Aquinas — The Dumb Ox — Chesterton, p. 171)

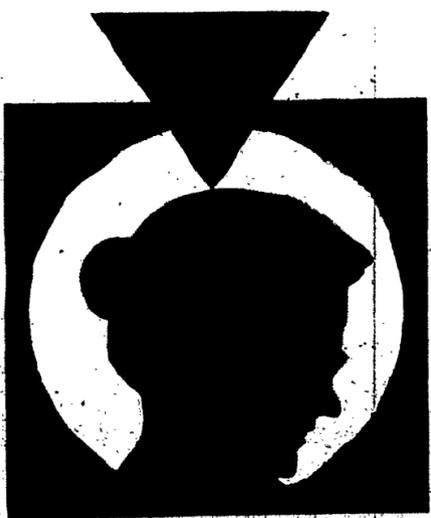
Fr. Interrogator: "But doesn't this cause confusion among the People?"

Fr. Ed. SPECIALIST: (cheerfully) "Oh, confusion is a sign of life!"

Comment: This well manifests Fr. Ed. Specialist's confused mind. Many people are confused, mentally disoriented by some emotional problem, or by drugs or booze or pain or exhaustion, or extreme loss of sleep. They are alive — but they do not function rationally. Vatican II says, unconfusedly: "Bishops are preachers of the faith . . . They are authentic teachers . . . who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice. By the light of the Holy Spirit, they make that faith clear by bringing forth from the treasury of revelation new things and old, making faith bear fruit and vigilantly warning off any error which threatens the flock. (Const. on the Church, N. 25) . . ."

The puzzle to me is that so many modern Siger de Brabants, and modern Renans, Loisy's and Rousseaus have influential positions in our American Religious Education Bureau. A hopeful sign comes from the bishops of Australia who have given the My Way to God series, which might be a helpful adjunct to the present catechetical material for children. It is published in the States by Our Sunday Visitor Press, Huntington, Ind. 46750, and has gotten favorable reviews from concerned religion teachers. And to the troubled laity, remember: "When you come to the end of the rope, tie a knot and hang on." Christ is with us always.

# Spotlighting the Canandaigua area PAT BOLAND



Pat Boland, a free-lance writer, is joining the Courier-Journal staff to cover the Canandaigua area.

Pat has had work published in several national magazines and newspapers and what makes this even more noteworthy is that she is the mother of six children.

And that's not all. She does part-time work at the Ontario County Historical Museum, and has taught school in several diocesan schools. A native of Rochester, she attends St. Mary's in Canandaigua. She and her husband Gerald have lived in Canandaigua for 11 years.

If you have news of the Canandaigua area, give her a call.

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