

THE CHURCH 1974

Father Andrew Greeley

I am uneasy about the reaction to the appointment of the new archbishops of Newark and Baltimore. On all sides one hears about what fine appointments they are and how the two men represent the beginning of a new era in the American church. Archbishop Jean Jadot — the Apostolic Delegate to the U.S. — is praised by everyone for bringing into major sees the kind of men who understand the problems of contemporary Catholicism and who are sympathetic to intelligent change.

With none of this can I disagree. I know only one of the two new metropolitans, but he is a first-rate bishop. From all I hear, so is the other. If the delegate is in part responsible for these appointments he deserves great credit — particularly for taking into account the recommendations of the priests and people of the Archdioceses.

But no archbishop, however open and intelligent, can change his diocese by himself; no delegate, however remarkable, can change the church in the United States. We are beginning to get open and intelligent archbishops. May their tribe increase! We apparently have a remarkable delegate. May he have a long term of service!

But the fundamental problems of American Catholicism were not created by either delegates or archbishops, and they will not be solved by them. To expect archbishops — American, Italian or Belgian — to make things all good and nice again betrays the same kind of immaturity which scapegoats the hierarchy for all the problems we have.

Bishops are critically important people in the church; that's why we have them. In the final analysis you can't dispense with leaders. Strong, vigorous, visionary bishops are a tremendous asset. Timid, fearful, repressive bishops are a great liability. But bishops are not the church, only part of it. There is not a single major problem facing American Catholicism today that was caused just by the hierarchy and not a single one which would go away if the hierarchy voted to make it go away. To think any differently is to engage in childish nonsense.

I'm not saying that bishops should be immune from criticism. I am arguing that criticism which blames leaders for everything and refuses to assume adult responsibility for the life of the church is juvenile. If we have a lot of people scapegoating their bishops for our problems, it follows only that we have a lot of juveniles around.

Indeed, the most impressive bishops I know spend much of their time climbing down from the walls up which they have been driven by the irresponsibility of many of their laity and clergy. The laity and clergy can complain on the record about their bishops, but the bishops can't complain back. In a way, it's a shame. Some of them have some pretty funny stories to tell.

Does anyone seriously think that the massive disaffiliation of young people, which may have blighted the future of American Catholicism for the next 100 years, is the fault of the bishops? Have not the parish clergy done their part in alienating the young by their rigidity, by excessive concern about petty vandalism, by taking the advice of janitors and mother superiors about youth more seriously than the young clergy who once worked with the young?

Has not a whole generation of younger clergy copped out on youth and teenagers, dubbing this the "kiddy apostolate"? Have not teachers — male and female — presented a rigid, repressive version of Catholicism, one which became no more attractive when it took on the cast of a left-wing ideology? Has not the well-publicized and narcissistic

departure of thousands of priests and nuns soured large numbers of the young who thought priests and religious were supposed to be unselfish and dedicated? Has not our insistence on sexual morality to the exclusion of all else badly distorted Jesus' message of the good news of God's love? Have not parents who equate forced Mass attendance with Catholic virtue done more than their share to alienate their children from the church — especially when forced church attendance and sacramental reception was combined with intolerance and racism?

It really is convenient to blame the bishops for everything. We don't have to face our own responsibility. It is no secret that I am not a wild admirer of some of the current top level leadership of the church. But they are not the whole problem, not even a major part of it.

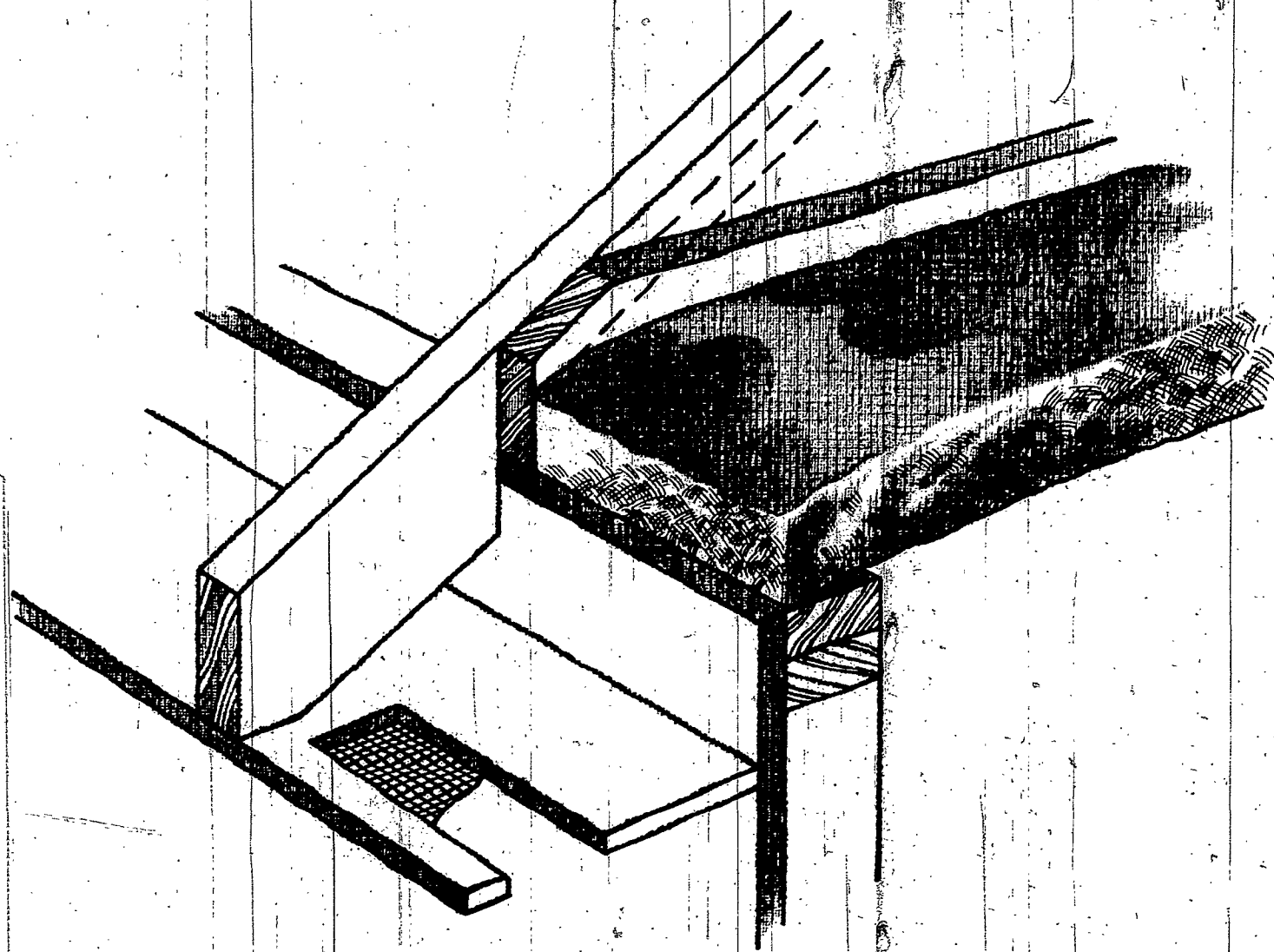
Things would be so much easier if they were.



Golf Classic to Help Children

Press-Radio Club president Jack Palvino [left] of WBBF Radio brought warmup jackets and a poster to Larry Brumfield, 11, Danforth Street, Rochester; Chris Seraphine Herbst, principal of the School of the Holy Childhood, to remind readers that the second Kodak Celebrity Golf Classic is scheduled for Sept. 28 at Oak Hill Country Club. The school was one of several area children's charities to benefit from the first Kodak tournament.

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