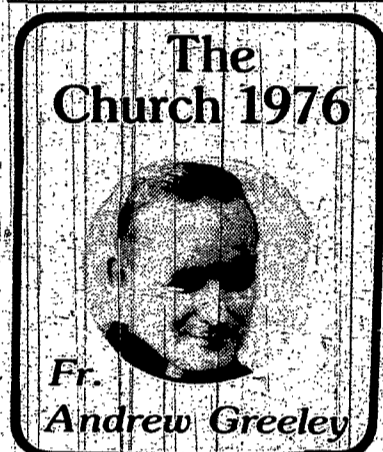




Statue's New Home

The statue of St. Ann was at St. Lucy's Church on Troup Street for many years. When the church was decommissioned and sold, most of the belongings were given to many old members of the parish. The statue of St. Ann was welcomed into the home of Mrs. Anna Piccoli who is devoted to her.



Whatever happened to the nuns you were talking about ten years ago? an old friend and companion in arms asked me the other day. "Remember, you were predicting that the religious women were about to enter an era of great influence in the Church? What went wrong?"

It was a fair question — though one does not like to be reminded of one's mistaken predictions. And I didn't know the answer. In 1965, in the postconciliar euphoria, the prediction seemed so reasonable as to be almost certain. The religious orders of women had given their members much better academic training than their male counterparts — to say nothing of the diocesan clergy. Graduate degrees from the great secular graduate schools were almost a matter of course for religious women long before the men arrived on the scene — and they were doing first-rate work on their dissertations, or so everyone heard it said.

So the women's orders seemed in much better condition for the postconciliar modernization than the men's orders, and they began the process of "renewal" (as we called it in those dear dead days of the happy past) much more systematically and confidently. Their superiors were stable, sophisticated, and open-minded people; the women were in the forefront of social action, cultural creativity, and intellectual endeavor. It looked like a golden era was about to begin.

But it all turned sour, and I do not think anyone yet knows why. Vocations have dried up; tens of thousands have resigned, and the loss in membership is close to 35 per cent. Many of those who have departed blame the orders for failure to modernize, yet it seems precisely those who most rapidly modernized that suffered the greatest losses. And in many communities, it was precisely those who led the successful struggle for change who thereafter decamped. That it has happened this way is clear enough, but why it has happened has never been explained satisfactorily.

And I cannot think of a woman religious — despite their superior intellectual training — who

exercises the kind of influence in American Catholicism as, for example, Eugene Kennedy, John McKenzie, Avery Dulles, Henry Nouwen, Richard McBrien, and Joseph Fichter. Nor are there any younger women on the scene who promise to have the impact of a John Shea or a David Traey. Finally, while there are some women college presidents with considerable influence, none of them has an impact anywhere near that of Ted Hesburgh, Jacqueline Grennan was going in that direction, but her career as a religious came to an abrupt end.

Why should this situation be? It may be argued that there is so much male chauvinism in the Church that the leadership of scholarly or influential women would not be accepted. I am under no illusion about the chauvinism — it is to be found even among some of those who claim to be liberal. (I could name names, but won't — on this occasion at least.) Yet the Church has provided more women with bases for influence than any other American corporate institution. Nor am I aware of any woman religious who is seriously striving for such a position.

It may be that many of the most gifted women, religious left the religious life because there was no room in it for their talents. But then their talents should have flourished once they left and we would be hearing of them. Yet we do not.

It may be that so much energy went into the radical political activism of the sixties and the militant feminism of the seventies that there was no time or opportunity left for Church-wide intellectual, religious, and human influence, but somehow I don't think such an explanation helps us very much.

I have asked this question seriously of many people in the past few weeks and can find no plausible explanations. I conclude that there is an immense amount of talent out there whose contributions are being frustrated, but do not know why. Nor, in truth, do I think the ordaining of some of that talent — however desirable such a goal may be — would solve anything.

I don't expect much in the way of a serious response to this question. The level of hatred and paranoia in the American Church today is such that I am already bracing for the response of vituperation. (Forget it, girls, it will all go into the wastebasket.)

But it remains a serious question.

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'Living Stones' Meeting Topic

By MARY ANN GINNERTY

Auburn — Representatives from parish councils at the Cayuga-Seneca regional meeting at St. Alphonsus Saturday, Feb. 21, heard Father Douglas Hoffman, director of the Office of Pastoral Ministry, give an updating on the guidelines for parish councils. All parish council constitutions are under review to assure compliance with these guidelines.

Father Hoffman laid the groundwork for the meeting with references to Bishop Hogan's pastoral letter, "You Are Living Stones."

Father Hoffman explained that throughout history the Church has had to reorganize itself. Since Vatican II the thrust of reorganization has been based on awareness of secular involvement in the ministerial work of the church.

Initial parish council guidelines dealt with practical organizational matters. The revised guidelines reflect the growing mission of the Church in its preaching, healing and praying.

The consensus process, in the parish council, was stressed as essential to the success of the parish council. Father Hoffman encouraged the use of this method in sensitive issues to assure total council approval. Essentially what is involved is more than a straight

voting by number, but rather coming to agreement so that all members will stand behind decisions.

Father Hoffman reminded the council members that their job is not only a business function. Prayer and study also are necessary.

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