Polygamy Deters Church's Advance In Africa

By GEORGE W. CORNELL

NEW YORK (AP)—One of the big roadblocks to Christianity in Africa is its rule against polygamy. A church official, back from that continent, is convinced there should be some changes in the rule.

"Frankly, after a year over there, I changed my mind about polygamy," said the Rev. Chester Lee Marcus of Cleveland, Ohio, secretary for racial and cultural relations of the United Church of Christ, in an interview.

"A whole system of social security and general welfare is tied up in this institution of multiple marriage."

At present African churches deny full membership to families of men with more than one wife—a widespread situation in Africa. They can become only associate members, which means they cannot share in communion.

"They can attend and contribute but cannot come to the Lord's table," the Rev. Mr. Marcus said.

"In most every church there are as many noncommunicants, who would like to be full members but can't, as there are communicants. This is no way to draw them into committed church life."

If Christianity is not to remain crippled by this condition, he said, the churches must modify the rule to admit such persons, on condition that the husband takes no more wives, and their children are taught that monogamous marriage is best.

"We could bring at least two-thirds of these people into the church on that basis," he said. "We should accept all people who want to come."

The Rev. Mr. Marcus, 43, a scholarly, bespectacled Negro clergyman, spent the last year in western African countries on special assignment by his church, a recent merger of the Congregational Christian General Council and the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

He said the present rigid anti-polygamy restriction, set up under influence of missionaries imposing Western cultural patterns, has become a "very serious" obstacle. It contrasts with Islam's policy, which does not oppose polygamy.

"Our evangelistic outreach has been greatly curtailed," he said.

"We accept all kinds of other sinners into the church, assuming that polygamy is sin, and hope that in the fellowship of the church they will develop the sensitivity to see the sin and get rid of it."

However, he added, the idea that polygamy in Africa is sinful is "an assumption I'm not prepared to make. Sin has to be tied in with a man's motives, and in this case the motives are the highest rather than the lowest.

"Polygamy is all these people have known. When they come in contact with Christianity and believe it, they want to be a part of it. Yet they have a responsibility to their families—to several wives and children.

"It is asking too much to say that a man should abandon three of his four wives, especially when this relationship was entered in good faith, with no awareness that a moral question was involved."

He said eventual economic and social changes will do away with polygamy in Africa.

But at present, he said, it is a stabilizing force that assures care for widows and children, who otherwise would be left abandoned and homeless.

"There are no orphaned children in Africa," he said.

He added that whenever a child's father dies, a brother of the father or other male relative is duty-bound to take widow and children into his family.

"They are really, genuinely taken into the new household," he said. "They are just as much a part of the family as the other wives and children.

"In this way, women continue a life of dignity instead of being castaways or left on a state dole. And every child has a home."

He said polygamy slowly will disappear, as Africa evolves from a barter economy to a money economy and wives become expenses or liabilities rather than assets.

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Rose Heads UF Drive

The new president of the United Fund is a retired Army officer with 22 years service, and currently sales representative for Crater Lake Machinery.

John Rose is an active worker in the community and was selected for the honor of the presidency at the annual United Fund banquet Monday night at the Willard.

Rose is a member of the Knights of Columbus, VFW, active in Boy Scouts, member of the YMCA and an active worker in St. Pius X Parish as a member of the Finance Committee.

He has been a member of the Board of United Fund since 1959, and was reelected this year for a three-year term. He has worked as unit chairman and served as division chairman in the 1961 campaign, both times in Allied Construction Division.

Rose said he looks forward with optimism to the coming campaign with Ralph Hunter as campaign chairman, and the 26-man board of directors, most of whom have been active in past campaigns.

Rose, his wife, Anne, and two of their four children reside at 5414 South Sixth Street. At home are Andrea, a student at Sacred Heart Academy, and William, attending the fourth grade at Ferguson School.

Two other children are in the service. John Jr. is in the Army and Patricia is in the WAC.

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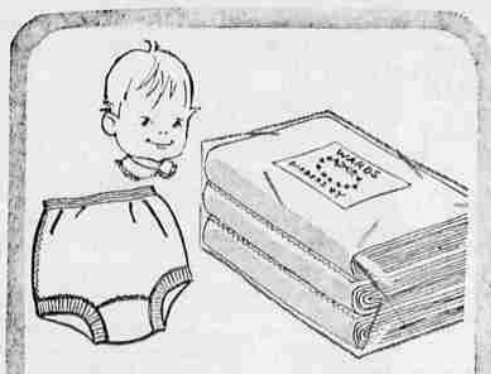

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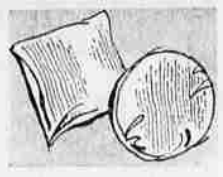

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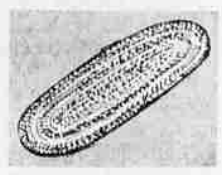

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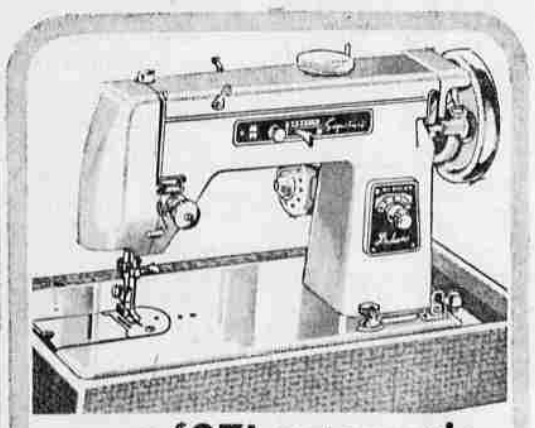

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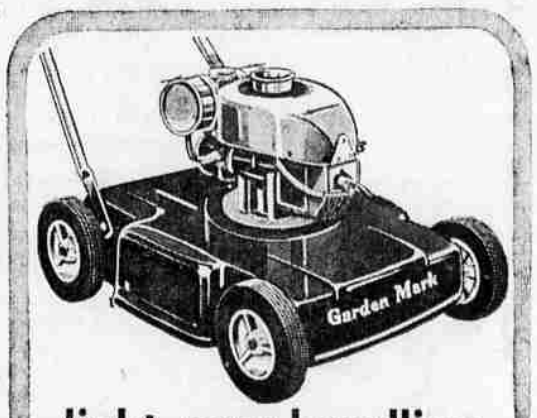

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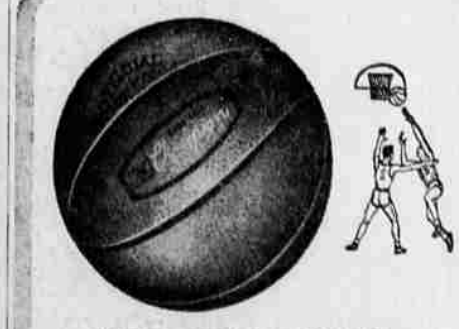

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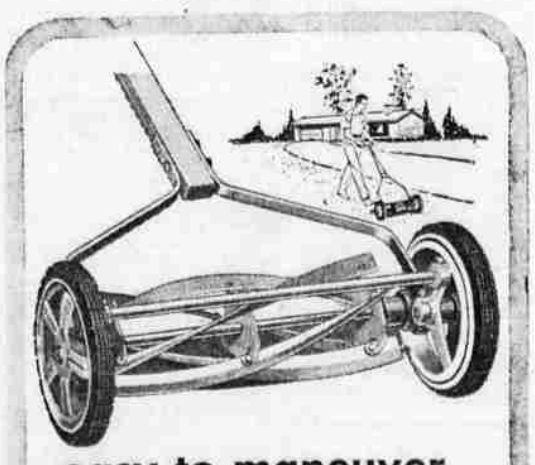

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