

# The Church 1979

By Father Andrew Greeley

## Denouncing American Catholicism

Back in the days before he had sold out to Berriganite enthusiasts, Jesuit Edward Duff once remarked that there was a tendency in the American church to indulge in mass masochism. The self-hatred of American Catholics in the late '50s was indeed intense. Monsignor Ellis's research had demonstrated that Catholics were not seeking scholarly careers. Father Weigle and Professor Thomas O'Dea had analyzed the theological and sociological reasons for Catholic anti-intellectualism. One had only to pick up the most recent issue of Commonweal or America to find some new acerbic criticism of what was wrong with the American church and the American Catholic people.



Fr. Greeley

This tide was turning even then, and since 1960 a new Catholic intelligentsia has emerged, both solidly Catholic and professionally intellectual. The signs of the change were to be seen even in 1960, though Commonweal denied that such a change was occurring or indeed could possibly occur. But the evidence that Catholicism is no bar either to economic success or intellectual excellence in American society is now so overwhelming that even Catholic liberals don't bother to deny it. Still the self-hatred continues.

In the '40s and '50s American Catholicism looked not to its own experience, which was deemed to be worthless, but to the experience of French Catholics for ideas and wisdom. As time went on we shifted our focus first to Germany then to the Netherlands and now to the Third World and particularly Latin America.

At one time we adored the French prophets who got on the American lecture circuit (presumably those who

cheerfully applauded the late Cardinal Jean Danielou back in the late 1950s have conveniently forgotten that interlude in their lives). Now it is the Latin American liberation theologian who arrives upon the scene to denounce America, write simplistic theological and political analyses, and stir up bands of hero-worshipping followers.

In the '50s it could have been argued that we had no American Catholic thinkers or scholars or prophets or poets. In the '70s we have them and it doesn't matter. Our self-hatred is so strong we still are eager to look at everyone else but ourselves for insight and wisdom. Jean Danielou was replaced by Juan Luis Segunda (lecturing at the Catholic Theological Union and the Jesuit School of Theology in the University of Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood — where Danielou prophesized 20 years ago) as the pied-piper to whom docile, servile

American Catholics look for inspiration.

It is enough to make one sick to one's stomach. Segunda, like Danielou, comes from the part of the world where the church has failed abysmally for hundreds of years. There is no evidence that his liberation theology has any effect on either political or religious life in Latin America. His identification of religion with a political system is exactly the same as the identification of Catholicism with right-wing regimes which liberationists criticize.

In both cases, the church and religion are in the service of political systems. The liberation theologians like their conservative enemies stand in the service of political regimes, the latter the Old Regime and the former what they hope will be the New Regime. But the enthusiastic devotees of liberation theology don't seem to notice the similarity.

## All in the Family

By Sarah Child

### Our Love For the Land

In a lenten series on the prophets of the Old Testament the teacher, a kind (he does not poke fun at our questions) and witty intellectual has been telling us how important land was to the Israelites. He then adds that land is necessary for God's acts to take place, a comment I do not fully comprehend but I have already used up my quota of questions for the evening. I concentrate instead on the ancient peoples' love of the land. That I can understand. It stems, says the teacher, from the fact that the land provided their wherewithal. I know the feeling.

Our garden plot would not sustain us for a week if put to the test and no animals destined to become food graze upon our three-quarters of an acre. Yet the land is precious to me. For a period in my life I lived in third story garret apartments, privation.

Part of these feelings probably stem from my grandparents who depended in great part upon what they could grow and the pigs, chicken and rabbits they kept for sustenance, their use and need akin to the people of the Old Testament.

But, a greater part of that feeling for the land and what

grows on it stems from something else, just what I'm not

Some years ago when we felt the need to go to Mass somewhat less compelling than we now do the standard joke on a beautiful Sunday morning was how much better it would be to go and "worship in God's own great cathedral."

There was merit in our mutinous thought. It is difficult not to sense the hand of God, the wonder of Him in the midst of green, growing things. Bend down to catch the perfect face on a velvet pansy, the symmetry in a corn of ear, the intricate pattern of a hemlock twig.

There is harmony in the most tangled of unpruned thickets, peace in a towering Sycamore, security in the half circle of a hedgerow gone amok.

The earth itself is almost as irresistible as that which grows. Start out with garden gloves and inevitably the protective garb will be discarded in order to let the feel of soil trickle through the fingers.

Our land, too, provides sustenance, albeit a somewhat different kind.

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### D-S Meeting

The Northeast Region meeting of Divorced-Separated Catholics will take place at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish Center, 4536 St. Paul Blvd at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, April 1.

Topic will be "Where Have We Been - Where Are We Going?"

The group ministers to those who are in various stages of divorce or separation. New members are welcome.

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