

Photo by Susan McKinney

### Show House

The Decorators' Show House at 68 W. Jefferson Road, Pittsford, will be open until May 23. Admission proceeds help the Junior League sponsor such projects as the Center for Environmental Information, Women's Career Center and others. Starting from the top left and continuing clockwise are: exterior shot of the house; Gayle Medill, chairman of the executive committee; the breakfast tray in the master bedroom and this English Country Garden room.

### The Church 1976



Fr. Andrew Greeley

The religious life may be entering into one of those long periods of decline that have marked its history. I've seen data recently that indicates religious vocations in virtually every community, male and female, have declined to about 10 per cent of what they were 10 years ago. The disappearance of the male religious has been masked somewhat by the fact that vocations to the diocesan priesthood — while not what they used to be — have not declined so badly. Hence overall statistics about seminary enrollment indicate only a 50 per cent decline. But for religious priests the figure seems to be closer to 90 per cent.

I have no doubt that the religious life will revive at some point in the future. New forms will emerge, as they did in the past. No way of living that has responded to human needs for at least a millennium and a half is likely to vanish permanently; but the religious life as we knew it in the United States in this century seems moribund. I say this with great sadness because, unlike most diocesan clergy, I am aware of the great contributions religious priests made to the immigrant church — the Polish Resurrectionists, Italian Scalabrin, German Redemptorists.

And without religious women, the Catholic schools, perhaps the strongest asset of the American church, could never have come into existence. The virtual disappearance of the religious life in the United States (and the world) is going to be a monumental tragedy.

And I think an unexplained one. There are lots of theories for the decline but no sound empirical research. As incredible as it may seem the religious life may just about vanish from the American Church without anyone seriously trying to figure out why.

The religious life is caught up in a catastrophe just at the time when holy men, holy women, gurus, and other forms of religious leadership are important to an increasing number of young and not-so-young

people. I wonder if the fierce and determined secularization of the religious communities during the past decade may not have been counterproductive. The quest for "relevance" for "being like everyone else" for contemporary life styles and activities might have come along at just the wrong time.

Greeley's First Law again: When Catholics stop something, others start it.

Maybe lay garb, left-wing activism, strident militancy, and fashionable "liberal" clichés (all derivative, of course) were just the opposite of what the religious life needed. Maybe women who wanted to be priests and men who wanted to be political leaders (without ever learning about politics) played an important part in finishing off the present forms of religious life.

Maybe the turn away from intellectualism was involved, too. You used to respect religious men, especially Jesuits, because they were "so well-educated." Now you gasp with surprise when "concerned" Jesuits like Simon Smith and William Ryan say that social concern gives you more right to theologize than formal intellectual training. Maybe the quick, simple, and easy answer to difficult questions helped to turn people off — though, paradoxically, such answers were supposed to make the religious life "relevant."

I'm in favor of the ordination of women and I applaud social commitment, but it's time to ask whether the style of militancy of the last decade may not have given the coup de grace to an already badly wounded religious life.

I don't think we will ever know the reasons. Still it is odd that when millions of people are into meditation and mysticism, the religious life — which used to be about both those activities — turns away from them and perishes.

### SCOUT TRIP

Ithaca — Upper Canada Village is the destination for the Girl Scouts from Immaculate Conception. The trip, planned for the first weekend in June, will find scouts from neighboring troops accompanying them.

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### MAY BANQUET

Mrs. Gwen Nolan is the new president of the Womens Guild of St. John the Evangelist Church, Humboldt Street. She will be inducted into office at the May banquet Monday evening, May 17, at Valley Echo, 2328 Browncroft. Other officers are Mrs. Richard Richter, vice president and program chairman; Mrs. Patricia Coates, secretary, and Mrs. Dorothy Collins, treasurer.

### OUTSTANDING WOMAN

Penn Yan — Women of St. Michael's Parish were invited to the May Fellowship Luncheon on Friday, May 7, at the Second Milo Baptist Church. "Valiant Women," the theme of the program, honored outstanding women of the area.

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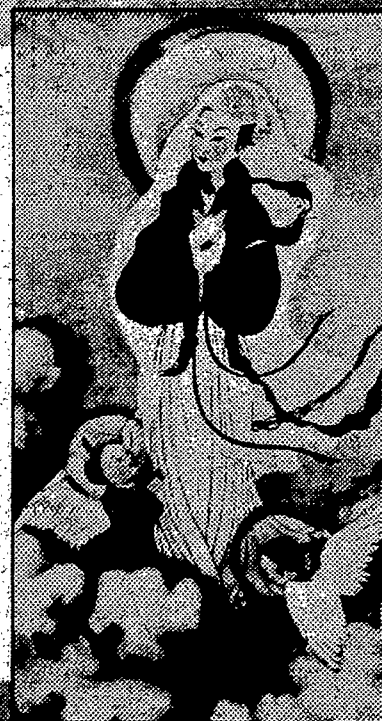
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