

The Church 1974



Fr.
Andrew Greeley

I think "relevance" has finally had it.

It had it a long time ago in every other sector of American life except the Church. The defeat of George McGovern was just about the end of the "movement," but Catholics, always the last into a new fashion, have been carrying the relevance ball long after everyone else dropped it.

The abysmal failure of the synod in Rome will make even the most passionate advocate of "involvement" as a substitute for faith think twice. Oddly enough, from a distance, it would appear that the synod failed even to put together a final statement because of bad staff work, lack of parliamentary skills, and an organizational structure which made democratic procedures impossible. The synod didn't "take a stand," not because it didn't want to, but because it didn't know how to.

But those who think that the Church's mission is to lead social crusades instead of preaching the Gospel are now in a position to ask themselves what difference it would have made if the synod had taken a stand — other than to give the "peace and justice" agencies a better bargaining position the next time the budget review comes around.

The answer is that while churchmen in individual countries may well decide that their situation is such that Christian leadership demands a militant social stand, this

Cardinal Invites Nominations For Successor

London [RNS] — The ailing Cardinal John Heenan, 69-year-old Archbishop of Westminster, invited nominations for his successor in a pastoral read throughout his archdiocese.

"You should be thinking and praying about my successor," he said. "The choice of Archbishop of Westminster is important not only for this diocese but for the whole country. If you have any names to suggest, write to the apostolic delegate in Wimbledon."

The apostolic delegate to Britain is Archbishop Bruno Heim.

Cardinal Heenan wrote his pastoral while in Papworth Hospital, near Cambridge, where he was first taken in September after a serious heart attack and then again in October following an asthmatic attack.

He said it was too soon to say if he would be able to resume his duties.

"You may be sure that if I am not well enough to serve you," he added, "I shall ask the Holy Father to accept my resignation. I shall be guided by the doctors."

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decision simply can't become normative for the whole church. Any attempt to make it normative won't work because leaders from other situations will nod politely and then go home to deal with their problems — which are not the same as the Asian and the African problems.

The "peace and justice" crowd will insist that Asian and African solutions should be normative. But by now, I think, they are beginning to get the message: No one is listening to them.

The Center for Concern will continue to issue blueprints for remaking the human race, but even they must realize by now that the age of the Berrigans is over, and we are in a time when the young Jesuits who don't want to be spiritual directors (which is most of them) are busy praying, meditating, and speaking with tongues.

The new younger generation can think of nothing more religiously irrelevant than social relevance. The relevance bunch will go on chiding, denouncing, worrying, pronouncing, warning, and viewing with dismay — to empty halls and in journals that no one reads.

On the whole, I'm not sure this is progress. I didn't much care for one generation of youthful enthusiasts who thought that the Church could produce a blueprint for world economic justice without any professional competence in economics, politics, history, or sociology. When one of the concernists urged priests not to play golf, and cited the now discredited Meadows' report as evidence that the world was headed for apocalypse, I decided that we were once again back in an era of enthusiastic amateurs masquerading as professionals — and almost dusted off my unused golf clubs as a gesture of defiance.

But the relevance gang looks more attractive than their younger successors who think that complex theological issues can be solved by what the Lord said to some charismatic quack in his sleep the other night. I'm not sure but what it's just like the election to the USCC presidency: we keep being delivered back and forth from Annas to Caiaphas.

Simplicism, in other words, generates more simplicism. Easy answers to economic problems and easy answers to religious and spiritual problems may be different in substance, but they're the same in style. The old relevant crowd and the newer pious crowd both believe that there are a few clear simple propositions that explain the whole of reality, that they have these propositions, and that anyone with sincerity and good will will surely agree with them.

Somewhere there must be a middle ground between the inept charging into the world and the inept withdrawing from the world. The name of that middle ground is mature commitment. And maybe, just maybe, American Catholicism will arrive there some day.

New Guinea Missioner Sees Church Changing

By JOHN DASH

All the highly sophisticated tools of modern organization are being employed by a Rochester missioner to New Guinea to get the people fired up with the idea "We are the Church."

Father Joseph A. Knoebel, SVD, assistant director of the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, was on his once in five years visit to his hometown last week and spoke with the Courier-Journal on his work.

The Melanesian Institute is a five-year-old project started by Father Knoebel and others to provide orientation courses to new missionaries to the country and to give established missionaries periodic updating in theology and scripture. The institute also publishes two magazines and engages in research work.

It is the research work that has been Father Knoebel's major occupation with the institute, and he is now watching the completion of a massive project of "self-study of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea."

He said that the Melanesian's original view of the Church was that of a foreign entity, "an alien function, with its rectory, school, church. The people were the babies of the father."

Now, he said, the project's aim is to instill the idea that "we are the Church, not just foreign priests." And the technique is to encourage the people "to discuss their own problems and solutions."

New Guinea is one of the largest islands in the Pacific and lies just north of Australia. Extraordinary economic and political changes have occurred on the island in the past five years, Father Knoebel noted, to the development of strong political parties and a drive for independence which is expected to be fully realized next year. A technical independence was granted by Australia, Dec. 1, 1973, but full military, internal security and foreign policy independence will only be given after a Constitution has been drafted and approved.

The Divine Word priest has also noted a "rush on indigenization, the 'Black is Beautiful' kind of thing. New Guineans are taking over more roles in government and controlling the financial situation. It was always a bit of a welfare state."

It is in this context that Father Knoebel's research project hopes to make a contribution. After months of analyzing position papers, seminars, questionnaires and responses, organizing of parish councils, input and feedback, the priest expects to present a summary of national

concerns and problems to the 15 bishops of the nation early next year.

He noted that in the course of the project many missioners were surprised at how vocal the people were, "as against 'let Father decide' on how to run parish affairs."

The first lasting mission establishment was made by Methodists in 1874. The Catholics

began their activities eight years later.

He hopes today's missioner has a "greater sensitivity to people's needs, and will look at his own mission work, to admit mistakes in the past and to resolve injustices."

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