

By JAMES C. O'NEILL

Vatican City — (NC) — The Church's more than one million members of Religious orders and congregations are specialists at work in a world where the demand for special knowledge is constantly increasing.

To govern this army of dedicated men and women living in 80,000 communities throughout the world, the popes have established the Sacred Congregation of Religious, the Church's spiritual 'pentagon.'

Over its desk flow the problems, needs and future plans of more than 1,100 different orders and congregations.

According to statistics prepared by the Congregation of Religious there were at the end of 1956 (the most recent statistics available) 276,888 members of religious institutes for men and 912,768 members of women's institutes.

Another 64,425 Religious, both men and women, lived in independent monasteries and convents. These figures do not include Religious who are members of institutes under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation of the Oriental Church or the Sacred Congregation for Propagation of the Faith.

The Congregation of Religious reported that as of 1956 there were under its jurisdiction 206 men's institutes and 597 women's institutes.

Communities or monasteries of men Religious totaled 21,203 while women's communities added up to 59,930. All these figures would be larger today if a precise count could be made.

Nevertheless, these figures give a good idea of the tremendous role which members of Religious orders and congregations play in the Church today.

The Catholic parochial school system in the United States could not have been built without the devotion and sacrifice of thousands of teaching Sisters and Brothers. The world's Catholic high schools and universities are almost all staffed by Religious.

Add to this the operation of hospitals, orphanages, seminaries, publishing houses and the hundreds of other practical specialties of the Religious and it is easy to see how they have shaped their organizations to meet the needs of the contemporary world. Another group of specialists, and the most perfectly religious, namely the contemplative nuns and monks, also are at work daily, praising God and praying for mankind.

What is a Religious? Canon Law defines the term as meaning a person who takes the three public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and who, generally, lives with others in a Religious community.

It is over all these that the Congregation of Religious has jurisdiction. It also directs societies living together without vows, Third Orders Secular and the fast growing Secular Institutes.

The latter are principally a phenomenon of the 20th century. Although a Secular Institute was founded in the 18th

### Missions Teach Americans

## 'Block Plan' Knits Parishes

By ROBERT G. HOYT

Kansas City — (NC) — American parishes may one day be repaid for their financial support of the missions—but not in cash. The repayment will be in the spread of an idea and a technique.

**THE IDEA:** In a period of social fragmentation, the parish must be something more than a "sacramental service station."

**THE TECHNIQUE:** A form of parish organization evolving now in Africa, the Philippines, and Japan, it is designed to knit person to person, family to family, and thus to make the parish once more a genuine, functioning community.

Maryknoll Father Bernard Meyer, a veteran missionary, for 32 years in China, developed these suggestions in an interview here. He stopped in this city on his way to the West Coast, where he is scheduled to embark on an 18-month tour of Catholic foreign missions.

Father Meyer is convinced that the modern urban parish



Over one million nuns, monks, brothers, religious order priests are all coordinated in a world-wide program to save souls through the Catholic Church's "pentagon"—the Vatican Congregation of Religious.

## Vatican Office 'Pentagon' For Nuns, Monks

century in France, it was not until our own time that these associations really began to expand.

A Secular Institute is made up of men or women who take private vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. They generally do not live in community nor do not wear distinctive habits. Their distinguishing mark is that they continue to live in the world, working at their lay profession, but living a deeply religious life.

As of the beginning of this year the Congregation of Religious has granted recognition to 51 such institutes out of 199 petitions. Only 12 — four for men and eight for women — have been granted pontifical recognition. The others exist only on the level of the diocese in which they are located.

Directing the multi-form activities of Religious Institutes, the Congregation of Religious has authority over everything touching on their government, discipline, studies, temporal goods rights and privileges.

Heading it is the 74-year-old Prefect, His Eminence Valerio Cardinal Valeri. The Cardinal, a thin, white-haired prelate with a long career as a diplomat of the Holy See, has in the past four years journeyed to France, Communist-dominated East Germany, Brazil, Canada and the U.S. in connection with his position as Prefect.

Pope Pius XII has appointed 23 Cardinals to the Congregation. Claretian Father Arcadio Larraona, the Congregation's Secretary, like most of the staff, is himself a Religious.

Among the congregation's biggest tasks is the supervising of the development and approval of new Religious Institutes. Between 1942 and 1956

women's groups alone jumped from 732 to 997. The number of convents increased by more than 15,000, from 45,487 in 1942 to 59,930 in 1956.

### HOW DOES a new order start?

A new Religious Institute is born on the diocesan level. Some pious person who sees the need for a new organization in the Church asks his Bishop for permission to form a community. The Bishop asks the congregation for permission and, if granted, allows the group to live together.

This embryo group is no more a Religious community than an egg is a chicken. It is considered only as a group of pious persons living and working together under the direction and authority of the bishop.

If all goes well and the community flourishes, the Bishop may petition to organize the group as a religious community but only on the diocesan level. When a community like this becomes firmly established — usually about 100 members and five houses — the Bishop then may apply for a

"Decree of Praise," which gives the group pontifical standing.

One final step is necessary before a religious community is considered fully established. The Congregation of Religious must approve its constitutions, the rules by which its members will live as Religious.

In 1957, 10 congregations were given diocesan approval and 14 were granted decrees of praise. The constitutions of 18 others were approved.

**ALL ORDERS** and congregations must submit annual reports on membership. They must also submit comprehensive and detailed reports on their activities once every five years. By means of these reports the congregation keeps abreast of the affairs of its various institutes and can make suggestions or laws to change, improve or correct specific problems.

The Pope and the Congregation of Religious have devoted much attention to the contemplative orders.

The Pontiff recently liberalized the rules of strict clois-

ter to permit contemplative nuns to help support their houses. Part of the congregation's cloistered nuns now always can engage in teaching, catechism, educating children or work in preparing youngsters for First Communion or Confirmation.

The rules of closure have also been modified to permit contemplative nuns to leave the cloister in case of air raids, requisition of the convent by military or civilian authorities, serious economic reasons, apostolic work and voting.

**FURTHER AID** has been offered to these groups by the congregation's encouragement of independent religious houses. In France this year, for instance, the congregation approved the federation of 17 convents into two groups. This permits the independent convents to maintain an economically practical common novitiate and to exchange freely superiors and Religious with special training.

The Pope and the congregation have also encouraged Religious institutes to adapt their habits, their garments, so as to be more practical for everyday wear.

Yet, while encouraging certain adaptations to modern needs, the Pope and the congregation of Religious have constantly stressed the need for these institutes to remain faithful to their austere spirit and to fulfill their vows in the strictest sense.

This year the congregation issued a letter to Religious superiors strictly banning the use of television in contemplative houses. It allowed television to be used in non-contemplative communities, but only in so far as it was a necessary aid to the particular community's work.

Another modern development fostered by the congregation has been the formation of national and international congresses and committees of Religious superiors. Today there are 25 approved national committees of these superiors. Through them, congresses, weeks of prayer, study courses and other means of centering attention on the work of Religious Institutes have been sponsored.

There are more Religious in the world today than ever before. And yet the congregation sees a disturbing trend. While there has been a significant increase in the number of full-fledged Religious, there has not been a corresponding increase in the number of novices.

For instance, in 1942 there were 17,100 men novices throughout the world. In 1956, there were 16,997. During the same period the number of women novices showed a slight rise from 31,346 in 1942, to 38,320 in 1956. The number of women under perpetual vows in those same years jumped from 422,307 to 599,781, an increase of more than 150,000.

In other words there has been a very marked fall-off in vocations in the past 12 to 15 years.

To cope with this the congregation has established a Pontifical Society to Promote Religious vocations. It also sees in the Committees of Religious Superiors and other organizations as the Sisters' Foundation in the U.S. hopeful means of meeting this decline.



Vatican's Sistine Chapel painting of Christ by Michelangelo.

## Church-going Barbarians

Adults these days throw up their powerless hands as youngsters dance to tunes with jungle tempo.

The younger crowd on public buses or at public beaches are also often branded as "barbarians" for their ill-mannered noise and sometimes downright rowdy behavior.

The puzzlement grows even more acute when these same youngsters appear next day in church and oldsters wonder why these "church-going barbarians" can't act civilized on the street as they do for the brief hour they are in the house of God.

Maybe it's time to ask the adults just exactly what the older generation has done to civilize the younger generation.

If a child is abandoned to live in the woods he will grow up as an animal — and if adults fail to provide an environment of culture, is it any wonder their children grow up as barbarians?

The Catholic Church through the centuries has had a reputation, sometimes tarnished, as the mother of civilization, the author of culture.

The Church believes, for a variety of reasons, that Christian faith thrives best when rooted in civilized and cultured minds—that is why the Catholic Church insists not only on building more temples of worship but schools of learning as well — even on the frontiers of faith out in otherwise backward mission areas.

But the pity is that school lessons are too often shattered by the failure of follow-up from the home. Take for example the following:

**MANNERS** — The Christian concept that we owe respect to our fellowmen, especially superiors is expressed through simple, polite, good manners. How many homes teach this lesson today? Parents frequently lead the way in vulgar table manners, impolite and lazy habits of receiving guests into a home, coarse remarks about women. Can we expect children to stand as an elder enters or to recognize "ladies first" after such poor example at home?

**MUSIC** — The current rock-and-roll may perhaps be dismissed as a passing fad that will soon get over, but what then? In these days when every home has its Hi-Fi record player, is it a child's duty to know a little about the music that is being played? Beethoven, Handel, Puccini? The answer is clear — parents themselves have neither knowledge nor interest in these matters, so the Hi-Fi becomes the source where youngsters learn melodies once limited to the records are now blaring booming into our living rooms.

**PAINTINGS** — Modern printing methods have made the masterpieces of Michelangelo, Raphael, or the contemporary works of Rouault, Renoir, or Matisse available for every home, and at a price often lower than the usual tawdry and gaudy so-called art cluttering walls. Children who never see a good painting can't be expected suddenly to appreciate fine art when a teacher starts to explain it in a classroom.

**SCULPTURE** — Some saints statues are the best examples of the worst art. Certainly Our Lord and His saints deserve to be represented with dignity but statues that look more like kewpie dolls do no honor to the saints nor the person who displays them. How can children exposed to "saints" like these choose them as models and exemplars in preference to the current top TV personality?

This article does not mean that children must be dressed in tuxedos or pastel formal for noontime lunch each day nor does it mean Dad must wear a monocle and Mother carry a lorgnette. But there are certainly many avenues of culture which need to be traveled by parents and children together if we expect someday the youngsters will grow up to be ladies and gentlemen.

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