

Religion in America

Protestant-Catholic Relations Undergoing Major Changes

By LOUIS CASSELS

UPI Correspondent

The past few years have witnessed a remarkable change in Protestant-Catholic relations at high office levels. The cold war among Christians has thawed to such a degree that it is no longer particularly newsworthy when a Protestant clergyman pays a courtesy call at the Vatican, or when Pope John says nice things about the "separated brethren."

Theologians and Biblical scholars from both sides of the Reformation divide are meeting together with increasing frequency to discuss their differences in an atmosphere of candor and mutual respect. But to date there has been relatively little of this kind of friendly "dialogue" at the grass roots. Pastor Jones and Father Murphy may exchange civil greetings when they meet at a community function, but they are not likely to sit down together in the evening for a long talk about the meaning of baptism. Catholic and Protestant neighbors may play bridge together, but there is usually a tacit agreement that no one will bring up the sticky subject of religion.

Church leaders are now making an earnest effort to stimulate more concern and conversation about Christian unity at the community level.

Arrange Local Contacts

Richard Cardinal Cushing, Catholic archbishop of Boston, stressed in a recent pastoral letter that "the work of unity is the work of every Christian." Several Catholic dioceses have appointed "ecumenical committees" to arrange local contacts with Protestant groups.

At its recent meeting in Kansas City, the general board of the National Council of Churches, composed of representatives of 34 major Protestant and Orthodox denominations, established as one of its chief objectives for the

coming year "helping to make the spirit and purposes of the ecumenical movement effective in local communities."

The experience of Alexandria, Va., indicates that Protestant and Catholic laymen are ready to participate enthusiastically in the "dialogue" if they are given the right opportunity.

Since the fall of 1960, a group of Protestant pastors and Catholic priests had been holding regular meetings in Alexandria to talk about Christian doctrines. Although they made no effort to avoid "delicate" subjects or to gloss over their differences, they got along so well that they decided it was time to share the experience with others.

United Observance Week

Last January, they organized a week-long Christian unity observance during which Protestants and Catholics held three joint meetings.

At the first meeting, in a Catholic parish hall, seats were hopefully provided for 100 people. Nearly 400 persons attended.

The second meeting was held in a lecture hall with a seating capacity of 700. Stained glass windows and many late-comers had to be turned away.

The final meeting, in a Protestant church, also drew an overflow crowd. This time the participants did not merely talk about their differences. They listened to the reading of Scripture (the 17th Chapter of St. John's Gospel, in which Christ commanded His disciples to love one another) and prayed together that the will of God be done in the reuniting of His church.

"Hard To Stop" "What was begun during that week will be hard to stop," says the Rev. Charles H. Bayer, pastor of Alexandria's First Christian Church. "Neighborhood groups in which people meet together for prayer and study have sprung up. The clergy who participated are welded more closely than ever before."

"Protestants have discovered that within Catholicism there is a diversity we never imagined, and a liberalism in ecumenical relations far beyond our expectations. Catholics have discovered within Protestantism a charitable spirit they had never realized existed."

Such grass-roots contacts obviously are not intended to settle any of the theological differences which divide Protestants and Catholics. The purpose, in the words of Episcopal Bishop Angus Dun of Washington, D. C., is "talking together in order to understand one another in love."

Rocky Ceremony Launches Vessel

Sausalito, Calif. — (UPI) — The good ship Everyman, built to sail in the Christmas Island area to protest U.S. nuclear testing, got off to a rocky start here.

In a confused launching ceremony, a press agent fell off the platform and the sponsor was cut by flying glass.

Mrs. Pearl Mendel, the sponsor, struck the traditional bottle of champagne against the vessel — but it failed to break. She handed it to publicity chairman Carl May, who swung so hard that he spun off the launching platform.

May finally broke the bottle on the boat, but a piece of flying glass opened a small cut on Mrs. Mendel's nose.

Three men plan to begin their voyage from San Francisco to the Christmas Island area aboard the Everyman Sunday.

SAAR MINERS STRIKE

Saarbruecken, Germany — (UPI) — An estimated 45,000 Saarland coal miners have gone on strike in defiance of government appeals for economic self control. The miners demanded a wage increase to match the highest pay brackets in the metals industry.

Udall Warns on Need To Preserve Wilderness Areas

Washington — (UPI) — Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall says that the wilderness areas of America will be lost forever if Congress fails to protect them.

Udall made the warning as a House Interior subcommittee began hearings on a Senate-passed bill to establish a national system to preserve millions of acres of public lands in a state of wild naturalness.

"There will one day be no wilderness unless its protection becomes national policy," Udall said.

Two Men Killed In Portland Crash

Portland — (UPI) — Two men were killed in a single car crash in Portland Wednesday.

Dead on arrival at a hospital were Francis E. Burnett, 44, Portland, and Harold M. Anderson, 53, Seattle.

Police said the car smashed into a large steel pole on a ramp off of Harbor Drive. The accident was witnessed by Marlana Harding, Tacoma, Wash., daughter of Burnett. She was in an auto following the Burnett car.

not be revoked but could not be renewed once they expired.

Rep. Walt Horan (R-Wash.) led the opposition to the measure. He told subcommit-

tee members he was concerned with the growing power of the executive branch and wanted to "protect the integrity of Congress."

Horan proposed an amend-

ment which would give Congress rather than either the Interior or Agriculture departments the power to say which areas would be included in the wilderness program.



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