



THE CHURCH 1973  
Fr. Andrew Greeley

One of the most interesting books to come along in a long time is *Victims of Groupthink* by Irving L. Janis, a Yale University psychologist. It is a study of some of the classic fiascoes of recent history: Pearl Harbor, the Bay of Pigs, the invasion of North Korea, and the escalation in Vietnam. Janis asks how intelligent, sincere, well-meaning men can make incredibly inept decisions that have grave consequences for themselves and for the rest of the nation.

The question becomes even more pertinent when one realizes that the people who made the decision to invade North Korea, for example, were the same ones who made the decision on the Marshall Plan (which Janis classifies as a "non-fiasco"). The Bay of Pigs and the escalation in Vietnam decisions were made by virtually the same group who had responded skillfully to the challenge of the missile crisis.

Instead of attributing fiascoes to the arrogance or the imperialism of those responsible for the decisions, Janis sees a complex but powerful psychological mechanism at work that operates in cohesive groups of human beings who get along very well with one another.

The more cohesive, the more intelligent, the more affable the relationships within the group, the more likely it is to fall victim to "groupthink," that is to say, the more likely an unconscious, collective psychological mechanism will be set in motion that moves the group to filter out evidence and ideas that run contrary to its own consensus.

Some junior officers at Pearl Harbor, for example, were quite prepared for the raid, but the senior officers — some of the best minds in the Navy — had collectively conspired (quite unconsciously) to tune out all the evidence that a Japanese attack was imminent.

It is important to note that in Janis's view of things — unlike that of David Halberstam's — "groupthink" is not something deliberate or conscious; nor is it something that is limited to just high level government administrators. It is a mechanism

**SSJs Offer Summer Program**

The Sisters of St. Joseph will operate a day-camp throughout July at their Motherhouse, 4095 East Ave. Swimming, sports, arts and crafts and nature study are on the program, for boys and girls 6 to 12 years old; plus an overnight campout for those who stay more than a week.

For high school students and adults there will be evening classes at the Motherhouse in typing, sewing and physical fitness. For children 9 to 14, ceramics classes will be held at Sacred Heart Convent, Flower City Park.

Fees for these various offerings range from \$20 to \$30. Registration will be open until June 23. Further information may be obtained from Sister Maria Hoffman, 288-9149, and Sister Carole Proia, 637-5600.

that is at work in all small, cohesive, friendly groups of human beings. For reasons not altogether clear as yet, virtually any group of human beings is strongly motivated to set at work psychological processes that filter out any threats to its own internal consensus. Groupthink can become disastrously dangerous when the decision that the group is making has national and international ramifications.

Any human group should be aware of the risk of groupthink and should strive to set in motion contrary processes to neutralize the phenomenon. The success of the Kennedy staff during the Cuban missile crisis was the result of deliberate decisions on the part of the President and his brother to make sure that the consensus-forming pressure could be resisted so that all opinions might be heard.

Janis recommends three prescriptions as initial counteragents to groupthink:

"The leader of a policy-forming group should assign the role of critical evaluator to each member, encouraging the group to give high priority to airing objections and doubts. This practice needs to be re-inforced by the leader's acceptance of criticism of his own judgments in order to discourage the members from 'soft-pedaling' their disagreements." (p. 209)

"The leaders in an organization's hierarchy, when assigning a policy-planning mission to a group, should be impartial instead of stating preferences and expectations at the outset. This practice requires each leader to limit his briefings to unbiased statements about the scope of the problem and the limitations of available resources, without advocating specific proposals he would like to see adopted. This allows the conferees the opportunity to develop an atmosphere of open inquiry and to explore impartially a wide range of policy alternatives." (pp. 210-211)

"The organization should routinely follow the administrative practice of setting up several independent policy-planning and evaluation groups to work on the same policy question, each carrying out its deliberations under a different leader." (p. 211)

There are two particular applications for the Catholic Church of the exciting work that Professor Janis has done. First of all, in recent years many Catholics have become extremely enthusiastic supporters of group dynamics techniques. In their fervor for the positive aspects of groupism, these Catholics have chosen to ignore some of the dangers in group dynamics methods. They have almost totally overlooked the tremendous pressures a group can bring to bear on individual dissenting members. Reading Janis's book and pondering on the dangers of groupthink might be a very healthy corrective for many of the encounter, sensitivity, and marathon-enthusiasts in the Church.

**Administration Proposes School Tax Credit Plan**

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — Among the major tax law changes proposed by the Nixon administration to Congress is a recommendation extending tax credits to parents of children attending non-public elementary and secondary schools, including church-related schools.

According to the proposed changes, the tax credits would amount to half the tuition paid, up to a maximum of \$200 per year each child. However, if the family income exceeds \$18,000 annually, the tax credit would be reduced.

Because there are educational tax credit bills pending in Congress and because a constitutional challenge on tax credits involving religious schools is imminent, the Nixon Administration has provided for a court test of the program.

As soon as any tax credit law is enacted by the Congress, opponents of such aid will challenge the law in the courts. State tax credit laws already are being tested.

The administration's tuition tax credit provision would apply only to private and church-related elementary and secondary schools. Tuition payments for higher education, for kindergarten or nursery school would not be included in the coverage.

For those families whose annual income exceeds \$18,000,

the reduction would be \$1 subtracted from the credit for every \$20 by which the family income exceeds \$18,000. Thus, under this system, a family with three children in non-public schools but making \$30,000 would receive no tax credit.

A family whose credit is greater than the amount of income tax they owed would receive a refund of the difference, or the family could apply the tax refund to the subsequent year's tax.

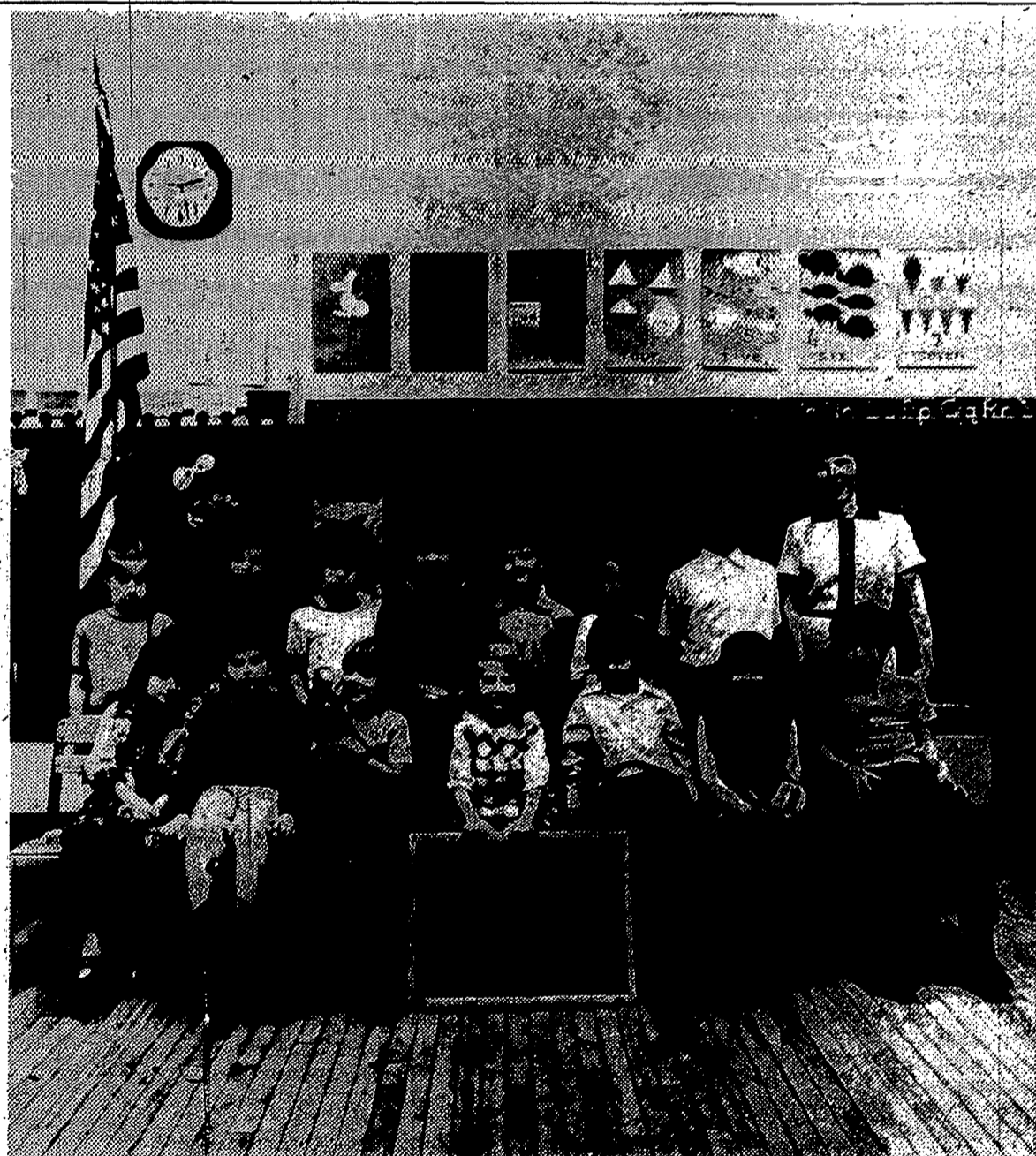
Under the new program, parents sending their children to racially-segregated private schools would not be eligible to receive tax credits.

Among other changes proposed in the tax laws is one which would provide a tax credit of up to \$500 for low and middle income persons 65 or over whose taxes paid on real estate exceed 5 per cent of their income. Apartment dwellers and those renting houses would also receive credit. Renters are assumed to pay property taxes equal to 5 per cent of their rents.

With regard to child care deductions, the new changes would eliminate the current limit of \$400 a month and substitute a yearly limit of \$4,800. The distinctions between outside and in-the-home care would be eliminated as well.

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Ecology and Energy. The Balance of Power.



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