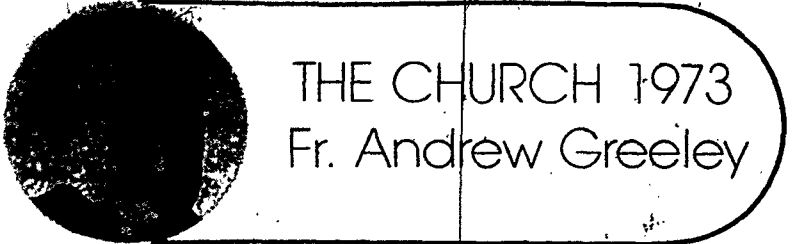




Essay Winner

Michael Weber, a sixth grade student at Christ the King school, was presented this week with a plaque and \$75 as first prize winner of the Monroe County Firemen's Association essay contest.



THE CHURCH 1973
Fr. Andrew Greeley

'You Catholics,' remarked a very distinguished Brahman to me recently, 'don't appreciate your heritage enough. You're not interested in understanding it and valuing it.'

The charge is unarguable. A decade and a half ago we were militant defenders of a heritage that we had reduced to formulae and slogans.

An interesting test case is G. K. Chesterton, one of the great Catholic thinkers of the 20th century. G. K. was once the great tin god of apologetic Catholicism.

Now we are told that Chesterton is passe and irrelevant, that he was something of an anti-Semite, a near alcoholic. No self-respecting 'with it' modern Catholic would be caught dead quoting Chesterton or rereading one of his books.

A pity. Most of what has happened in the Church since the Vatican Council was anticipated by the Chestertonian vision. He is, if anything, even more relevant today than he was 50 years ago.

Take for example the Chestertonian paradox that heresy was easy and that orthodoxy was an exciting romance, high adventure, a glorious battle waged with a curious God who, for some odd reason, turned out to be named Thursday.

Orthodoxy wasn't romantic at all, it was merely the blind repetition of certain propositions which people had repeated for ages past (which usually meant since the middle of the 19th century). 'Modernists' and 'Americanists' were a threat to orthodoxy from the left, but not a very serious threat because there were very few modernists and no Americanists.

all. Orthodoxy, to tell the truth, was a rather dull affair.

But now it has become precisely the adventure that Chesterton said it should be. We have come to understand once again that God's revelation does not come to us in propositions out of catechism but in symbols — that is, in people (like Jesus) and events (like his death and resurrection). These symbols (and they are more real — not less real — than academic propositions) are rich, complex, multi-layered, polyvalent realities.

Orthodoxy does not consist in the repetition of formulae, but in being faithful to the religious truths that God has communicated to us through symbols. Another way of looking at it is to say that religious symbols incarnate God's truth in flesh and blood, sight and sound so that the truth addresses itself not merely to our intellects but to our total human personality.

The romance of orthodoxy consists of interpreting the symbols so that we are faithful to the truth that is contained in them, faithful to the truth our predecessors saw in them, and faithful to the truth with which they illuminate our own religious situation.

We must violate neither the past meanings of the symbol nor the religious demands of our own time. We must not be so tied to the formulae of the past that we have nothing to say to men and women of our own era, nor so overwhelmed by the apparent needs of the present as to think that the insights of the past can be safely ignored.

It is a delicate, precarious, exciting and supremely important balancing act. It is also an act for grownups and not for little children — of the right or the left — who need simple, easy answers to everything.

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