



## THE CHURCH 1973 Fr. Andrew Greeley

One of the interesting social phenomenon of contemporary Catholicism that even professional anticlerical journals like the *Commonweal* have missed is the surge of anticlericalism among the upper middle-class laity. One of the reasons why the old-line anticlericals haven't noticed it may be that it is not an anticlericalism of the left (or the right either). Many well-educated Catholics have developed an intense dislike for priests — quite independently of whether their ideology is left, right, or center.

This dislike for priests is especially obvious when you ask a member of the upper middle class between 30 and 40 why he or she is going to church irregularly. The answer has little to do with the English liturgy (which everyone likes) or semiliterate lay readers (which everyone dislikes) or miniskirted nun guitarists singing songs of revolution at Communion time (which everyone thinks is blasphemous). These things may be mentioned occasionally, but the universal answer is that the sermons are so bad. "They are not merely bad," one woman remarked to me, "they are aggressively awful. They are an insult to the intelligence and the religious sensibility of everyone in the congregation."

The objections one hears to clerical homilies is not that they are "irrelevant" politically or socially. Indeed, if the respondents in my informal survey are to be believed, those members of the younger clergy who strain for "relevance" are even worse than their elders who repeat the language of the Baltimore Catechism or their seminary manuals. "At least the older fellows believe in something," I was told by one lawyer.

It is very hard to sort out the specific criticisms aimed at Sunday sermons, since they usually come pouring out with strong emotional intensity when one asks the question. But there seems to be a number of different points that most people I talked to repeat:

**-Hypocrisy.** "I know what kind of life that man lives and what kind of a person he is. What right does he have to tell me to live a life of faith?" I have heard

comments like this time and time again. The charge is obviously extremely serious and probably much too harsh. But priests ought to take it very seriously none the less. To many of the laity their religious faith as reflected through their Sunday sermons does not seem to have much authenticity or integrity.

**-Fear.** Closely related to the charge of hypocrisy is the charge that priests are frightened — frightened of their congregations, frightened of the more aggressive and intelligent laity they must deal with, frightened of the changes in the Church and the changes in society. Hence, I was told, they retreat behind barriers of moralism and cliché. "It's not that they are irrelevant," one young woman told me, "but that they are completely out of it. For most of them, marriage would be one more way to escape from a world that terrifies them."

**-Stupidity.** This is the charge that I heard most frequently. Sermons, according to my informants, are completely devoid of intelligence. A man in another profession who was that inept at one of his principal professional responsibilities would soon go out of business, but a priest can go on insulting the intelligence of his congregation Sunday after Sunday with no penalty at all for his incompetence. "Didn't they train any of you in the seminary to think and to express yourself?" one extremely irate man asked me. The answer to that question is that such matters were hardly important in the pre-Vatican seminary, and that emotions are far more important than disciplined intelligence in the psychiatric institutions that many post-Vatican seminaries have become.

My survey was informal because no one is willing to fund serious research on the clients' reaction to what is going on in the Church. It may well have been a biased sample, and it certainly was not very large. Many of the respondents would cite one priest who was an exception to their charges. Surely many priests work very hard on their sermons. Yet anyone who has talked to the laity for more than five minutes on the subject of Sunday sermons should know how angry and outspoken they are on the subject.

## Keeping Tabs

The annual card party given by the **Alhambra Ladies** for the benefit of Holy Childhood School is scheduled for Wednesday noon, April 25, in the Knights of Columbus club, 513 Monroe. Mrs. Robert J. Farrell is chairman.

Parishioners of **Most Precious Blood Church** will put on a Holy Week play at 7 tonight at the church, Lexington Avenue and Stenson Street. The two-act play, *Between Two Thieves*, is an adaptation of Diego Fabbrì's *Processo a Gesù*. The public is invited, free.

**Opera Theatre** of Rochester will hold auditions for its 1973-74 productions of *Rigoletto*, *Lucia de Lammermoor* and *La Bohème*, Saturday, April 14, at Monroe Community College. Appointments may be made by calling 544-3429.

A luncheon, folk Mass, dinner and entertainment featuring the music of Jack Spallino will be featured at **Nazareth College's Homecoming**, slated for Saturday, April 28, at the campus.

Members of the **80th Seton Branch** will hold their monthly meeting at the home of Mrs. Gerard Hanson of Belvedere Drive, Wednesday, April 18, at 8:30 p.m.

The **Court Our Lady of the Cenacle** of the Catholic Daughters of America recently donated \$50 to Bosco House, a religious learning center for retarded children.

**St. Andrew's Rosary Society** will hold its Rosary Banquet at Henri's Restaurant April 23. For reservations call Carm Melino at 342-7258, Wanda Flowerday at 467-4347 or Bernie Stebler at 342-9239. Plans are also underway for a mother and children breakfast to be held May 6. For reservations call Margaret Paul at 467-2589.

The **Home-School Association of Our Lady of Mercy Parish** is holding a garage sale, Saturday, April 28, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. in the rectory garages. Donations accepted. Call Kathie Walsh at 621-4313.

## The Harris Poll

# 'Deep Guilt' Seen Over Indians

**New York [RNS].** — A majority of the American people suffer from "a deep sense of guilt over the way Indians have been treated by this country," the Louis Harris Survey reported here.

A poll of 1,472 households (March 15-23) asked several questions during the confrontation between Indians and the federal government at Wounded Knee, S.D.

Fifty-one per cent of the respondents had more sympathy for the militants at the Pine Ridge Reservation hamlet than for the government position, which received the endorsement of 21 per cent. Twenty-eight per cent said they were unsure.

Harris said that 75 per cent of Americans believe Indians have not been treated well in the U.S. The greatest degrees of support for Indians were found among Eastern suburbanites, young

people, the college-educated, Catholics, independent voters, blacks and those who make more than \$15,000 per year.

The poll showed that 62 per cent agreed with the statement that "American Indians have been mistreated by the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs."

An assertion that the "government has not lived up to the treaties signed with the Indians" was supported by 59 per cent, with 10 per cent disagreeing and 31 per cent unsure.

Harris continued, "The Indians' claim that they have not been given a chance to determine their own future through self-government" is upheld by 59-17 per cent.

"The statement that 'unemployment among American Indians is the worst in the

country' is accepted by 53-12 per cent.

"That American Indians have not had a chance to make complaints about their treatment to the government is believed by a plurality of 45-30 per cent."

The poll quoted three typical responses in showing the "guilt" felt by Americans on the treatment of Indians.

A Raleigh (N.C.) businessman said, "We took away everything the Indians ever had, including their self-respect."

A Detroit student was quoted as saying, "We left the Indians to rot on their reservations with no way to even support themselves."

The statement of a Waco (Tex.) store clerk: "The Indians were treated real bad. They were here before we were, but we took away their land, took away the buffalo, and have been terrible in the way we treated them."

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