

Church Membership Hits Peak, Counselors Wonder If It Marks Revival

By LOUIS CASSELS
United Press International
Boon conditions prevailed in 1958 in all areas of American religious life that can be measured by statistics.

Church membership rose to a new high of 104 million persons, 61 per cent of the population. Sunday School enrollment, Bible sales and contributions to religious causes set new records. Church building snapped back from a brief recession to equal 1957's breathtaking outlay of \$865,000,000.

Not all church leaders found these figures comforting. Some felt, with the Christian Century magazine, that America's popular piety was superficial and self-centered, that it was often no more than a vague "faith in faith."

But an increasing number of clergymen saw a genuine quest for ultimate truths by millions of people who no longer believe that science has all the answers, or that material prosperity is all you need to be happy.

Despite the external evidences of a continuing religious revival, few church leaders were ready to say that America had already become a "nation under God." For 1958 also witnessed outbreaks of hatred and violence, a rising incidence of crime, divorce and alcoholism, and other symptoms of moral deterioration in American society.

Most disturbing development of the year, to many churchmen, was a sharp rise in racial tensions. Leaders of every major denomination expressed concern about the ugly passions aroused by the school desegregation dispute. They appealed to church members to work calmly and courageously for a Christian solution.

This attempt to carry out a "ministry of reconciliation" in the racial crisis is likely to be a major preoccupation of the churches in the coming year.

For America's 35 million Roman Catholics, 1958 was a year of bereavement. Samuel Cardinal Stritch of Chicago died of a stroke soon after he had been called to the Vatican as the first American prelate to hold a high post in the Roman Curia. Pope Pius XII, revered by millions of Protestants as

well as Catholics, died in October. Edward Cardinal Mooney of Detroit suffered a fatal heart attack while preparing to attend the conclave at which a new pope was elected.

But there was good news, too. Pope John XXIII, the former Cardinal Roncalli of Venice, quickly won the affections of American Catholics by his easy manner and common touch, and by the vigor with which he set about reorganizing the Vatican's neglected administrative machinery.

At a Dec. 15 consistory, Pope John created 23 new cardinals, in-

cluding Archbishops Richard J. Cushing of Philadelphia and John O'Hara of Philadelphia.

Protestants also got new leaders. Dr. Edwin T. Dahlberg, a St. Louis Baptist pastor, took over as president of the National Council of Churches. Another St. Louis clergyman, the Rt. Rev. Arthur C. Litchtenberger, was elected Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Mrs. William Sale Terrel of West Hartford, Conn., was elected President of United Church Women.

The church unity movement continued to make slow but steady progress. The Presbyterian Church

in the U.S.A. and the United Presbyterian Church formally merged in colorful ceremonies at Pittsburgh to form the nation's third largest Protestant denomination. Lutherans reached major agreements looking toward a four-way merger in 1960. Methodist and Episcopalian negotiators came up with a long-range program for moving toward intercommunion and exchange of clergy.

The November elections provided strong evidence that religious prejudice is a diminishing factor in American politics. A number of Catholic candidates won major of-

fices in predominantly non-Catholic states, and a Jewish candidate ran up the biggest gubernatorial plurality in the history of his state.

As usual, the churches stood together on some issues, and split sharply on others. The strongest unity was evident on the moral necessity of sharing America's abundance with less fortunate people abroad. Church leaders of all faiths urged Congress to approve an expanded U.S. foreign aid program. On their own, religious organizations sent overseas nearly \$300,000,000 worth of food, clothing and other private relief.



ORDERED CONFUSION is the way it works out at the Wyandotte olive plant in Oroville. This scene shows the workmen sending the sealed cans of ripe olives from the canning machine to the cooker. The big pitting machine

sits to the far left of the picture. Overhead is a conveyor carrying the empty cans to the starting point of the whole process.



A CONSTANT CHECK on the quality of the ripe olives going into the cans at the Wyandotte plant is kept by Mrs. Eva Sprowl, forelady, who has been an employee of the plant since 1923. She is shown here with Elton W. Leggett, manager of the big plant.



THIS FILTER is one used in the final stages of purifying the olive oil. The filters are contained in the drum at the top of the machine and are changed when they fill up. No parts are spared by Wyandotte in making sure that the oil is of the highest quality.

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