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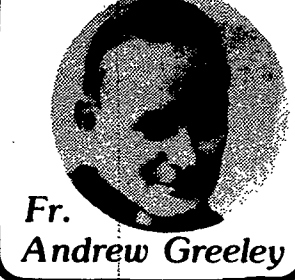
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## The Church 1977



Fr. Andrew Greeley

Reflecting on the orgy of theological meetings the last few weeks, I'm beginning to think that the theological baton is passing to the United States. For a long time we've had rough parity with our European counterparts in scripture studies. Now we have caught up with them, if we haven't passed them, in systematic theology. We are decisively ahead of them in the capacity of theologians and social scientists to engage in meaningful dialogue. Finally our theologians are much closer to pastoral and human realities than are their European counterparts.

Obviously there is not a competition going on; but the competitive "model," to use an "in" word which theologians have taken over from the social sciences (who in their turn have taken in from the physical scientists), is a useful way to illuminate the change. European religious reflection seems to have run out of energy. Serious American theological reflection has just begun — slowed down perhaps by the blind path of liberation theology (which means for Americans reflecting on someone else's experience instead of your own).

There are a number of possible explanations for the change. My guess is the principal cause of European decline is the change in religious reflection in the present state of the human condition. The most important religious thought — as far as people are concerned — is no longer that which wrestles with profound metaphysical problems nor that which purports to answer political and social confusions, and certainly not that which focuses on the internal politics of the church.

Rather, the leading edge of religious reflection in the years ahead will be in the general area of what one might call "spirituality" — though I hasten to add that authentic Christian spirituality must have a solid philosophical basis (not the shallow, pop spirituality of such travesties as Matthew Fox's book on "ecstasy," "Whee! Wee, wee. All the way

Home" which panders to everything narcissistic and undisciplined in the modern pop mentality and ignores the Catholic mystical tradition) and must involve an irrevocable commitment to social action.

With some notable exceptions, the Europeans just don't seem to be interested in such problems as hope, suffering, passing on faith to one's children, growing old, interpersonal intimacy. I have the impression that they think these questions are beneath their dignity as serious thinkers. It may be that the special isolation of the European university (particularly the German university) from the rest of human life accounts in part for the lack of interest. Even the concern of the so-called "political theologians" for the poor is a curiously academic concern — ritualistically repeated with great fervor, but involving no need to focus on the specific economic, social and agricultural problems of particular countries.

I tried to engage one such theologian in a conversation about land usage in Bangladesh (potentially the world's richest agricultural country). Not only was he uninterested; he seemed to think that raising such an issue somehow blighted the purity of one's concern about the poor.

Also the political theologians are determined to "criticize" everything — everything but "the left" and themselves, that is. Unconcern about political oppression in Eastern Europe and about their own patronizing autocratic manners shows them as not merely academic but academized. For all their passion, they are a strangely bloodless lot.

American religious thinkers, not above being hyper-academic — heaven knows — still seem by comparison much closer to the real world. As one who has benefited greatly from the work of the Europeans and counts many of them as friends, I am sorry about their eclipse — though I have little hope about meaningful dialogue across the ocean at the present time. Political theologians don't dialogue, they harrangue and hassle. The saddest event of the past couple of weeks was the refusal of many prominent European thinkers to sit down in small working groups (at the Notre Dame "Vatican III" meeting) with American theologians and young American social scientists. At first I was furious at their rudeness.

Than I felt sorry for their paths

## Regional Highlights

**North Region**

Father Conrad Sundholm, regional coordinator for the past two and a half years, introduced Father Bernard Dollen, pastor of St Andrew's parish, as the new coordinator during the June 16 regional assembly. Although Father Sundholm is stepping down as coordinator he will continue serving as the regional delegate to the Diocesan Priests Council. In thanking Father Sundholm for his work in the North Region, Dave Maier, assembly chairman, said that Father's contribution to the region was like "taking an old plow horse and developing it into Seattle Slew."

a summary of the accessibility of church buildings and grounds to the handicapped. For further information you may call St Andrew's rectory at 342-8686

**BAPTIST STAND**

**Kansas City, Mo. (RNS) —** The Southern Baptist Convention, in its 120th annual session, passed a resolution expressing "strong opposition to abortion on demand and all governmental policies and actions which permit this. Delegates declined, however, to call for a Constitutional amendment or other legislation to restrict abortion.

The region has published

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