

The Church 1979

By Father Andrew Greeley

Conspiracy To Subvert Catholicism

During the November bishops' meeting, while the headlines were going to the



George Higgins/Anne Neale battles, another major issue faced the bishops — the problem of the growing anti-Catholicism, indeed anti-religious, environment in America, especially in the federal government. Bryan Hehir and Charles Whelan, two of the members of the bishops' national staff who were not scheduled for the headman's ax, assured the bishops that there was no anti-Catholic or anti-religious conspiracy in the federal government. "It is complexity, not conspiracy," said one of them.

If the bishops are interested in saving money, they should get rid of the people who are trying to tell them that there is no anti-Catholic or anti-religious conspiracy in the federal government. The federal bureaucracy has turned viciously anti-religious in the last several years, and Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants are the principal targets of this viciousness.

You do not need to have cabals (meeting over three-hour lunches on taxpayers' time) to plot against religion. There are other conspiracies besides the explicitly organized and formalized ones. For the radical New Left bureaucrats to go after organized religion there don't have to be any secret meetings. The anti-religious and anti-Catholic ethos which permeates the federal bureaucracy is so pervasive that one doesn't need a formal conspiracy.

Research proposals on Catholic schools, for example, at the National Institute for Education go invariably to black staff members who state explicitly on the record that they believe all Catholic schools are segregationist a belief that simply doesn't yield to contrary empirical evidence. The HEW blitz, led by the turncoat Joseph Califano, against Catholic schools made the ridiculous charge that these schools are the enclaves of wealthy segregationists. No secret meetings are required among HEW staffers, officials of the National Council of Churches, the American Jewish Committee, the NAACP and the national PTA; the officials of all these organizations are anti-religious and anti-Catholic to begin with. Their response to the mention of Catholic schools is like that

of a dog to a tree or a little boy to a water fountain. By the standards of the two USCC staffers, it may not have been a conspiracy, but from the point of view of Senators Packwood, Moynihan and Roth, whose legislation was defeated by this alliance, it most certainly was a conspiracy.

The Internal Revenue Service is embarked on a campaign to take tax exemption away from religious newspapers and religious schools. They are doing so allegedly in the name of fighting the segregationist academies of the South, but anyone who thinks that those are the real targets doesn't understand the minds of the New Left federal bureaucrats. The targets are Catholic schools and Catholic newspapers. If the hierarchy refuses to fight, it will be actively encouraging religious persecution, just as it did by its silence during the tuition tax credit fight.

This neo-nativism can be beaten. It does not represent a substantial segment of the American population; it is, rather, limited to a small group of intellectuals and bureaucrats, many of them self-anointed spokesmen for "minority" groups who really don't reflect the feelings of those for whom they claim to be spokesmen. But the anti-Catholic and anti-religious elites do happen to have certain key positions in the national media, the universities and in the federal bureaucracy. They will not go away simply because they are bad men; much less will they go away because Brian Hehir says the issues are complex. They will go away because American Catholics are willing to use their political muscle against such people. Unfortunately, at the present stage of things in the American church, that muscle will only be used when the hierarchy is prepared to organize it or at least initiate it. How many more staff members of Secretary Califano are going to say that they could not make a Catholic head of the White House Conference on the Family any more than they could give the job to the Pope's son before the bishops begin to believe that there really is bigotry at HEW? How many more Internal Revenue Service rules will there have to be before the bishops understand that there really is a conspiracy in that agency to get the Catholic church?

I find myself agreeing with my friend Cardinal Krol once again: There is a conspiracy in certain quarters of the government to subvert religion and especially Catholicism. I hope the other bishops will listen to the cardinal and fight back.

Nervi Dies

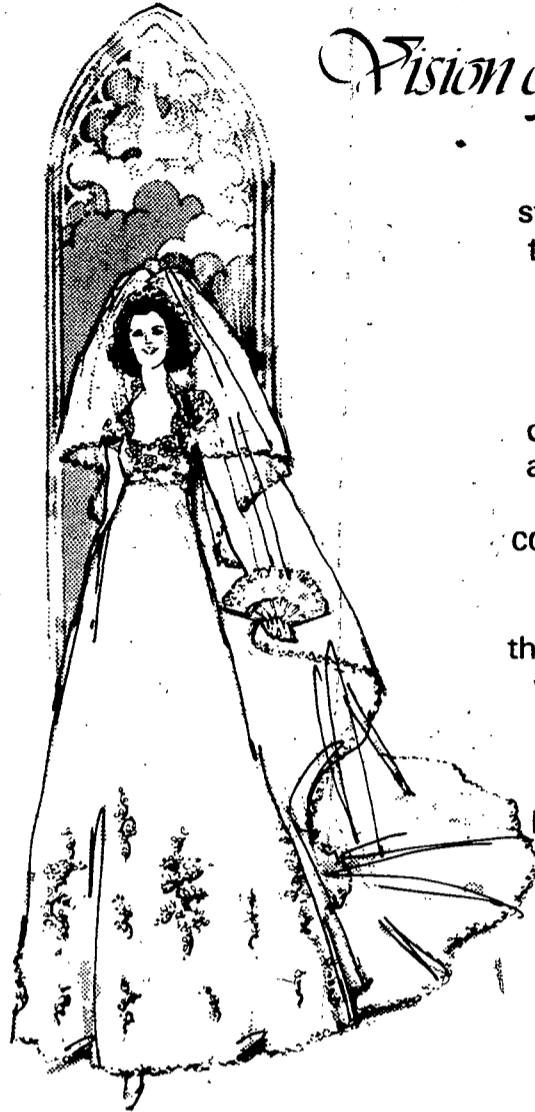
Rome (RNS) — Pier Luigi Nervi, the renowned Italian architect who designed the Vatican's Paul VI Hall, died at the age of 87 on Jan. 9, 1979.

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