

THE CHURCH 1974

John Andrew Greeley

I keep getting letters from people who tell me I don't understand the religious life.

They may be right. I am not a religious, and I would not pretend to know from the inside what the dynamics of a religious community are. I do know from our research data that when pressures are on to leave the priesthood, the relationships of a religious community seem more effective than the relationships in the diocesan priesthood. I am prepared to believe that community support is stronger among religious than it is among the diocesan clergy. It couldn't be much weaker, heaven knows.

But if I don't know what the religious life is like now, I think I do know enough about the modern world to know what the religious life will have to become if it is to survive. As I understand some of my correspondents, they say that the religious life cannot compromise with contemporary demands for freedom, initiative and responsibility. If that be the case then the religious life as we know it will perish — as did the eremitic monasteries in the Egyptian desert — and new forms will emerge. You don't have to know the religious life from the inside to come to that conclusion; all you have to know is a little history, of which many of my correspondents, like most other American Catholics, are blissfully innocent.

Still, I must admit that I am surprised by the arguments that many religious level against my position that the authority-obedience perspective is outmoded. They are appalled that I raise the question of whether the right to sexual integrity is among the rights a subject is expected to concede to a superior. They think that it is a "terrible thing" for me to raise that question.

Let us leave aside the question of the history of this problem in the religious life as being both beyond the scope of the argument and perhaps not appropriate for discussion in the present context. Let us also leave aside the question of whether the cynicism and favoritism that mark certain relationships within

the priesthood and the religious life may on occasion represent a certain psychological violation of integrity.

The basic issue is why, if all other rights are to be yielded to the superior, this one is to be held back. The integrity of one's talents, which pertain to the spirit (at least in the traditional view of the human person presumed by the theory of superior-subject relationship) can be violated whenever the good of the Church demands it, but the integrity of the body cannot be so violated. Yet it has always been held that the spirit is higher than the flesh. The superior takes control of the use of the talents of his subject and thus controls absolutely his spirit, but he is apparently forbidden, according to my correspondents, to control the subject's flesh. A strange contradiction, it seems to me.

Ah, the argument comes in return, but it is a sin to violate sexual integrity. The implication is clear: to misuse the sexuality of another is sinful, to misuse his God-given talents is not sinful. Talents, in other words, are less important than sexual organs. A very peculiar doctrine, to say the least.

But the problem, I am told, is pride. Talents must be left undeveloped both because God sometimes demands it for the good of the soul (the same God who created those talents — about which He must have forgotten) and because the talented person might become proud.

It is not clear to me what this deeply feared pride is, although I get an endless stream of letters warning me that I face its dangers. Whether pride is a problem for me or not is a matter known only to me, my confessor, and God. If others decide that it is, they must have a special revelation of God. But I take the argument to be that if anyone writes a lot, he MUST be a victim of pride. In fact, as I understand pride, the proud man wouldn't write at all because he would feel so superior to other human beings that he would see no need to share his ideas with them.

Similarly, the really proud person would not want to use his talents but would feel that there is no reason to spread his caviar out for the generality. The religious or the priest who wished to develop his talents in order to share them with others is in fact practicing humility — and he better be good at it because when his brothers (or her sisters) begin to blast away at him for doing anything different from everyone else, pride will tempt him to say that the exercise of his talents isn't worth the grief he encounters. Better to forget about sharing abilities with others who don't want what you have to offer in the first place.

Thus if the religious life as it now exists is to survive and evolve, it is going to have to promise that the community will protect and support the talented person to the fullest development of his talents, and then rally round him when envious outsiders jump all over him. I must confess that I don't see any religious communities doing that just now.

But if there were any, I'd be tempted to join.

Unity Is Holy Year Aim

Vatican City (RNS) — The Vatican has expressed hope that the Roman Catholic Church's 1975 Holy Year will result in a "new advance" toward Christian unity.

This unity, according to a Vatican Radio editorial, involves "a double commitment for all who believe in Christ."

The first of these commitments, the broadcast explained, is to "reunification according to the will of Christ himself, that is, reunification in a single body, a single Church, of all who believe in Him."

"In this respect, Christ's own prayer — 'that all may be one' — will be realized."

"And the second commitment is to a spirit of unity internal to the Church itself."

Observing that the early Christian community "used to expect this internal unity as a consequence of Baptism," the editorial pointed out that Holy Year pilgrims who will visit Rome in 1975 will be able to read an inscription in the baptistry of the Basilica of St. John Lateran which says: "There is no separation between those who are reborn in Baptism, because it makes them one — in the same Spirit and in the one faith."

The Vatican broadcast emphasized the importance for

Christian unity of prayerful reflection on the word of God.

"Reflection on the word of God produces unity in the family of believers, because in the Sacred Scriptures the Father who is in Heaven meets his children with great love and speaks to them, and the force of this divine word remains the support and energy of the Church."

At the same time, the editorial declared that the unity of Christ's Church requires for its "perfection" acceptance of "the ministry of Peter" on whom Christ established the principal, permanent, and visible foundation of the unity of faith and communion.

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Deaths

Anna Mitrano

Anna Mitrano, wife of Charles Mitrano of Arcadia Parkway, died July 11, 1974.

She was the mother of nine children, four of whom are in religious orders.

A Mass of Christian Burial was offered July 15 in St. Anthony's Church by her son, Basilian Father Joseph C. Mitrano of Detroit. Twenty-four priests joined him in the celebration.

Mrs. Mitrano's other children are Sisters Concetta, Cora Marie and Ann Regina, all of the St. Joseph community; Philomena Mitrano, Mrs. Peter Triano and Mrs. Eugene Uttaro; Vincent P. and Gerard A. Mitrano.

She also leaves, besides her husband, two sisters, Mrs. Fannie Camello and Mrs. Mary Solimano; eight grandchildren and several nieces and nephews.

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