

FR. HENRY ATWELL

Toward Tomorrow



Church and State, we've often been told, are to be separate in the United States. Politicians seeking office, not excluding even President Nixon, bridge that separation very deftly.

An article in a recent issue of The Wall Street Journal describes how Mr. Nixon is skillfully wooing Catholic ethnics, especially Poles, Italians, Greeks and Slavs.

His stop-over at Kiev in the Ukraine and then at Warsaw in Poland were an obvious part of his strategy.

The article quotes Monsignor Geno C. Baroni as saying, "The vote of the traditional Democrat working-class urban Catholic is up for grabs." Baroni should know, says the Journal, because he is director of the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs. He showed the Journal's reporter a map of the nation and traced a quadrangle from St. Paul to St. Louis, over to Baltimore and up to Boston. Within that area live more than 60% of the nation's 50 million Catholics, particularly concentrated in New York, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia and Cleveland.

How these Catholics will vote this autumn can swing the election decisively for or against Mr. Nixon.

"If 1968 was the year of the Southern strategy for Richard Nixon," says the Journal, "signs are emerging that 1972 is the year of the Catholic strategy — with a huge presidential pitch to the urban Catholic worker in the making."

President Nixon has "eagerly embraced" this Catholic strategy, the Journal states and lists as evidence:

• The President jetted to Philadelphia to tell a cheering crowd of nuns, priests and other Catholic educators that he is "irrevocably committed" to preserve parochial schools because, he said, they provide "spiritual values" and "a moral code" not taught in public schools. He then invited Philadelphia's Cardinal John Krol, who is Polish, to dinner aboard the presidential yacht.

• The President wrote a highly publicized letter to New York's Cardinal Terence Cooke to support the church-led drive against abortion, using the church's own terminology about "the right to life of literally hundreds of thousands of unborn children." The President knowingly undercut his own Republican comrade Governor Nelson Rockefeller who favored the abortion law.

• The President rejected his own Population Commission's recommendation which favored abortion and contraceptive services for minors. The President scorned the suggestions saying they "would do nothing to preserve or strengthen close family relationships," a theme often heard from Catholic pulpits.

The Journal expects the tempo of such Catholic-slanted strategy to increase as the election nears — a strategy which is aimed at "Northern Catholics and Southern Protestants."

Senator Barry Goldwater once remarked, "You have to go hunting where the ducks are."

President Nixon knows there are a lot of Catholic ducks in the United States. And the President's aim has been shrewdly accurate so far.

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

On The Right Side



The day I send my hair shirt to the laundry I read America as a substitute. That Jesuit weekly is a mixture of solid information and instruction and a lot of irritating non sequiturs. The May 13 issue carried a splendid article by Cardinal Suenens, a reflection on many things, especially on the harm done by his book, The Nun in the World. He began his reflections by commenting that people who quoted his book either did not read the book; or just read a review; or that "many who read my book did so to find the lines that they wanted to read." (p. 503)

As we who have loved the Sisters and their work watch the erratic and misfortunate direction of many religious sisterhoods ponder over the dreadful changes, we can sympathize with the regrets of the Cardinal. He reflects:

"We had to build a spirituality for active religious and my book was only consecrated to active religious . . . I spoke in behalf of freedom: to obtain freedom from and to obtain freedom for. Now freedom for, in my view, really has two purposes. The first is to bring Christ to the world through the apostolate . . . I wanted to stress the need always to have in mind that it is Christ that we are to bring to others through apostolic means."

He continues: "Although this has been much misunderstood, my point was not that Sisters should leave schools or give up nursing. Very often critics accuse the book of advocating that. I explicitly said the opposite . . . I only stressed that in the schools, and in the hospitals and so on, one should look for priorities. Just look at your timetable, see to what you are consecrating your time."

And quite contrary to what the book intended, we have seen capable Sisters abandoning works for which they have a special competence and training to experiment in a more "exciting and relevant work". The result has been to weaken the very services which were instruments to the apostolate. The most obvious is the teaching vocation.

When Columban Father Aeden McGrath was in Hornell, I was his host at St. Anne's while the pastor, Father MacNamara was occupied administering the eighth sacrament, viz. a parish meeting.

I asked him: "what of Cardinal Suenens? We read disturbing things about him in the Catholic press as well as the secular."

His muscles about the jaw tightened with indignation, and he said, "I know Cardinal Suenens very well; and he is my friend. Indeed he asked my help and opinion regarding apostolic works on several occasions. The Cardinal is a great, generous man, totally loyal to the Church and to the Holy See. But he has gotten diabolical treatment from the American Press."

A few days ago I spoke of the article in America to a learned male religious, and spoke of the points mentioned above. He said tartly: "It seems to me that he is rather late to be explaining it now." This may be very true, but as we watch the departure from an inherited, tested religious apostolate, we may very well be looking forward to new religious Communities to take over. It may be prophetic that the pencil drawing of a nun used for the Suenens "reflection" is that of the founder of a new Order, the famous Mother Teresa of India.

Those who have read Malcolm Muggeridge's Something Beautiful for God may recall this passage: "Her home, she said, had been an exceptionally happy one. So, when her vocation came to her as a schoolgirl, the only impediment was precisely this loving, happy home which she did not wish to leave. Of course the vocation won, and forever. She gave herself to Christ, and through him to her neighbor. This was the end of her biography and the beginning of her life: in abolishing herself she found herself, by virtue of that unique Christian transformation, manifested in the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, whereby we die in order to live." It seems quite likely that this is what Cardinal Suenens really said.

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Father Cuddy is Chaplain of St. James Mercy Hospital and author of the Weekly Courier-Journal Column ON THE RIGHT SIDE.



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