

TOWARD TOMORROW

Fr. Henry Atwell

One of the venerable scholars of the Catholic Church in the United States is the historian, Msgr. John Tracy Ellis.

In a somewhat lengthy article (nine pages) in a recent Commonweal magazine, he writes about "American Catholicism in an uncertain, anxious time."

He begins his article with a quotation that is a reply to a proposed "Advice to Bishops" on how they could better run the Church. The reply says, "With regard to your proposed 'Advice to Bishops,' there is this to be considered, that we temper zeal with Christian prudence, lest wishing to build up we, perhaps, through want of discretion, rather destroy, especially in these times when so little is left of the Church except ruins."

A recently published and best-selling book, "Bare, Ruined Choirs," states that the Church today is in shambles. The quotation is not from that book, however, but was written by St. Peter Canisius in 1557, well over 200 years ago.

St. Vincent Ferrer, two centuries before that, and St. Augustine, almost ten centuries before that, had similar opinions about a Church in ruins.

Many people — Pope John once referred to them as "those prophets of doom" — think the Church is once again in ruins or nearly so.

Monsignor Ellis admits we live "in a time of singular divisiveness" wonders if perhaps prudence requires that we keep silent on controversial matters but concludes with an axiom of R. H. Tawney that "rashness is a more agreeable failing than cowardice, and, when to speak is unpopular, it is less pardonable to be silent than to say too much." He then proceeds to "say it like it is" — as he sees it — in the Church in the United States at this time.

Good historian that he is, Monsignor Ellis cites a litany of crises that have troubled the Church in this country over the past two centuries — trusteeism, the alleged Americanism heresy, anti-Catholic bigotry. Ellis points out that survival of these crises was due in large measure to "the discipline" accepted by the majority of American Catholics at those times.

This discipline, according to Ellis, has proved to be the Achilles' heel in American Catholicism.

While few if any Catholic teachers ever explicitly taught that the Church had an answer to

BOOK SALE

More than 10,000 used books will be offered for sale May 17-19 in Greece Town Mall by the Genesee Region Citizens League for Nursing.

This will be the fifth annual book sale to raise money for the endeavor summed up in the league's slogan, "Better Nursing for All."

every question, the atmosphere that so often prevailed in Catholic schools from kindergarten to university, says Ellis, was conducive to that assumption on the part of most students.

Catholics, by and large, unquestioningly accepted not only the "official" teachings of the Church (would that they had even known them!) but even the edicts and legends promulgated in parish schools and pulpits.

They were tortured by the complexities of abstruse religious concepts and wanted a simple yes or no answer to such questions as, "Is it a sin to use cosmetics?" or "Is it a sin if I forgot it was Friday and ate a hot dog at a football game?"

Those Catholics who did question their faith or probe for clarification were not infrequently made to feel singular and somehow not totally true.

Ellis then says, "When, in the late 1960's, the dam gave way, so to speak, and in the rush and ferment that ensued there broke on Catholic consciousness the unsettling fact that the Church did not have answers to all questions, that there are questions to which no human source can supply an answer, confidence in the Church's reliability began to crumble."

Monsignor Ellis says that those who react to this situation by "harsh and negative condemnation" contribute nothing toward a solution. I would add that neither do those who continue to teach and to act as if the Church did have the answer to all the ills of the world, and of each individual in it.

Our task today is not to spoon-feed people all the right answers but rather to provide insights and values so they can think for themselves, make their own decisions. Wasn't that, after all, what Jesus did when he worked so many of his miracles — to enable the blind man to see for himself, the man who was mute to speak for himself, the crippled man to stand on his own feet and walk the way he wanted to.

Bishop Assails Racism, Urges Just Economy

New Orleans [RNS] — This nation's first black Roman Catholic bishop told a national gathering of educators here that racial injustice must be redefined in this age, not only to stress the need for "economic justice," but to show that racism is an attempt to "usurp God's rights over men."

Calling upon Christians especially to act now to build a "whole and healthy community," Auxiliary Bishop Harold Perry of New Orleans, said the struggle for justice "is not merely a personal feud between man and man. Rather, each struggle of the black, the Indian, the Chicano is at bottom an attempt to vindicate God Himself."

Speaking during the 70th convention of the National Catholic Educational Association on today's social concerns, the prelate said the struggle for racial justice "is really in God's cause every time, since each time it is God's plan for mankind at stake."

Some 10,000 Catholic educators attended the four-day convention (April 23-26) at three New Orleans hotels. The convention theme was "Religious Education: Building Values and Meaning."

Bishop Perry said it is not a question of human rights basically, but a question of "defending God's right to invite all men to take possession of the happiness for which He created them."

Noting that economic justice must be "our first consideration," he said that without it, "there is little chance for interracial justice" and that "low wages, scarce jobs, lack of security and the effects of all these torment and plague all American minorities."

Bishop Perry charged that "racism is not dead in this land" simply because it has been made illegal in its familiar forms.

"There is a new kind of racism dividing society as sharply as the color line. This new racism is . . . blasphemy against God. For it separates man from man by the indifferences of one and the helplessness of the other."

Marriage Encounters Scheduled

Marriage Encounter weekends have been scheduled at four places in the Rochester area for the next four months.

At St. John Fisher: May 25-27, June 22-24, July 6-8, July 13-15.

At St. Joseph Motherhouse: June 1-3, Sept. 21-23.

At Nazareth College: June 8-10, July 6-8.

Married couples may make reservations and get information

on the above from Al and Marty Cardona, 29 Lambeth Loop, Fairport, N.Y. 14450, telephone 377-7601.

At Notre Dame Retreat House: June 15-17, July 20-22, July 27-29, Aug. 3-5, Aug. 10-12, Aug. 17-19, Aug. 24-26, Aug. 31-Sept. 2.

Retreat house reservations may be made by calling Dick and Betty Connelly, 28 Sonara Pkwy., Rochester, N.Y. 14618, telephone 244-0969.



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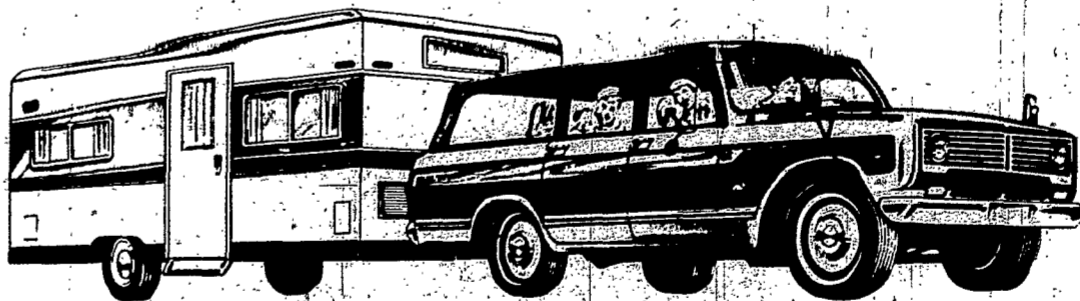
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