

The Church 1974



Fr. Andrew Greeley

It isn't only that the Church doesn't appreciate the neighborhood, no one else in the city does, either. Neighborhoods are at best irrelevant and at worst an obstacle to progress. The city government, the banking and lending institutions, the planning experts, the professional "liberals" are all indifferent to the fate of the neighborhood. So as one neighborhood after another is eaten away, the city feeds on its own flesh and slowly destroys itself. Then everyone wonders where the slums came from.

Take the now famous Forest Hills case in New York. Read Mario Cuomo's brilliant and sensitive book, "Forest Hills Diary." Forget the foolish

forward and the pompous afterward, which the editor — the ever "with it" Jason Epstein — added to the book. Study Cuomo's agonized account of how one tries to shape a compromise when urban government makes a foolish decision from which it can't back down.

The unique thing about Forest Hills was not that it was the first neighborhood to be threatened with destruction by a combination of liberal ideology and central planning indifference. It was rather the first Jewish neighborhood where members of the middle class responded to city hall decisions the way Catholic ethnics responded previously (and the way South Boston is responding now). Cuomo's portrait of the complexity of urban life, the charade of the democratic decision-making process, and the dangers for the man caught in the middle is enough to make anyone hesitate before entering a career in urban politics.

Or visit the northwest Bronx where a cluster of Catholic parishes under the leadership of Bishop Patrick Aherne are trying to stabilize what is left of their neighborhoods. One would think that the city and its financial institutions faced with the prospect of all of the Bronx

becoming a ghettoized jungle would warmly support such efforts. In fact, the financial institutions continue to red-line the community, and the city government continues to pressure landlords to convert their apartments to welfare use.

The short-run goals of the banks and the government become a threat to the long-run health of the city, which neither the bureaucrats nor the bankers seem very worried about. When the neighborhoods are gone, the then what?

But isn't all of this concern about neighborhoods just a subtle form of racism? As long as liberal ideologues and their Catholic allies repeat this mindless question the cities will continue to destroy themselves. What if it is racism? Don't racists have human rights? And whether the people in the neighborhoods are racists or not, the fundamental problem remains: keep on destroying the neighborhoods and you will destroy the city.

I make no case for racism; but a moral denunciation of it is no substitute for actions to save the city. In fact, there is undoubtedly some racism in the northwest Bronx (though most of the neighborhoods there are already integrated by middle-class blacks), some very ugly racism in South Boston, and some racism in Forest Hills. But most of the people in neighborhoods are not pathological or ideological racists. They are simply

frightened, and they have good reason to be. To refuse to listen to their valid fears is a sure way to drive them into the hands of the tiny hard core of real racists in the community. This, of course, is just what liberal suburban judges and liberal city planners who live in high rise fortresses are doing.

It's a funny thing, but that's what most blacks want, too. They want it a lot more than they want busing or scatter-site public housing.

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THE OPEN WINDOW



Fr. Louis Hohman

Dear Rev. Hohman,

It hurts, a Roman Catholic, especially the authorities, to make such a statement: "accept Jesus as our personal Saviour". Because prior to "these times" we as Roman Catholics wrote the script, so to speak.

And our pride has caught up with us or we with our pride. Now actually you don't have to give the Protestants the credit for that statement. Nor do you or I or any other Roman Catholic have to feel it's the wrong way to say it.

The way to get around that type of thinking or feeling is to say: accept the word of God; then say it like it states in the New Testament — no more, no less.

If it says in the New Testament, "accept Jesus as our personal Saviour," then by all means use it with the understanding that no one owns these words but God. If it doesn't, then I too would feel ashamed to use them, because it sounds like Protestantism.

What I would like to do, if I could, would be to quote the New Testament just as it was written, when you have to.

Thank You,
A Roman Catholic

P.S. I just noted that you are listed as the Episcopal Advisor — if that means you are not a Roman Catholic, then this letter may have other meanings.

Dear R. C.,

First let me take care of your "P.S." The word Episcopal is an adjective meaning pertaining to a bishop. The Latin word for bishop is "episcopus." In this case it means I am advisor to the bishop (Bishop Hogan) relative to the Courier Journal. I am an ordained Roman Catholic priest.

Now for your letter. In his second letter, St. Peter admonishes Christians to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18) I as a person then am enjoined to accept Jesus as my Saviour. I do not know any place in the Bible which uses the words, "accept Jesus as your personal Saviour" but all Christian theology including Roman Catholic recognizes the necessity of such an acceptance. Jesus offers me grace and salvation in his person but that cannot take effect until such time as I say "Yes," accept him as my Saviour. Through the years many people forgot this important truth, and thought that by just going through ritual motions and observances without any (or little) inward acceptance of Jesus, they could still be saved.

My point in using the expression "accepting Christ as your personal Saviour" was that I thought it was a very good way of reminding us that Jesus offers his salvation to us but that our acceptance is a vitally important matter. The fact that Protestants invented and/or used the expression widely is of no importance at all to me. I am very happy to be able to share their insights just as I hope they will be glad to accept ours. Tearing down these kinds of barriers, incidentally, is the first vital step toward Christian unity. You were very right when you said the words belong not to Protestants but to God, just as all of us, Protestants and Catholics, belong to God.

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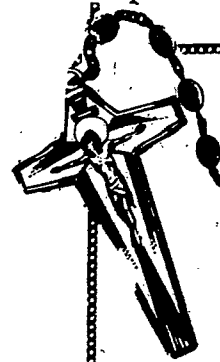
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