

FR. HENRY ATWELL

Toward Tomorrow



I constantly marvel at what people will put up with and what they don't want to put up with.

On these past few sultry Sundays, many people commented on their way into Mass, "Make it short, Father." And I'm sure most priests gladly cooperated.

And in the good old days when many people went to Confession they soon discovered and lined up for the priest who gave few if any comments and "a light penance."

Yet these same people will burn themselves lobster red to see a few famous golfers bash a wee ball 65 or 70 times or, in a chilling autumn downpour, sit for two hours to watch mud-caked muscle men shove each other back and forth on a soggy gridiron.

If any priest ever gave the worst of sinners a penance such as sitting in the broiling sun or in a bone-cold rainstorm, I'd imagine even the Bishop would scold him.

Commonweal magazine recently reported a human behavior phenomenon in England this summer.

Thousands of people are daily lining up at the British Museum to inch along in a queue so they can eventually have a glimpse of an exhibition of the treasures of Tutankhamun.

Brian Wicker, author of the Commonweal article, says a friend of his arrived at the Museum one morning at 9:30 a.m. but didn't actually get into the exhibit until 4:30 p.m. and then had only 45 minutes time to view it.

Queue-life included purchasing refreshments at a stand painted blue and gold — the colors of the famous pharaoh's death mask, and if after a few hours in line one must pay heed to the call of nature then one has to stand in another, subsidiary queue of rather substantial length and then, after doing one's duty, catching up to one's place saved by a friend in the original queue.

After arriving within the Museum itself, the visitor is told it will now be only about three hours wait to get into the exhibit.

Then at last, after six or seven hours in the queue, one gets into the always crowded exhibition room to see the fabulous treasures of the long-dead monarch of Egypt. Then as one leaves there are counters where one can buy Tutankhamun rings, Tutankhamun jewelry, Tutankhamun post cards, in fact all kinds of various Tutankhamun junk.

Museum officials expect up to two million people will endure these hours of waiting to have minutes to see the baubles and trinkets dug from a sandy tomb.

Past events and people from out of the past do indeed contain important lessons for the present but by what stretch of the imagination can we fathom why people by the thousands are fascinated by Tutankhamun's treasures?

Is it, perhaps, that all the grim realities of life today, all the loneliness and the crowding, the pressures and frustrations, the struggle simply to survive — does all this drive us to find momentary relief in trinkets and games which are simply, utterly, impudently irrelevant?



FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

On The Right Side

At breakfast one day our psychiatrist was expounding on the evils of bureaucracy, saying: "I spent 25 years in Germany under the Nazi bureaucrats; and my last 25 years in the States. And we are developing into a similar pattern of bureaucracy." I opined: "Well, Doctor, with computers, things will be worse." He replied grimly: "Yes. When a jackass makes a mistake he makes only one. When a jackass feeds a computer, he can make a million." Many people familiar with the Church, including Cardinal Wright, are concerned that the Body of Christ is being regarded more and more as a sociological institution rather than Christ in the world. A few years ago I wrote a letter to a priest-friend, who is also a bureaucrat. But I never did mail it. Here it is in part.

"Before me is a pile of directives, letters, scheduled meetings, papers to be read or to be delivered at diverse diocesan meetings; programs, reports, position papers from the many bureaus of the diocese. A young priest recently exclaimed: 'The parishes could solve their financial bind by having a paper drive, and selling the bundles that come from Rochester.' May I voice my thoughts regarding the growing bureaucracy. I am no official spokesman for our harassed priests, but I do think these opinions are shared by the silent majority, who are not always silent among themselves.

"Question 1: How many bureaus are there in the diocese; and how many are needed?"

"Question 2: How many persons are connected with these bureaus; and how many are needed?"

"Question 3: Granting the need for some bureaucracy, what are the present ones doing?"

"Regarding Q. 1 . . . Bureaus are like taxes. They are easy to establish. They are difficult to dissolve, even after they no longer serve their purpose.

"Regarding Q. 2 . . . St. Paul includes in his description of charity: 'Love seeks not its own.' This is rarely true of bureaucrats. In the military service I spent many hours at staff meet-

ings. Each department 'sought its own', with rare regard for the needs of the whole military body. Self-seeking and department aggrandizement would have been worse were it not for many wise commanders who frequently regulated the bureaus demands according to the needs of the whole command.

"That department heads should push their own is understandable. Few men are so holy they do not seek, albeit hardly consciously, their own. For example, how many towns build buildings and develop projects which they would not if the local taxpayers had to foot the bills. But no! They figure that since most of the money comes from state or federal taxes they better get as much as they can from the public trough. Frankly this is a dilemma which seems unsolvable.

"Regarding Q. 3, 'What are the bureaus doing?': I am frequently more concerned about some of these than about the other two. Recently I attended a lecture by a progressive priest. The subject was on marriage, and was sponsored by a Christian Formation Group. My hearing is very good. My comprehension is average. Yet what was given as Christian teaching was no more Catholic or Christian than Unitarianism. I thought to myself: 'If this is the formation of the Catholic person, the Church is hurting.'"

It is nearly three years since this unmailed letter was written. In that time, some bureaus have been reduced and reorganized; some have been added. The volume of printed matter has slowed for the Summer, but Fall may well bring a renewed printing "Agnes," to demonstrate that each bureau is alive and self-conscious.

It is the hope of many that the Catholic Church will not continue for long as primarily a sociological entity, but rather as Christ Jesus, Our Lord, present in the world and demanding to be heard and to be obeyed. "He who hears you, hears Me. He who rejects you rejects Me and Him who sent Me."

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