

The Church 1977

Fr. Andrew Greeley

What is it worth to be a member of the Catholic church? If one is to judge by many of the Catholic reviewers who commented on John Cogley's posthumous memoirs, "A Canterbury Tale," membership is not worth much of anything. Cogley becomes a hero for leaving the Church, and those who stay are cowards.

Thus in the New York "Times," "Commonweal," Jesuit Raymond Schroth writes that "some of us who have remained both Catholic and liberal during the last 30 years have occasionally sustained our faith and hope with the exaggerated fantasy that there were really two Catholic churches: theirs and ours." "Theirs," of course, is the church institution and "ours" is the church of the liberal elite. It does not occur to Father Schroth that there might be a third church represented neither at Detroit nor at Washington, a church which reads neither "Commonweal" nor the "Sunday Visitor," and is made up of the ordinary Catholic laity.

So, too, is it another matter whether it is faith at all that needs to be sustained by fantasy. Father Schroth apparently would agree that fantasy is no substitute for religious seriousness; and John Cogley, heaven knows, was serious: He was "too honest, too rational to sustain himself with an occasional two-church fantasy. In a way, he took Roman Catholicism more seriously than the rest of us, perhaps too seriously — certainly, too seriously to remain in it."

These words are ambiguous. I have no reason to doubt Father Schroth's religious commitment, yet what else can one conclude from the quotation except that the honest, rational, serious person leaves the church, and only the dishonest, irrational, and nonserious can remain in it. Father Schroth ends with a phrase about "those of us who could not follow him." Again, I wonder what that means. Why "could not"? Lack of courage? Lack of honesty, rationality, seriousness? Or possibly it was for solid intellectual reasons. But what are they? Father Schroth does not say.

When Cogley left I wrote that while I wished him well and believed in his sincerity, I did not think that in the objective order his reasons for leaving were good ones. I lamented that the family of the faithful had lost an important and influential member for inadequate reasons. Since he received virtually universal applause for his departure, Cogley was angry at me for breathing a word of criticism; and the Cogley cult has never quite forgiven me. Jesuit book review editor for "America," Father John Breslin and Coleman McCarthy, editorial writer for the Washington "Po-

have gone out of their way to settle scores with me.

I'm baffled. Do Jesuits Breslin and Schroth no longer believe in the family of the faithful? Do they no longer think that unity of the Catholic Christians is important? Do they no longer think that there is an objective order in which actions are to be judged, however sincere those actions may be? (I do not speak of Coleman McCarthy, who hasn't thought anything in a long time.)

I yield to no one, not even

John Cogley, in thinking that "Humanae Vitae" was ill-advised: (I go so far as to be persuaded by those theologians who are beginning to suggest, off the record, that it may have been invalid because of the absence of the "consensus fidelium" that traditionally has been required for major church decisions.) But I do not think the encyclical is a good reason for leaving the church. Now it either is such a reason or it is not. Cogley thought it was. Since Fathers Breslin and Schroth remain in the church, they apparently think that it was

not. Why don't they say so then?

And those who stay in the church despite harassment and persecution may be at least as heroic as those who leave for "the stately liturgies of the Episcopalians" instead of the "slap-dash masses or 'Blowin' in the Wind' at communion." Do Fathers Breslin and Schroth think that?

Why don't they say so then?

Vigil

Focus on the Eucharist will sponsor a First Friday vigil tomorrow night at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, 95 Warren Ave. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, prayers, readings and hymns will begin at 7:30, with Mass at 10:30. Marian Buchheit, publicity representative of the Focus group, said a similar vigil would be held somewhere in the Rochester area on each Thursday preceding first Friday.



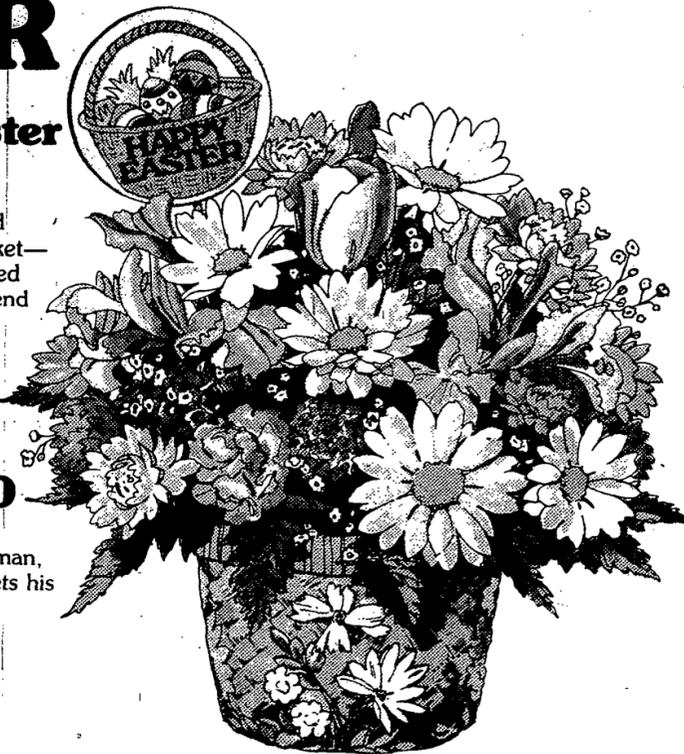
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eration Theoe topic at the e of Siena ation program ay, April 20. arde and Rev. rs will be the ie public is attend the h begins at 8 ish Center.

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